

Don't lose historic chance to make internet fair for all, says BCC

Tomorrow (12 September), MEPs have an historic opportunity to support copyright proposals that would deliver a fair deal for European creators and assure the future of creativity in the digital age.

Current EU copyright laws were made before many online services including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter existed, and the new copyright directive before Parliament is urgently needed to fix a drastically skewed framework that enables major online platforms to earn vast sums on the back of creative content — such as music, literature, images and news — for which they pay little or nothing.

The British Copyright Council, whose members include professional associations, industry bodies, collecting societies and trade unions that together represent hundreds of thousands of authors, creators, performers, publishers and producers, is therefore calling on the European Parliament to back without delay proposals that properly value creative works online and improve clarity for internet users.

We know MEPs have faced a determined campaign, backed by large tech companies, that seeks to block these forward-looking measures and to defend the status quo. Among the false charges against the directive are that it heralds censorship — an allegation that is not only anathema to our community of journalists, authors, photographers, film-makers and many other creators, but one that fares badly against the facts. The proposals introduce no new restrictions on internet users, confirming only that large commercial content-sharing companies are accountable for copyright works used on their platforms. Where those companies buy licences, individuals can upload content just as before. Likewise, users remain free to share links to articles (hyperlinking is explicitly excluded from the draft) and to engage in parody (already covered by a copyright exception).

When MEPs last met in July they voted to give the directive a closer look in plenary this week. In the meantime, Parliament's legal affairs committee rapporteur, Axel Voss, has worked hard in putting forward a number of amendments to address key sticking points, particularly on Articles 11 and 13.

The BCC now urges MEPs to move the directive forward in support of creators, understanding that the biggest threat to a content-rich internet and to freedom of expression is to deny their livelihoods.

In Britain alone, the creative industries now contribute around £92bn a year to the economy. Stopping the directive would be to privilege multinational internet giants at the expense of European creators — most of them individuals and small businesses — who are absolutely crucial to our economic, digital and cultural wealth.

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For further information, please contact: Elisabeth Ribbons, Director of Policy & Public Affairs
Email: elisabeth@britishcopyright.org
Tel: 07791 677827