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European writers open letter to the EU authorities

Copyright spells authors' rights

Let us speak plainly: we writers do not understand the EU's insistence on "reforming" copyright/authors' rights in Europe.

The European Commission has chosen the wrong target in attacking authors' rights in order to encourage the emergence of a "Digital Single Market", when it is precisely authors' rights that are the essential condition for creating works of literature. Undermining them would be to stem the source of the digital book market before it even properly takes off. Diluted authors' rights means impoverished literature.

Authors' rights are not an obstacle to the circulation of works. The authorisation of translation rights enables works to be translated into all languages and disseminated in all countries. The real obstacles to dissemination are economic, technological and fiscal, and it is monopolies, proprietary formats and tax fraud that should really be the object of any reform.

In adopting an extensively amended version of Julia Reda's report, the European Parliament reaffirmed loud and clear the importance of protecting authors' rights, and of preserving the increasingly precarious economic stability of the creative industries. Regrettably, at the same time, it rashly left the door open to a whole array of exceptions to authors' rights – exceptions that could be created, expanded, made compulsory and standardised by the Commission, flying in the face sometimes of national solutions that already fulfil the needs of readers and other users.

How is the proliferation of exceptions to authors' rights supposed to promote the creation of works? After how many exceptions (libraries and archives, e-lending, research and education purposes, text and data mining, transformative uses, out-of-print and orphan works etc.) will the exception become the rule and authors' rights the exception?

Authors' rights are vital for us because they mean we have financial and moral rights over our work.

Authors' rights are the foundation on which our European literature has been built; they are a source of economic wealth for our countries, and of job creation; protecting them guarantees financing for creativity and the sustainability of the entire book chain; they are the basis for our remuneration. In allowing us to reap the fruits of our work, they guarantee our freedom and our independence. We do not want to return to the days of patronage, or to live on potential public subsidies: we want to make our living from the exploitation of our works. Writing is a profession, not a pastime.

Authors' rights have permitted the democratisation of the book over the past few centuries, and in the future they will enable the development of digital works and their distribution to the widest audience. A legacy of the past, authors' rights are a modern tool, compatible with the use of new technologies.

It is crucial to stop pitting authors against readers. Literature would not exist without writers; it serves no purpose without readers. Writers are fundamentally open to the changes and developments of the world in which they live. They defend freedom of thought, freedom of expression and the freedom to create more vociferously and passionately than anyone. They are in favour of sharing ideas and knowledge, that is their *raison d'être*. They are readers first and foremost.

We European writers call on the European authorities to abandon plans to extend or increase the scope of exceptions and limitations to authors' rights. The assurance of some form of "compensation" is no substitute for the income earned from the commercial exploitation of our works, especially as authors are already suffering from a growing material precariousness. We call on the European authorities to fight against the temptation of an illusory "everything for free", which will only benefit the major distribution platforms and other content providers. We call on the European authorities to help us obtain a fairer share of the value of books, especially in the digital sphere, as well as to prohibit abusive clauses in contracts and to combat the pirating of our works effectively.

The freedom to create and the vitality of European culture are also dependent on you.

(Translation: Ros Schwartz,
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