**European Commission slams Saudi Arabia for “causing considerable harm to EU businesses” through beoutQ and Arabsat piracy**

***Major report follows representations by rights-holders, broadcasters
and other stakeholders across European sport***

**BRUSSELS, LONDON, PARIS – 27 January 2020** – The European Commission has published a major report in which it singles out Saudi Arabia for “causing considerable harm to EU businesses” following the unprecedented two-year theft of European sport programmes by Saudi-based beoutQ and Arabsat.

The report sets out priority countries – only 13 worldwide – on which “the EU will focus its action” regarding the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in third countries, including Saudi Arabia.
Saudi Arabia, in particular, was selected based on representations made by rights-holders and broadcasters across European sport – including UEFA, the Premier League, LaLiga and (as the principal target of Saudi Arabia’s piracy) beIN MEDIA GROUP – regarding rampant copyright piracy; along with submissions from other industries harmed by deficient patent and data protection regimes. Saudi Arabia is one of only two countries added to the European Commission’s bi-annual “priority list”, alongside Nigeria.

In highlighting the “serious shortcomings” in Saudi Arabia’s protection and enforcement of intellectual property, the report states:-

* “*Saudi Arabia was selected because of its global role as a regional transit country for counterfeit and pirated goods destined for the EU, and because stakeholders report high-scale satellite and online piracy and ineffective enforcement measures to tackle them*.”
* “*BeoutQ makes available – without authorisation – content belonging to EU sport event organisers and EU rights-holders (authors and related rights-holders) in the territory of Saudi Arabia, in the Middle East and North Africa as well as in the EU*” before adding that, according to submissions, Saudi Arabia has “*not taken sufficient steps to stop the infringement despite the fact that the satellite services of BeoutQ are being {until recently had been} transmitted by the satellite (Badr-4/Arabsat- 4b) of the partly state-owned Arab Satellite Communications Organisation.*”

While beoutQ channels have not been distributed over satellite since last August, beoutQ boxes are still widely in circulation in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, and continue to provide illegal access to third-party IPTV pirate apps covering every major sport and entertainment channel in the world, wiping billions of dollars of value off the global industry.

Further, as a reminder of the unprecedented situation last year where the 8 leading bodies of world football publicly declared that they were unable to initiate a copyright infringement case in Saudi Arabia[[1]](#footnote-1), the report highlights how the Saudi government acts as its own judge and jury, approving or vetoing any legal action against it:-

* “*As regards criminal enforcement, stakeholders report that the {Saudi} Ministry of Culture and Information has a discretional right to authorise or deny access to the Copyright Committee, which is the sole entity responsible for copyright infringements in Saudi Arabia, and also to approve or disapprove the decisions of the Copyright Committee, which does not seem to be compatible with the {World Trade Organization} TRIPS Agreement. These rules make the availability of criminal judicial procedures and sanctions conditional on political or subjective considerations.*”

Finally, as proceedings against Saudi Arabia continue at the World Trade Organisation (“WTO”), and other governments (particularly the US government and the UK government) continue to condemn beoutQ and Arabsat, the European Commission highlights how Saudi Arabia simply ignores requests, regulations and the basic rule of law (referencing a demarche originally requested by the BBC and Sky regarding beoutQ[[2]](#footnote-2)):-

* “*In August 2018, the EU made an official demarche to request Saudi Arabia to take appropriate actions against satellite and online piracy of TV programmes belonging also to EU rights-holders. In the absence of any reaction or action, the EU made a third party written submission in {the WTO dispute} due to its systemic interest in the correct and consistent interpretation and application of the TRIPS Agreement and the Berne Convention as well as its concerns about the impact on EU stakeholders.*”

In fact, the last time Saudi Arabia commented publicly on the matter was via its Ministry of Media, which absurdly asserted last summer that a Wimbledon press release “baselessly claims” that “Saudi Arabia is somehow complicit in beoutQ’s broadcasts” which “both offends the Saudi people and is a malicious lie”[[3]](#footnote-3).

**Commenting on the report, Yousef Al-Obaidly, CEO of beIN MEDIA GROUP** said:“*The European Commission’s latest report adds to the existing calls (including at the highest levels of the US and UK governments) calling on Saudi Arabia to uphold the rule of law. As the biggest buyer of media rights in world sport, this is nothing to do with politics - it’s commercial theft, plain and simple. We are not rallying against Saudi Arabia, we are rallying against any nation, company or individual who steals sports content. Even today after over two years, the only way to watch most premium international sport in Saudi Arabia is via illegal means. The only message this sends to international broadcasters and rights-holders around the world is that you cannot monetise or protect your IP in Saudi Arabia.”*

**The European Commission’s Commissioner for Trade Phil Hogan** said: “*Protecting intellectual property is critical for the EU’s economic growth and our ability to encourage innovation and stay competitive globally. As much as 82% of all EU exports is generated by sectors which depend on intellectual property. Infringements of intellectual property, including piracy, threaten hundreds of thousands of jobs in the EU every year. The information gathered in the report will enable us to become even more efficient in protecting EU firms and workers against intellectual property infringements like counterfeiting or copyright piracy.*”

A copy of the report is available here (key pages 42 & 43):

[**https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/january/tradoc\_158561.pdf**](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/january/tradoc_158561.pdf)

In further updates and reminders:-

The European Commission’s report follows the publication of a **158 page investigative report[[4]](#footnote-4) commissioned by eight leading football bodies** – FIFA, UEFA, the Premier League, LaLiga, the Bundesliga, LFP, the AFC and Lega Serie A **–** which established “without question” that beoutQ’s pirate satellite transmissions have been distributed by Saudi-headquartered satellite provider **Arabsat**. That report also described in detail the sophisticated IPTV streaming function of beoutQ’s boxes, which has provided consumers illegal access to the rights of every major sports and entertainment body in the world.[[5]](#footnote-5) According to the report, one of the most damaging IPTV pirate apps - “**EVDTV**” - is based in Riyadh and remains operational.

Late last year, the President of the Nanterre Commercial Court in France censured **Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO)** – organizers of the Dakar Rally, Tour de France, and the Paris Marathon, amongst other events – ordering it to honour beIN’s 5 year multi-million euro broadcast contract, having unlawfully tried to transfer beIN’s Dakar Rally rights to Saudi Arabia. ASO’s unilateral and unlawful attempt to terminate beIN’s agreement and re-license the media rights to a Saudi broadcaster is an illustration of Saudi Arabia’s current strategy – namely, to illegally force its way into sports broadcasting through improper political and commercial influence.

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For more information on beIN MEDIA GROUP, please contact: mediaoffice@bein.net.

1. [https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/mediaservices/mediareleases/newsid=2617482.html](https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/mediaservices/mediareleases/newsid%3D2617482.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/oct/31/bbc-sky-eu-european-commission-saudi-pirate-tv-service-beoutq> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/538425> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://premierleague-static-files.s3.amazonaws.com/premierleague/document/2019/09/16/2816a9d6-5ea2-4065-822c-7507d436e825/MarkMonitor-beoutQ-Report-April-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/news/joint-statement-by-fifa-the-afc-uefa-the-bundesliga-laliga-lega-serie-a-ligue-1-> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)