

French lawmakers reject Internet piracy bill

April 9 2009, By SCOTT SAYARE , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- French lawmakers unexpectedly rejected a bill Thursday that would have cut off the Internet connections of people who repeatedly download music or films illegally.

The bill would have also created the world's first government agency to track and punish those who steal music and film on the Internet.

The music and film industry had supported the bill, aimed at boosting revenue for their struggling sector and cracking down on illegal downloading. Critics said it would be too tough to apply and encroach on freedoms.

The Senate had approved an earlier version of the bill. New measures were added in the lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, which passed it last week after a month of contentious debate.

On Thursday, lawmakers from both houses met to approve the final wording. The bill had widely been expected to pass, and few people showed up to take part in the vote, apparently assuming it was a foregone conclusion.

Instead, when the near-empty National Assembly held a vote, the bill was rejected by a vote of 21-15. Most of those voting were opposition Socialists, who had opposed the measure from the outset.

"It's an immense joy," said Socialist legislator Patrick Bloche.

The government was not giving up, however, and planned to resubmit the measure to both houses of parliament after legislators return from their Easter break on April 27, said Roger Karoutchi, the junior minister in charge of the government's relations with the parliament.

Under the legislation, users would receive e-mail warnings for their first two identified offenses, a certified letter for the next, and would have their Web connection cut for any subsequent illegal downloads.

"It's absolutely innovative," said Professor Pierre-Yves Gautier, an Internet [law](#) expert at the University Pantheon-Assas in Paris.

Music labels, film distributors and artists - who have seen CD and DVD sales in France plummet 60 percent in the past six years - hailed the bill as a decisive step toward eliminating online piracy and an example to other governments.

But some French activists and legislators say the law would represent a Big Brother intrusion on civil liberties.

Other opponents note that users downloading from public Wi-Fi hotspots or using masked IP addresses might be impossible to trace.

They say the law also misses the point, by targeting traditional downloads at a time when online streaming is taking off, for example.

"It will, in any case, be completely impossible to apply," said Jeremie Zimmerman, coordinator of the Quadrature du Net, a Paris-based Internet activist group that opposes the bill. "It is a bad response to a false problem."

French Culture Minister Christine Albanel has said the law "doesn't aim to completely eradicate" illegal downloads, but rather to "contribute to a

raising of consciousness" among offenders.

"There needs to be an experiment," said Gautier, the Internet law expert, noting plummeting entertainment industry profits. "Frankly, it's worth it."

Associated Press writer Emmanuel Georges-Picot in Paris contributed to this report.

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