

French Senate wants ban on free book delivery

January 9 2014, by Jamey Keaten

If the French Senate gets its way, retail giant Amazon and its online peers won't be able to offer free book deliveries in France anymore.

In an unusual show of unity Thursday, the upper house of parliament unanimously approved a bill that would amend a 33-year-old law regulating book prices, and help struggling independent book sellers, which have faced tough competition from cost-cutting online vendors in the digital age.

In essence, the Senate proposal would strip some of the convenience and financial advantage of home or office delivery of books ordered online. Ultimately, if approved, the legislation could weigh on the minds of customers when they decide whether to trek over to mom-and-pop bookshops instead of shopping online.

The bill would allow online vendors like U.S.-based Amazon to cut the regular delivery price by up to 5 percent—but not provide free delivery. It differs slightly from a bill passed in the National Assembly, parliament's lower house, in October, which said nothing about barring free delivery.

Amazon.fr systematically offers both a 5 percent discount on books, and free delivery.

Amazon declined to comment. A company spokeswoman in France referred only to a previous statement following the Assembly vote that

said "all measures aiming to raise the book price on the Internet will first penalize French consumers and lower their purchasing power."

Socialist Culture Minister Aurelie Filippetti hailed the Senate vote as part of a strategy to support book shops in France—including some 11 million euros (\$15 million) in state support for independent booksellers.

The legislation doesn't specifically name Amazon. But in a Senate hearing last month, Sen. Bariza Khiari, a Socialist rapporteur on the issue, said the company has a 70 percent share of the growing online book-sale market in France—while in-store book sales fell 10 percent in November compared to in 2012.

The two houses are now to work out final language for the bill.

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