It's time to fix copyright in Europe: Oppose pre-filtering requirements.

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On September 12, the European Parliament will vote on amendments to their proposed EU Copyright Directive. This is a rare opportunity for the European people to define and shape a legal framework that will affect the way they use the internet every day.

Why oppose pre-filtering?

If certain language is adopted in the EU Directive, platforms may be forced to employ systems that have the ability to filter out content before it is even published, limiting the information users share and the ways in which they share it. Regulations which require platforms to ensure the functioning of agreements with rightsholders shifts the burden of enforcement onto platforms to police all user-generated content, controlling your access to information online based on their own individual definitions of copyright infringement.

Instead, regulations should focus on driving cooperation between rightsholders and platforms to develop new and better ways to ensure licenses are upheld.

Who is affected by pre-filtering?

Creators who rely on copyright exceptions. One of the biggest issues with automatic filtering of user-generated content is that it often restricts legal uses of works that benefit from exceptions to copyright, e.g. criticism, parody, educational content, and more. With platforms employing filtering technologies whose primary goal is to take-down first, ask questions later, lawful content which relies on exceptions will be one of the first casualties.

Startups and smaller platforms. YouTube's ContentID system, which is often pointed to as a successful automatic filtering mechanism for copyright violations, took $60 million to build. Requiring this type of technology on every platform that hosts large amounts of user-generated content, even if that content is freely licensed or in the public domain, would only serve to further entrench the hold large technology companies have on the online information system. This would disadvantage startup platforms or non-profits like Wikimedia which rely on an effective system of volunteers to flag and remove copyrighted content, not algorithms.

Everyone else. Mandatory filter requirements may be directed at copyright now, but employing technology which scans every piece of user-generated content before it is uploaded creates an infrastructure for more troubling censorship. What now only catches copyright infringement may be used in the future to filter out "offensive" speech, political speech, or any other number of protected free expressions that users have a right to.

Visit https://fixcopyright.wikimedia.org to tell your representative to oppose regulations that would require platforms to pre-filter content.