

Featured content

Don't miss the goal!

To unfold its full economic and social potential, sport needs a solid and enforceable copyright framework, not a weakened one.

According to President Juncker, the European Commission's top priority is "to get Europe growing again and increase the number of jobs". The Sports Rights Owners Coalition (SROC) that I chair couldn't agree more.

Representing as it does, 1.76% of the gross value added and 2.12% of the total employment in the European Union (according to the Commission's own study from 2012), it is unquestionable that the sport sector should be part of the mix.

Our members represent the most popular European and international sports and competitions, they attract millions of spectators and their events are available to fans across a growing number of broadcast platforms. However, if national governments and the EU institutions have promoted and used the power of sports for social and economic good, the financial foundations upon which this is based have been less clearly understood. A good example is the current discussion around copyright and territoriality.

SROC members rely on intellectual property and especially copyright law to sell rights and create income that can be reinvested into their sport. Being able to exploit commercially their competitions and to protect them against any infringements is key to a sustainable financing of both professional and grassroots sports. However, due to its immense popularity across the world, sport content is attractive to commercial undertakings looking at creating profit, without any re-investment in sport. The digital revolution has created a lot of commercial opportunities but it has also made it easier for these undertakings to exploit our events and data without consent. Without a solid and enforceable copyright framework, both offline and online, sports will no longer be able to deliver the huge economic and social benefits at national and local level that are both hoped for and expected.

While SROC members all have a fundamental desire for their competitions to be seen and experienced by as

many fans as possible, the nature of sport is inherently territorial and not all citizens of every country want to access every kind of sports competitions. Cricket and rugby are for example more popular in the UK than handball and ice hockey which are huge in other EU member states. Sports competitions, just like creative works, are conceived, created and marketed in response to specific linguistic and cultural factors. Without a flexible copyright framework which recognises the contractual freedom principle, SROC members and their licensees/broadcasters would not be able to tailor their content to specific national or local audience tastes.

There is no one single model which would magically apply in all instances to deliver sporting content to consumers. While the UEFA Champions League is broadcast and transmitted on a tailored basis to meet specific consumer expectations in all EU member states and beyond, other "smaller" competitions such as the French Volleyball League make their matches available on the internet without restriction outside of their home market because they want to gain exposure. There is not geo-blocking for every sporting event, far from it!

We support President Juncker's goal in terms of growth and employment so we would recommend careful attention when it comes to the copyright framework. It is flexible enough to accommodate all kind of sports. It works well for European sports and creative industries which are popular and successful worldwide. Changing it radically is unlikely to magically create millions of jobs, however is very likely to impact the value chain with those only transmitting the content online making much more money than those creating it and investing in it.

In order to boost growth and employment in real terms, the anticipated Commission initiatives dealing with IPR and copyright specifically will have to reconcile the single market with respect for our cultural and linguistic diversity which is the true wealth of our continent.

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