

# Debate starting on new French Internet piracy bill

(AP) -- Lawmakers in France's lower house of parliament are to start debate Tuesday on a new version of a bill aimed at cracking down on online piracy by cutting the Internet connections of those who illegally download movies and music.

An earlier version of the bill was found to be unconstitutional. Legislators in the National Assembly are to debate the amended bill through Friday, but decided not to take a vote on it until they return from summer recess in September.

The piracy legislation, which has been working its way through parliament for months, has drawn attention from entertainers and Internet privacy advocates beyond France's borders.

The music and film industry has applauded the measure, sponsored by President Nicolas Sarkozy's conservative UMP party. But critics contend it represents a threat to civil liberties and could open the way for invasive government monitoring.

The bill calls for graduated reprisals against alleged offenders. If suspected pirates fail to heed e-mail warnings and a certified letter, their home Internet connections could be cut for a period of one month to one year, and they could face fines or even jail time.

The earlier version of the bill would have allowed a new government agency to cut off Internet connections, and France's Constitutional Council ruled that was

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unconstitutional.

The new version of the bill would leave it to a judge to decide whether to cut repeat offenders' connections. Those found guilty could appeal the decision.

Still, the opposition Socialists have threatened to refer the bill to the Constitutional Council again. They have also loaded the bill with more than 700 amendments, in an attempt to slow down the parliamentary debate.

If it passes a vote in the lower house, the National Assembly, the legislation will need to be examined by a committee of lawmakers from the upper and lower houses of Parliament and submitted to a new vote in both houses before it becomes law.

Even as the French lawmakers struggle over the legislation, crafty Internet pirates are already hatching strategies to get around it.

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