

BBC and Sky call for EU crackdown on Saudi pirate TV service

The BBC and Sky have called on the European commission to take formal action against Saudi Arabia over a pirate TV and streaming service that provides UK viewers with illegal access to content including Premier League football, The Bodyguard and Game of Thrones.

BeoutQ, which started as a geo-blocked website available only in Saudi Arabia, has rapidly developed into a sophisticated international piracy operation. Set-top boxes are available internationally, including the UK, which also illegally allow streaming access to thousands of premium TV channels.

The illegal service has had a surge in popularity after making global headlines for pirate broadcasting the entire World Cup. BeoutQ also provides access to other illegal streaming apps and its feed is now being pirated by other operations.

The rapid growth of BeoutQ has prompted Sky, which operates in seven countries in Europe, and the BBC to support the calls for the European commission to take action against the service.

The broadcasters have sent letters to Anna Malmström, the European commissioner for trade, outlining their concerns and backing a formal EU protest, or *démarche*, to the Saudi government about BeoutQ.

Sky's letter highlighted "threats posed to European broadcasters and rights owners by a relatively new, but rapidly growing, source of audiovisual piracy, namely the BeoutQ service".

It added: "[Sky] understands that [the directorate general of trade] is planning imminently to launch a *démarche* towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia authorities regarding the issue. The purpose of this letter is to confirm Sky's full support for that *démarche*."

The BBC's letter, which also backs EU action, highlights the damage that making its content and channels available via the pirate service will do to its finances.

"The availability of the BBC channels and content via BeoutQ's pirate activity will adversely impact BBC Studios' ability to license these channels to partners throughout Europe and also the ability of our European partners to sell subscriptions to their television services," the letter says.

A BBC spokesman said: "The BBC group is committed to combating piracy of its channels and content worldwide and actively work with our media partners in fighting against piracy operating in the terrain which our partners hold exclusive licences."

The BeoutQ service is transmitted internationally on 10 channels by the Saudi-headquartered satellite firm Arabsat, which counts the Saudi state as its largest shareholder, and also offers streaming.

It was set up last year, initially pirating the feed of Qatar's BeIN Media Group, owner of beIN Sports and Pulp Fiction to The English Patient film studio Miramax.

General Business Use

BeIN Media, which has 55 million pay-TV customers worldwide, has spent billions on the rights content including Premier League, Champions League, World Cup, NBA and NFL.

The pirate service was launched when Saudi Arabia mounted an economic boycott of Qatar. This has led to widespread accusations, denied by Saudi Arabia, that it is a media weapon in its wider political dispute designed to weaken Qatar's economy.

The UK broadcasters are the latest to turn up the pressure on Saudi Arabia to take action against the service.

This month, BeIN Media launched a \$1bn lawsuit against Saudi Arabia, and the Premier League and Fifa have appointed legal counsel in the kingdom to try to prevent the theft of its intellectual property rights.

The Saudi Ministry of Media did not respond to a request for comment.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/oct/31/bbc-sky-eu-european-commission-saudi-pirate-tv-service-beoutq>