

COMMISSIONER REDING'S WEEKLY VIDEOMESSAGE

THEME:

**"The Future of Internet Governance:
Towards an Accountable ICANN"**

4 May 2009

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

Hello again. Today I want to talk to you about how the internet is governed today, and how it could be governed in the future.

There are today 1.5 billion internet users worldwide. To all of them, the internet has brought global freedom to communicate and to exchange opinions and ideas. The internet still holds breathtaking opportunities for our civilisation: from omnipresent access to education and healthcare to better government policies through participative democracy. Much of the progress and creativity achieved in recent years has been the fruit of human ingenuity unleashed by the internet's openness to innovation.

But to continue reaping the benefits of the online world, the internet must evolve on a solid and democratic base. Have you ever asked yourself who actually is in charge of ensuring that millions of computers can connect to each other 24 hours a day? And who decides on new top level domains in addition to the existing ones, such as ".com", ".fr", ".de" or ".eu", we can have? Who decides on the price that domain name registries and end-users should pay for new domain names? Who, in the last instance, guarantees the stability and openness of the internet for users in the whole world?

Today the main player in all those decisions is ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. ICANN is also entrusted with the IANA functions managing the root of the internet, the Internet's core directory.

What is ICANN? ICANN is a private not-for profit corporation established in California. Since it was created more than 10 years ago, ICANN has been working under an agreement with the US Department of Commerce. At the moment, the US government is the only body exercising some oversight over ICANN. I believe that the US, so far,

done this in a reasonable manner. However, **I also believe that the Clinton administration's decision to progressively privatize the internet's domain name and addressing system is the right one. In the long run, it is not defensible that the government department of only one country has oversight of an internet function which is used by hundreds of millions of people in countries all over the world.**

I hope that now, after some hesitations about this by the US over the past 8 years, President Obama will now continue the work started by the Clinton administration. **A moment of truth will come on 30 September this year, when the current agreement between ICANN and the US Government expires. This opens the door for the full privatisation of ICANN; and it also raises the question of to whom ICANN should be accountable, as from 1 October.**

Accountability of ICANN is a must. Let us not forget that ICANN, in the end, has the unique position of a global quasi-monopoly. The global nature of the internet is its very strength and it certainly requires global management. But monopolies always involve the risk of abuse. So to whom should ICANN be accountable? Who should ensure that principles of fair competition and end-user interests are taken into account in ICANN decisions? Who should make sure that ICANN works only for the global freedom of the internet, and never lends its hand to censorship or the suppression of ideas?

After many talks with ICANN itself, representatives of different US administrations and with stakeholders from around the world, I, personally, would like to see the following **model of internet governance** evolve after 30 September:

- First, I would like to see a **fully privatised and fully independent ICANN** that complies, in its structure as a private corporation, with the **best standards of corporate governance**, in particular with those on financial transparency and internal accountability.
- Second, **all people, companies, bodies or organisations affected by ICANN decisions should have a right to request full judicial review of ICANN decisions by a small, independent international tribunal**. ICANN decisions affect millions of citizens and companies in the world. **The courts of California alone are certainly not best placed to handle legal challenges originating in all continents of the world**.
- Thirdly, while the day-to-day management of the internet should be left to the independent decisions of ICANN and of the global internet community, **there should be a multilateral forum available for governments to discuss general internet governance policy issues**. I believe that in most cases, the expertise of ICANN, the pressure of market forces, as well as international law and principles will be enough to help resolve issues related to Internet Governance. But there will also be some cases where swift and efficient coordination among governments will be required. Threats to the stability, security and openness of the internet are one example, as these almost always have a global dimension. I know that some stakeholders think the United Nations would be a good candidate for this job. I personally believe that since decisions on internet governance need to be taken swiftly and efficiently most of the time, we will need to find a less formal international forum. I propose that we create a **"G-12 for Internet Governance"**, an informal group of government

representatives that meets at least twice a year and can make, by majority, recommendations to ICANN where appropriate. To be geographically balanced, this "G-12 for Internet Governance" should include two representatives from each North America, South America, Europe and Africa, three representatives from Asia and Australia, as well as the Chairman of ICANN as a non-voting member. International Organisations with competences in this field could be given observer status.

To put a new model of Internet Governance like this into place, will need many discussions in the internet Community worldwide. There will be a first public hearing this week in Brussels to give the internet Community in Europe the possibility to express their views. However, it goes without saying that one country will have a particular responsibility for how the internet will be governed in the future: the United States.

I trust that President Obama will have the courage, the wisdom and the respect for the global nature of the internet to pave the way in September for a new, more accountable, more transparent, more democratic and more multilateral form of Internet Governance. The time to act is now. And Europe will be ready to support President Obama in his efforts.

Thank you for watching and see you next week!