

EU tech regulation**MEPs warned to back overhaul of EU digital copyright rules**

Reforms vital to curb internet giants' advantage over content creators, says Brussels



Mariya Gabriel, EU digital commissioner, said only big internet platforms would benefit if copyright reforms failed to go ahead © Emmanuel Duand/AFP

Mehreen Khan in Brussels SEPTEMBER 10, 2018

The European Commission has warned MEPs to vote in favour of a revamp of EU copyright rules this week or risk handing big internet companies a lasting competitive advantage over publishers, authors and musicians in the digital economy.

After a [fierce lobbying campaign](#) pitting internet freedom groups against content creators, MEPs will on Wednesday vote on a series of amendments to a proposed package of reforms intended to update EU copyright rules for the first time since 2001.

The overhaul of the copyright directive was first proposed by the commission in 2016. It is designed to rebalance the relationship between big internet companies that stream and link to content created by others, and the creators who increasingly rely on the web giants but who say they are not properly paid for their work.

Critics of the reforms, including Jimmy Wales, founder of online encyclopedia Wikipedia, and Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the world wide web, say they will herald the “death of the internet” by impeding access to information.

But supporters, including entertainer Paul McCartney, say they will force internet companies to

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give fair remuneration to authors and musicians. Singer Wyclef Jean is opposed, saying the reforms will hurt rather than protect artists.

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Mariya Gabriel, EU digital commissioner

Mariya Gabriel, the EU's digital commissioner, told the Financial Times it was a "now or never" moment for MEPs to approve the plans so the European Parliament could start negotiations with EU governments. National capitals and the parliament must agree a common position before the revised directive can be finalised and come into force.

As the copyright directive is not an EU regulation, member states will be able to implement the rules as they wish.

"Only big platforms will benefit from the absence of a copyright reform: not the creators, not the press, not the citizens, not the 7,000 [smallest] European platforms," said Ms Gabriel.

If MEPs do not reach agreement on the amendments — drawn up in response to criticism of the original proposals — Brussels fears the package will not be concluded before European Parliament elections next May and risks being dropped by the new intake of politicians. "It takes a crystal ball to predict what could happen in the next mandate," said Ms Gabriel.

The copyright debate has been marred by a ferocious lobbying battle that has seen allegations of death threats to MEPs and incessant email spamming by internet rights groups.

Earlier this year, Wikipedia blacked out its website in parts of the EU in protest at the plans and a petition called "Save Your Internet" has gathered nearly 1m signatures.

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One of the most contentious elements of the draft legislation, known as article 13, would require the use of "upload filters" to pre-scan user uploaded content to ensure it did not breach copyright rules. Critics say this would hamper internet freedom and kill off content such as social media memes.

Critics also oppose article 11, which would force companies to pay to show snippets of information when displaying hyperlinks to content such as news stories.

On Wednesday, MEPs will vote on a series of alternative versions of the two articles. The outcome is uncertain, with a number of the parliament's biggest political groups split over the issue.

In June, MEPs voted to give themselves more time to scrutinise the legislation after public campaigning.

“None of the positions now on the table will destroy the internet or prevent citizens from sharing hyperlinks, parodic images or their wedding memories,” said Ms Gabriel. “None of the positions is a threat to free encyclopedias like Wikipedia; none of the positions will destroy European cultural heritage.”

This story has been amended to reflect that Wyclef Jean opposes article 13. An original version said he backed it.

Letter in response to this article:

[EU copyright rules would limit online freedom / From Mitchell Baker, Mountain View, CA, US](#)

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