



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Stopping a Digital Cold War

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Thanks for inviting me. I believe that the idea of this meeting came at the last Internet Governance Forum, in Azerbaijan. I am very pleased that the European Parliament is increasingly interested in the internet. Politicians in Europe need to recognise the importance of the digital economy, and the benefits for society. I wish leaders had done so when discussing the EU's budget!

The internet is the home to so much innovation. The platform for so many democratic voices. The new frontier of freedom: we must cherish and protect it.

So how the internet is governed has accelerating implications: for all those things we do online, but also for our foreign relations.

Currently internet governance follows the multi-stakeholder model. That means in particular that governments are not the only decision-makers, not even the main ones. That's unlike most areas of life. The internet was invented by academics. It has incredible core values in its very architecture: things like openness, transparency and sharing. It is not hierarchical, but collaborative.

It took some time for governments to realise the importance of the internet. And guess what, because some of them do not like openness and transparency, some would prefer a more traditional governance: hierarchical and state-to-state.

Others are saying that the current governance of the internet is unduly dominated by the USA; or view the multi-stakeholder model as code for excluding the poorest. And they look for institutions, like the United Nations, to give them more political power.

These are not easy matters. And distrust is growing, which worries me. I don't want a new Digital Cold War!

In Dubai, last year, at the WCIT conference, some countries sought to change how the internet is governed, to give themselves a greater role. Europe stood united. We engaged. We negotiated on what could be negotiated – like roaming transparency, accessibility, and energy efficiency - and reached good compromises. But at some point, we had to recognise that there were elements we could not agree with, and should not agree with, because they could undermine the internet we want.

We did not and do not want control of the internet by governments, nor for that matter by the ITU – the worrying direction hinted at by Resolution 3. Also, as we made clear in our cyber security strategy, security must not be abused by some governments as a pretext for censorship, filtering or surveillance. Yet the Treaty provisions on security and spam are undesirably vague. We must keep One Internet: we cannot turn it into a fragmented series of national "inTRANets".

All in all, what matters most is the clear divide that has emerged between countries, and the mutual suspicion that someone is trying to unilaterally control a common resource.

We have been here before in our history. I strongly believe that Europe has a voice for the internet and that we can help. Here are four quick thoughts:

First, we shouldn't turn this into a struggle between civilisations. We should accept cultural difference and diversity, as we do within Europe. The internet is not about Western cultural supremacy: it is what you make of it.

Second, I think we can get better at the multi-stakeholder model. We should strengthen our own relationships with ICT and internet stakeholders, right here in Europe. We should improve the functioning of ICANN, and in particular make the GAC more efficient so that it can be seen as an effective place for governments to be active.

But also we should work together inclusively with international partners, so that countries feel part of this model – and not excluded from a rich members' club. I welcome the intentions of ICANN to become a more global organisation, open to all regions of the world.

We should include all countries in the multi-stakeholder model: Europe has instruments we should use more. Like dialogue, capacity-building, and our instruments for development and neighbourhood policy.

Third, I think that it is time for diplomats to realise the importance of the internet. To prevent a major backlash, we should understand the real reasons why such countries take the positions they do. Maybe they don't have the right capacity or expertise. Maybe they feel threatened by, distanced or disenfranchised from the internet. Maybe they see the whole issue as too complex and interrelated. We need to engage and convince those people of the merits of a distributed approach to internet policy-making. Because the alternative could end up being an internet that is broken up along national lines.

Fourth, we need to develop our European vision for the internet. We should defend our values, and challenge those who oppose our freedoms: whether the debate is about the internet or anything else. But by greater engagement, I think we can deliver the benefits of the Internet to the widest range of people: open, free, unified, multi-stakeholder, pro-democracy, architecturally sound, trustworthy and transparent.

In the coming months I'm planning to focus my attention on those objectives. And I'm looking forward to working very closely with colleagues in the EU institutions, as well as with key international partners and forward-looking stakeholders.

Thank you.