

News agencies hail 'major step' by EU to make net giants pay for news

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Officials are hammering out an overhaul of EU copyright rules against the backdrop of free online news that has decimated earnings for traditional media companies

News agencies welcomed Monday what they called a "major step" by the

EU parliament's legal committee asking internet giants to pay for press articles.

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"Very profitable companies, like Facebook and Google, offer users qualified news reporting from publishers including news agencies, but they do not offer a fair return for this usage," said the European Alliance of News Agencies, of which AFP is a member.

The proposal was made by Axel Voss, the rapporteur for parliament's legal [committee](#), which is expected to vote on the proposed copyright directive in June.

News publishers hope the laws will include so-called neighbouring rights that would require online platforms to pay for putting up articles.

Several parliamentary committees have already approved versions of the tax proposal, but the key Legal Affairs Committee has not yet weighed in.

After a year and half of talks, the 28 EU member states remain divided on the wisdom of any tax or payments, which tech giants like Google strongly oppose.

Some legal experts are also against the idea, saying it would help only the most widely known news providers to the detriment of independent and start-up companies, effectively curbing the right to free speech.

But news providers say their ability to invest in unbiased coverage from around the world is at risk, since millions of people have become used to

reading and watching free content on the web.

Representatives from EU countries are set to meet again in Brussels on May 16 to try to reach a compromise.

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