



## EP debates petitions against ACTA

**Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement ACTA has left few people indifferent. Over the last few months the EP has received numerous petitions - including one signed by nearly three million people - asking MEPs to vote against the controversial agreement. The EP's petitions committee discussed the issue with petitioners on Tuesday 19 June. The international trade committee will vote 21 June on whether to recommend rejection to MEPs.**

### The petitions

A petition by AVAAZ, an organisation which uses the internet to campaign on various issues, has already been signed by 2.8 million people. It calls on MEPs to demonstrate leadership, stand up for a free and open Internet and reject the ratification of ACTA. Other petitions say that ACTA will neither "stop the trade of counterfeit products, nor Internet piracy" and instead would give authorities and companies too much control over the Internet. Another concern is the possible restriction of access to generic medicines.

Alex Wilks, of AVAAZ, pointed out at the meeting that ACTA was negotiated behind closed doors: "Citizens shouldn't feel like spectators unable to affect the outcome." He added it would "establish a legal regime where private companies could become unaccountable, snoopers and censors of the internet". This is why Mr Wilks urged MEPs to "make sure this treaty never sees the light of day".

### The role of the Parliament

British Labour MEP David Martin, responsible for steering the agreement through Parliament, underlined that no fewer than six parliamentary committees had discussed the issue. "Whether you are for or against ACTA, the fact that the EP, as the voice of the European citizens, has had the opportunity to look at this issue in detail and come to a conclusion should be welcomed," he said. "It doesn't matter which side you are on, the fact this has been subject to open democratic scrutiny is a great plus."

Spanish Green MEP Raúl Romeda i Rueva added that MEPs would lose credibility if they didn't follow the majority of people on this.

### European Commission

Benoît Lory of the European Commission, said there was no reason to be concerned about the agreement: "ACTA does not modify the current EU legislation and in no way, directly or indirectly, infringes any EU fundamental rights. The legal services of the European Commission and the European Parliament have provided assurance of this. ACTA has been examined in all the member states and in the end the EU unanimously, with unanimous support of the member states, decided to sign this agreement."

### Next steps

For ACTA to enter into force in the EU, the agreement has to be ratified by the European Parliament, the Council and all member states. Some member states have already said they won't ratify ACTA. MEPs will base their decision on a recommendation by the international trade committee, taking into account contributions by the committees for legal affairs, justice and home affairs, industry and development, which have all rejected the agreement.

A vote on ACTA is scheduled for the July plenary.