

Open letter urging further action to end geoblocking in the EU

To:

The European Commission

The European Parliament

The Council of the European Union

May 18, 2017

The EU must take decisive action against digital borders that today divide the people of Europe, discriminate against minority language speakers, inconvenience millions and cause substantial losses to the EU economy.

The measures currently planned against the discriminatory practice of geoblocking must be the first steps, not the last. They fall far short of making the error "This content is not available in your country" a thing of the past where Europeans most encounter it: When trying to access online video content.

- The *Portability Regulation*, to be passed today by the European Parliament, only allows Europeans to access existing subscriptions from their home country while on vacation.
- The *Geoblocking Regulation* was strictly limited to online shopping by the European Commission. The European Parliament is debating whether to expand it to cover music, games and e-books, but even MEPs have decided against including video content.
- The *Online Cable and Satellite Regulation* concerns only online services of TV and radio broadcasters, and it's still subject to heated debate which of their content it will end up covering.

These measures are baby steps, when what is urgently needed is a decisive move forward to do justice to the severity of the issue: Geoblocking is discrimination. It undermines the development of a common European public sphere. It locks audiences out from much of Europe's cultural diversity and locks artists into national borders. It is especially painful for speakers of minority languages, and negatively affects expat workers, exchange students, language learners, startup companies and many more.

We urge you to consider the recent independent evidence underscoring the need for action:

- **Geoblocking for videos is wide-spread in the EU**, the *European Commission's* sector inquiry has found in a report published last week: 68% of digital content providers in the EU geoblock. The vast majority of films are geoblocked, and even for news content, 1 in 4 contracts require locking out a potentially interested European audience online. (Source: <https://mep.link/3>)

- **Geoblocking is limiting the audience of EU productions**, the *European Audiovisual Observatory* concluded in a May 2016 report: 80% of EU films are available online only in 3 countries or fewer, neglecting the cross-border demand to access cultural works e.g. by members of language minorities. (Source: <https://mep.link/4>)
- **Millions in sales are lost**. As much as an additional €945 million could be generated per year and copyright infringement would be substantially discouraged by prohibiting geoblocking of audiovisual content, the *European Parliament Research Service* found in February. (Source: <https://mep.link/5>)
- **EU action is widely popular**. In the *European Commission's* 2015 public consultation, "almost nine in ten of the relevant respondents agree to rules banning ways and means of discriminatory geo-blocking". (Source: <https://mep.link/6>)

Abolishing physical borders between member states has always been a core purpose of the European Union. On the internet, there is even less justification for artificially created geographical barriers. **We must follow through with abolishing geoblocking in the EU to further the European project and complete the Digital Single Market.**

Signatories:

- Davyth Hicks, Director, **EuroLang, European Language Equality Network**
- Christopher Glück, President, **JEF/Young European Federalists**
- Réka Salamon, President, **AEGEE-Europe/European Student's Forum**
- Lenard Koschwitz, Director Public Policy, **Allied for Startups**
- Stavriana Kofteros, Co-founder **European Startup Network**, Special Entrepreneurship & Growth Adviser **Democratic Rally** (EPP family)
- Josep-Maria Terricabras, MEP and Co-chair of the **Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages in the European Parliament**
- Julia Reda, MEP and Co-chair of the **Digital Agenda Intergroup in the European Parliament**

Additional supporters: Romilly Dennys, Executive Director COADEC; Jan Jilek, Founder 1000Startups.eu; Carmen Bermejo, executive director at the Spanish Startup Association; Matej Rus, Start:Up Slovenia; Karen Boers, Co-Founder Startups.be; Rein Lemberpuu, President Estonian Startup Leaders Club; Gianmarco Carnovale, Co-founder and President of Roma Startup; Gianmarco Carnovale, Co-founder and President of Roma Startup, Board Member of Allied for Startups

Further information: EndGeoblocking.eu