

Czech Republic, Slovakia freeze anti-piracy pact

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Czech Prime Minister Petr Necas, pictured in 2011, said Monday his country would freeze plans to ratify a controversial international online anti-piracy accord after mounting off-and-online protests.

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"The cabinet cannot accept a situation in which the bedrock of liberty and free access to information is endangered," Necas was quoted as saying by the Czech news agency CTK.

He said the government would undertake a thorough review of the "real world" impact of ratifying the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA).

The Czech Republic is one of 22 European countries that last month signed up to ACTA, which aims to set up international standards for [intellectual property protection](#) but has sparked fears it could curtail online freedom.

Despite mounting outcry among Internet users, governments gave a nod to ACTA with an initial signature of endorsement, but ratification by parliament is needed for it to come into force.

Later Monday, neighbouring Slovakia also suspended its ratification process, with Economy Minister Juraj Miskov saying a wide [public debate](#) needed to be initiated before the process could continue.

"I will not support a treaty that could limit human rights and freedoms," Miskov said in a statement.

The decision by the Czech and Slovaks government comes in the wake of a move last week by Poland, which also froze its ratification process.

ACTA was negotiated between the 27-nation European Union, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, [South Korea](#), Switzerland and the United States.

Governments have come under fire for signing the accord after talks with record companies and commercial media, while allegedly failing to do enough to address groups representing Internet users.

"ACTA is a serious attack in [civil liberties](#) in the [Czech Republic](#). We're convinced parliament shouldn't ratify it," said Mikulas Ferjencik, deputy leader of the local [Pirate Party](#) based on the Swedish cyber-freedom movement of the same name.

In addition to street rallies and online protests, anti-ACTA "hacktivists"

have also launched cyber attacks on the Czech government and Necas's ODS party.

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