The new copyright rules in Europe are a victory for the entertainment industry, but have provoked a storm of worries in the research community.

The EU Copyright Directive

The new set of rules on copyright began life in the European Commission in Brussels as an attempt to harmonise the hotchpotch of different copyright laws in member countries. The set of rules—that called a directive—were also an attempt to update legislation for the digital age taking account of CD Roms, Digital Video Discs, and the Internet. The directive was penned, and even before, digital age taking account of CD Roms, Digital Video Discs, and the Internet. The objective was to convince MEPs to provide stronger protection for the music industry. The European Parliament was about to examine the copyright rules proposed by the European Commission. The original proposal exempted copying that was “dictated by technology,” such as the automatic but temporary caching of files by networks, done when data traverses the Internet. This was in December 1997. By the time the European Parliament had voted on the rules in February of this year, the exemptions had been changed. Permission from the copyright holder would be needed before temporary copies of data could be made by Internet networks (see above).

The music industry had successfully lobbied Parliament. It had partly found support from the software and publishing industries, but had techniques (a 15-minute “roadshow” for MEPs, a petition signed by 400 music artists and handed in by French pop star Jean Michel Jarre) were successful despite the lobbying efforts of those opposed to tough new rules.

Elly Plooij-van Gorsel is in charge of research for the European Liberals, and is one EU Minister who voted against the proposals because she thought the interests of the entertainment industry and its artists were favoured too much in the directive. “The copyright on products is very strong, even on temporary copies, which is very bad for the speed of the Internet. Also, it will be difficult to make copies just for home use,” she says (copying an album by the Irish rock group The Corrs’s from CD onto a tape, and taking the tape to the lab to listen alone, will be illegal under the new copyright rules without permission from the owner of the music—this, in its own small way, may affect research in Europe).

When asked whether she thought researchers could ever match the lobbying tactics of the entertainment industry, Plooij-van Gorsel told Europhysics News, “No. Scientific councils can have influence if they lobby at the national level. But I never once saw science organisations lobbying on the directive, although it influences research.”