



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Digital Agenda: Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg invited by Kroes to promote internet freedom globally

Brussels, 12 December 2011 – European Commission Vice-President Neelie Kroes has invited Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, a former Federal Minister of Defence, and of Economics and Technology, in Germany, to advise on how to provide ongoing support to Internet users, bloggers and cyber-activists living under authoritarian regimes. This appointment forms a key element of a new "No Disconnect Strategy" to uphold the EU's commitment to ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected both online and off-line, and that internet and other information and communication technology (ICT) can remain a driver of political freedom, democratic development and economic growth.

VP/HR Catherine Ashton and Vice President Neelie Kroes want to ensure that the European Union and its Member States cooperate closely towards these goals, supporting bottom-up approaches to building and strengthening Internet freedom and democracy in countries where Europe perceives that a vibrant and open Internet is not the norm or where grave human rights abuses take place. Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg will liaise with Member States, third countries and NGOs which are committed to work in this area and advise on how to advance the strategy in a co-ordinated and effective manner.

The "No Disconnect strategy" will assist people in four ways:

1. **Developing and providing technological tools** to enhance privacy and security of people living in non-democratic regimes when using ICT.
2. **Educating and raising awareness of activists about the opportunities and risks of ICT.** In particular assisting activists to make best use of tools such as social networks and blogs while raising awareness of surveillance risks when communicating via ICT.
3. **Gathering high quality intelligence about what is happening "on the ground"** in order to monitor the level of surveillance and censorship at a given time, in a given place.
4. **Cooperation.** Developing a practical way to ensure that all stakeholders can share information on their activity and promote multilateral action and building cross-regional cooperation to protect human rights.

Catherine Ashton said: *"Human rights policy is not just an add-on. It is a silver thread which runs through everything we do. The right to communicate freely is a key part of basic human rights. The Internet and social media have become an important way of promoting freedom of expression. That's why the EU is determined to resist any unjustified restrictions on the Internet and other new media. And that is why I am so pleased to support the 'No Disconnect' strategy."*

Neelie Kroes said "*Technology can support human rights, but we must also ensure it is not used against those struggling for freedom. I want Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg to champion this cause with governments and NGOs and ensure it gets the attention, focus and support it deserves.*"

Background

The Joint Communication, "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" ([COM\(2011\) 200](#)) committed the Commission to develop tools to allow the EU, in appropriate cases, to assist civil society organisations or individual citizens to circumvent arbitrary disruptions to access to electronic communications technologies, including the internet. This followed evidence of such disruption or attempted disruption by authoritarian governments during the Arab Spring uprising, for example in Egypt.

Enabling citizens of authoritarian countries to bypass such surveillance and censorship measures depends on two basic conditions: availability of appropriate technologies (in particular software programs that can be installed on one's desktop computer, laptop, smart-phone or other device) and awareness / knowledge, both of the techniques used by authoritarian regimes to spy on citizens and censor their communications, and of the appropriate counter-measures to use.

More information

[Neelie Kroes' website](#)

[Follow Neelie Kroes on Twitter](#)

[Catherine Ashton's website](#)

Contacts :

[Ryan Heath](#) (+32 2 296 17 16); Twitter: [@ECspokesRyan](#)

[Linda Cain](#) (+32 2 299 90 19)