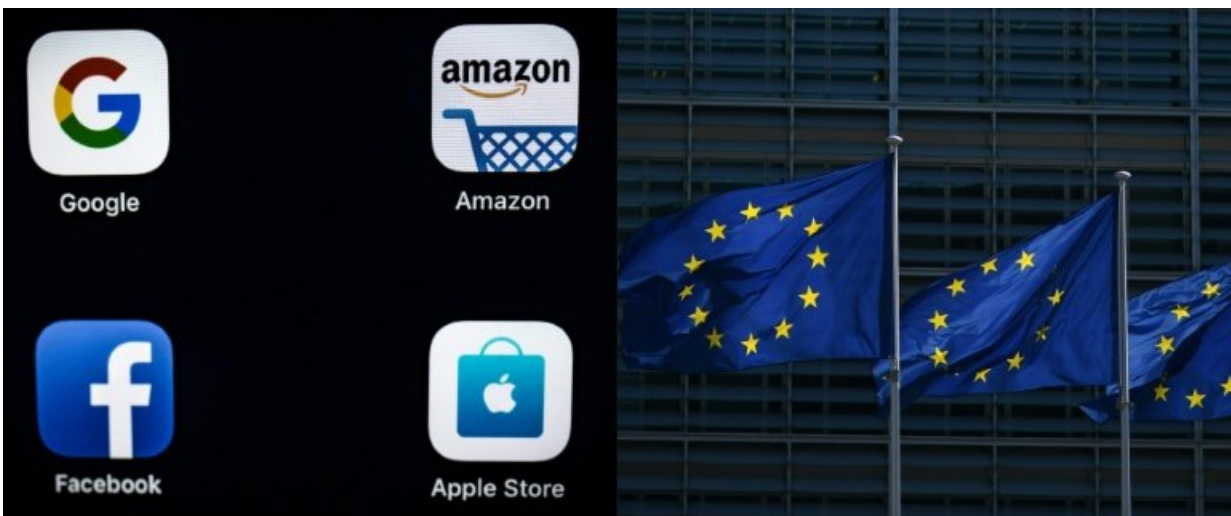


Vote on EU online copyright reform splits usual allies

September 12 2018, by Marie Julien



Artists and lawmakers are divided over proposed European reforms to online copyright law that opponents say favour web giants

The European Parliament votes Wednesday on a highly complex online copyright law that has split natural political bedfellows and pitted music and news companies against Google and Facebook.

EU lawmakers are divided on the issue even within their usual ideological camps, and a jamboree of lobbying around the Strasbourg session has underscored divisions in the creative community.

Haitian recording star Wyclef Jean was in town to oppose the law—putting him on the side of Silicon Valley giants and activists for internet freedom.

But British singer Murray Head was also there, backing efforts to update EU copyright law for the first time in 15 years and ensure creators are paid fairly in a digital world.

This put Head on the side of other greats such as Beatles frontman Paul McCartney—who wrote in support of the draft law—and of global news organisations, including Agence France-Presse.

Indeed, the ambitious draft provoked one of the most intense lobbying wars in EU history, with both sides spending lavishly on advertising and email campaigns to defend their corner.

The vote will take place at about 1000 GMT after a flurry of media stunts and celebrity appearances to help persuade MEPs.

The outcome remains highly uncertain with stakeholders lobbying MEPs intensely behind the scenes even as lawmakers debated the draft in the chamber.

Rejected in July, members on all sides of the issue have proposed a huge series of amendments hoping to calm the fears of advocates of [internet freedom](#) who helped sink an earlier draft.

Viral memes

"We should not accept a world where a handful of multinational companies capture most of the value generated by works created by others," eight culture ministers, including France's Francoise Nyssen and Spain's Jose Guirao Cabrera, wrote in editorial.

The draft has been resisted by US tech giants as well as online freedom activists, with some campaigners warning it could spell the end of viral "memes" or jokes.

They also fear that automatic filters to prevent users sharing content subject to copyright could be misused to censor political messages or other forms of free expression.

German liberal MEP Nadja Hirsch warned: "We are dealing with more and more anti-democratic forces. That's why we refuse upload filters. We don't want to open Pandora's box."

Backing the draft are traditional media in urgent search of revenue at a time when web users get much content for free, and advertising revenue is siphoned away by search and aggregation platforms.

"All that we want is that they pay so we can continue to gather news," said Sammy Ketz, veteran AFP reporter and author of an influential editorial entitled: "A question of life and death."

"Who will fight fake news and conspiracy theories if journalists do not?" he demanded.

If adopted, MEPs will be able to start negotiations with the EU Council representing the 28 member states which already reached a compromise on the issue in May.

These closed-door discussions, which also include the European Commission, are known in EU jargon as "trilogues" and can take several months before any compromise is put to a fresh vote.

Proponents of the reform would like a law before the European elections in May 2019, when many fear an influx of eurosceptic MEPs with little

use for it.

The lobbying battle is over two parts of the planned law.

The first is Article 13, which would make platforms like Google-owned YouTube legally liable if their users share copyrighted material, to prevent content producers being ripped off.

At the Venice film festival last week, 165 European film-makers, including Mike Leigh and Jacques Audiard, urged EU lawmakers to pass this measure.

Critics say the change will lead in effect to blanket censorship of platforms that have become an online hub for creativity as well as the prime source of entertainment—at the expense of TV—for younger generations.

"Upload filters or anything else that restricts this will stop artists from making and creating the future," said former Fugees star Wyclef Jean.

Unlimited freedom

But Green lawmaker Helga Trupel criticised web freedom activists, saying web giants have shown they are better able to profit from a copyright free-for-all than smaller content creators.

"Their understanding of freedom is an unlimited one," she told a news conference, which means that "only the big win."

The second key disputed provision is Article 11. This would create a so-called "neighbouring right", meaning that newspapers, magazines, and news agencies would receive a fee when web services link to their stories.

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