

EU plans to allow streaming services abroad by 2017

December 9 2015



Europeans are currently unable to watch streaming services such as Netflix, when they travel outside their home country

The EU unveiled plans on Wednesday that would by 2017 allow travellers to get their Netflix film fix or listen to Spotify when abroad, something currently blocked by complex copyright rules.

Europeans spend about one billion nights in other EU countries every year but are confronted with a frustrating inability to enjoy watching many of their favourite films or TV shows on an iPad or laptop computer when they travel outside their home country.

"We want to ensure the portability of content across borders," said Andrus Ansip, the European Commission's Vice President for the digital single market.

"People who legally buy content -- films, books, football matches, TV series -- must be able to carry it with them anywhere they go in Europe," he said.

The commission, the executive body of the 28-country EU, said the ability of Europeans to enjoy subscriptions to services such as Netflix while still in the bloc was "a new EU right for consumers".

The proposal now goes to the European parliament and EU member states for approval, which the commission hopes will come next year, with final implementation of the rules in 2017.

Officials said streaming services linked to public broadcasters such as the BBC's iPlayer or France's PLUZZ—which are currently limited to within their own countries—would not immediately be covered because unlike commercial streaming services they don't have a system that verifies the country of residence of users.



Spotify has more than 75 million users worldwide

The BBC had said it would enthusiastically pursue such a system so that British residents could watch iPlayer when abroad.

The so-called "portability" issue is the first step towards a far more controversial plan by the EU to overhaul the EU's complex copyright rules, part of a scheme to create a single digital market in Europe.



Andrus Ansip—the European Commission's Vice President for the Digital Single Market—speaks during a press conference in Brussels, on December 9, 2015. The commission proposes modern digital contract rules to simplify and promote access to digital content and online sales across the EU.

The European Union is the world's biggest economy, but despite its 500 million potential consumers, digital services remain confined to national borders, with separate accounts and proof of residency required from one country to another.

But media companies are extremely reluctant to break the status quo especially in France, where protecting French culture is an important government priority.

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Citation: EU plans to allow streaming services abroad by 2017 (2015, December 9) retrieved 26

April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-eu-streaming.html>

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