



Parliament to receive 2.4 million petition signatures against ACTA

The EP will tomorrow receive a petition signed by more than 2.4 million internet users against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). They fear that the agreement will pose a threat to a free and open internet. The EP's petitions committee will look at the petition before deciding what action to take. Its options vary from asking the European Commission to launch a preliminary investigation to preparing a full report for the Parliament to vote on during a plenary session.

The petition has been organised by Avaaz, an organisation which uses internet to campaign on various issues. Once the petition has been received, the committee will decide whether it is admissible or not. This normally takes one to two months. In special cases an "urgency procedure" can be used to speed up this process. A petition could be declared inadmissible if it does not fall with the EU's area of activity. In this case, no further action will be taken. If a petition is declared admissible, the committee will then decide what type of action should be taken.

Italian Christian-Democrat Erminia Mazzoni, chair of the petitions committee, said: "The ratification procedure of ACTA in the European Parliament has only just started. It will need to be examined carefully, taking into consideration all concerns, through a reasoned assessment of the facts and trying to combine the freedom of the Internet on the one hand and the fight against counterfeiting on the other. The follow-up of the petition will be decided in the coming weeks by the members of the committee on petitions."

The petitions committee works to resolve infringements of citizens' rights through cooperation with local, regional and national authorities on the application of EU law on a range of issues. It is an investigative committee and has no legal power, but tries to find non-judicial remedies for citizens whose claims are substantiated. It can organise fact-finding visits and report to plenary.

ACTA is aimed at more effectively enforcing intellectual property rights on an international level. It has proved controversial because critics worry the agreement would favour the interests of large companies at the expense of citizens' rights and see its possible application in the online sphere as a threat to people's privacy and human rights. It cannot enter into force in the EU unless the Parliament gives its consent and all member states ratify it.

Text of the petition:

- "To all Members of the EU Parliament: As concerned global citizens, we call on you to stand for a free and open Internet and reject the ratification of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), which would destroy it. The Internet is a crucial tool for people around the world to exchange ideas and promote democracy. We urge you to show true global leadership and protect our rights."