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France Lawmakers Endorse File-Sharing



By LAURENCE FROST, AP Business Writer

1 hour, 42 minutes ago

PARIS - A French government crackdown on digital piracy backfired Thursday as lawmakers rebelled by endorsing amendments to legalize the online sharing of music and movies instead of punishing it.

The vote by members of France's lower house dealt a setback to Culture Minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, who introduced the draft legislation. Showbiz and cultural celebrities protested the latest move, an indication that the amendments' supporters may eventually have to back down.

Under the original proposals, those caught pirating copy-protected material would have faced \$360,000 in fines and up to three years in jail.

An 11th-hour government offer to give illegal downloaders two warnings prior to prosecution was not enough to stem the rebellion. Instead, the amendments voted would legalize file-sharing by anyone paying a monthly royalties duty estimated at \$8.50.

Music labels and movie distributors have suggested the amendments would break international laws on intellectual property, and French actors and musicians lined up to condemn the surprise vote.

"To legalize the downloading of our music, almost free of charge, is to kill our work," venerable rocker Johnny Hallyday said in a statement.

The actors' and musicians' branch of France's largest trade union, the CFDT, said the plan "would mean the death of our country's music and audiovisual industries."

The proposed royalties duty amounts to a "Sovietization" of the arts, said Bernard Miyet, president of the French music composers' and publishers' organization SACEM.

"You're talking about an administered price, set by a commission without regard to the music and film economy," Miyet said.

But UFC-Que Choisir, France's largest consumer group, said the plan would create a "new area of freedom allowing Internet users access to cultural diversity and fair payment for creators."

Days before the parliamentary debate, consumer activists delivered a 110,000-signature petition to the culture ministry criticizing the draft bill. The right of consumers to make copies of their music and videos for private use is enshrined in European law, and media companies have faced legal action in France for selling copy-protected CDs and

AP Photo: French Culture Minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres grimaces as he walks out of the Elysee...

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The ruling conservatives' parliamentary leader, Bernard Accoyer, rejected government demands for a fresh vote Thursday, saying lawmakers will first take time to listen to all sides, "in particular the artists and creators."

The final lower-house vote is not expected until after Jan. 17, when deputies return from their winter break. The bill requires only one further vote in the Senate to become law, under the emergency procedure invoked by the government to comply with a 2001

[European Union](#) directive on digital piracy.

Associated Press Writer Emmanuel Georges-Picot contributed to this report.

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