

GEMA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

11 MAY 2023

LAUDATORY SPEECH DR. HEKER: HONOURING AXEL VOSS MEP

Dear members, dear Mr Voss!

We award the Ehrennadel [honorary badge] to personalities who have made a special contribution to the concerns of GEMA.

And you, dear Mr Voss, have done exactly that, without a doubt.

Since 2009, you have been an MEP and were involved in the large political decisions concerning digital matters over the last few years. From the European General Data Protection Regulation to the Artificial Intelligence Act, the legislative process for dealing with artificial intelligence, which is currently on a home stretch in Brussels.

Above all, we know you as a rapporteur with respect to the EU Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market adopted in 2019. You made a major contribution to one of the most significant and comprehensive modernisations of copyright in the last 20 years. An act of modernisation which has bolstered creatives all over Europe like no other undertaking in recent times has done.

Let us take a quick look back:

After intensive debates, the Directive was finally adopted by the European Parliament – and the Council in the spring of 2019. This decision had been preceded by year-long and sometimes extremely controversial discussions.

Another reason for this reform being fought over in such a way was due to the fact that it intended a paradigm shift in dealing with the major network corporations, something that actually came to fruition. European Heads of State and CEOs from Silicon Valley participated in this debate. Particularly in the run-up to the decisive vote in the European Parliament, the discussion sometimes really got out of hand.

In these turbulent times it was you, dear Mr Voss, who, as a supporter of the reform, turned into one of the most antagonised protagonist Members of the European Parliament. Excessive criticism, even threats, spilled over to you and your personal environment. One can probably only imagine what it was like to be in your shoes and under such pressure as an MEP if one experienced such a situation directly. I know that it must have been hard and admire your courage and your strength.

After all, it is certain that: Without your solid stance, your unwavering commitment, your steadfastness and your negotiation skills, it would not have been possible to pass the Directive in its current form! (applause)

You made a crucial contribution to finally bring the basic principles of our social market economy to bear in the digital world: namely responsibility, fair competition, protection of intellectual property. The Directive was implemented in Germany in the summer of 2021. Since then, we clearly feel that the new rules strengthen the negotiation position of creatives in the digital realm.

The horror scenario painted by the opponents of the reform of an allegedly imminent “end of a free internet” has, in fact, not come to be true. We were pleased with you when the European Court of Justice ruled last year that Article 17 of the Copyright Directive ensures a “fair balance” between various fundamental rights - including the rights of creators!

Dear Mr Voss, on behalf of our members I put it very clearly once more: Thank you very much indeed! For your long-term commitment to the interests of creatives and your unequivocal stance regarding the draft of the EU Directive. And with the above, I would like to combine my own personal thanks for the constructive exchange with you and your entire team over the past years.