

EU Commission urges Euro MPs to hold off ACTA vote

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Protesters wearing Anonymous Guy Fawkes masks take part in a demonstration against controversial Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), in March 2012. The European Commission urged the EU Parliament to hold off on voting on ACTA until judges rule on its legality.

The European Commission urged the EU Parliament on Wednesday to hold off on voting on a controversial global anti-online piracy pact until judges rule on its legality.

The commission is expected to refer the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) to the European Court of Justice in a few weeks, hoping to settle if it respects fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and data protection.

EU commissioners agreed Wednesday on the legal question to put to the

Luxembourg-based judges: "Is the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) compatible with the European Treaties, in particular with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union?"

The EU Parliament is expected to vote on ACTA in June, but EU Trade Commission Karel De Gucht urged the assembly to wait until the court ruling, saying it would bring "clarity" about its legality.

ACTA aims to beef up international standards for [intellectual property protection](#).

But fears it may curtail online freedoms by attacking [illegal downloading](#) and file-sharing have sparked angry protests from [Internet users](#) across Europe.

"Considering that tens of thousands of people have voiced their concerns about ACTA, it is appropriate to give our highest independent judicial body the time to deliver its legal opinion on this agreement," De Gucht said.

"This is an important input to European public and democratic debate. I therefore hope that the [European Parliament](#) will respect the European Court of Justice and await its opinion before determining its own position on ACTA."

Twenty-two of the 27 EU states as well as other countries including the United States and Japan signed ACTA in January but the treaty has yet to be ratified anywhere.

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