

fastFT EU tech regulation

EU parliament backs overhaul of digital copyright rules

Draft plans would force internet companies to pre-filter uploaded content



The vote by MEPs followed more than two years of fierce lobbying that pitted content creators against internet freedom campaigners © Reuters

Mehreen Khan in Strasbourg SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

The European Parliament has backed a draft update of EU copyright rules that could increase the burden on internet platforms including You Tube and Facebook by requiring them to filter content uploaded by millions of users.

The proposal to overhaul the bloc's copyright directive has been billed as a way to give authors, publishers and musicians more rights to get paid for their content in the digital age. MEPs in Strasbourg on Wednesday voted by 438 votes to 226 for the plan.

The parliament's vote followed more than two years of [fierce lobbying](#) that pitted content creators, including Paul McCartney, against internet freedom campaigners, such as Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales.

If adopted, the measures would require social media companies to co-operate in "good faith" with rights holders when user-uploaded material — such as music, video and images — breached copyright rules. Opponents had dubbed the measures as "censorship machines" that would significantly curb internet freedom for social media users.

Feedback

However, MEPs voted to exclude smaller platforms from the requirements to remove content.

The vote does not immediately change copyright rules but will allow MEPs to open negotiations with EU governments and the European Commission about the final rule changes.

Julia Reda, a German MEP and critic of the filtering obligations, said the new version of the text made only “cosmetic changes”.

“This law leaves sites and apps no choice but to install error-prone upload filters,” said Ms Reda. “Anything we want to publish will need to first be approved by these filters, and perfectly legal content like parodies and memes will be caught in the crosshairs.”

Another contentious part of the text will mean platforms such as Google will only be able to show individual words when hosting hyperlinks to content such as news stories. Critics say this so-called “neighbouring right” is akin to a “link tax” and will impinge the free flow of information.

Platforms and search engines will also have to pay publishers and rights holders for hosting their content.

Google, owner of YouTube, said “more innovation and collaboration are the best way to achieve a sustainable future for the European news and creative sectors”.

“We are committed to continued close partnership with these industries,” it added.

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Proposed by the commission in 2016, the copyright rules were designed to rebalance the relationship between publishers, authors and artists and the internet companies they increasingly rely on for their business models.

Axel Voss, a centre-right German MEP in charge of finding a compromise in parliament, said the update would help to sustain Europe’s creative industries and not destroy the internet as opponents had claimed.

“I am convinced that once the dust has settled, the internet will be as free as it is today, creators and journalists will be earning a fairer share of the revenues generated by their works, and we will be wondering what all the fuss was about,” Mr Voss said.

An update of the copyright directive will only come into force after final three-way negotiations involving MEPs, the European Commission and EU governments.

If parliament had not voted in favour on Wednesday, an update was unlikely to have won approval before pan-European elections in May next year.

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