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Internet Freedom

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· The EU is committed to promote human rights in all areas of its external action without exception, in particular, **using the link between new technologies and human rights as important avenues for promoting democracy**. The "Arab Spring" has shown to the world how ICTs can be a powerful force to support human rights activists and in general a driver of democratization processes.

· Today we see signs that the objective of an open Internet for all seems to be more and more shared by a number of governments in the MENA region. The Commission's information society policy in our discussions with public authorities, telecommunication regulators and civil society stakeholders in the MENA region can build on this increasing support as part of its approach to *secure a fair, open, competitive and transparent market for telecommunications, a connected ICT research environment, a diverse media landscape and an open and vibrant Internet for all.*

· In the EU strategic framework on Human rights and Democracy adopted in 25 June 2012, it was stated that the EU will continue to promote freedom of expression, both on-line and offline as democracy cannot exist without these rights. As an example during the launch of the **cyber security strategy** in January 2013 Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission said: "*For cyberspace to remain open and free, the same norms, principles and values that the EU upholds offline, should also apply online. Fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law need to be protected in cyberspace. The EU works with its international partners as well as civil society and the private sector to promote these rights globally.*"

· The EU has repeatedly **condemned restrictions** to freedom of expression and access to the Internet, as well as the arrest of bloggers, in the framework of its bilateral relations with third countries and through several public statements.

· The EU is ready to send a **clear political message in response to the worrying trend of increased internet censorship.** Moreover, the Strategic Framework for Human Rights foresees in its Action Plan that the EU will “ensure that a clear human rights perspective and impact assessment

is present in the development of policies and programmes relating to cyber security, the fight against cyber crime, internet governance and other EU policies in this regard ”

· The EU has also **adopted sanctions prohibiting the export of these technologies on Syria and Iran**, to prevent authoritarian regimes to use them to crack down on human right defenders. Further internal discussions are taking place in the framework of the revision of the EU security export control policy, regarding the possibility to extend export controls to certain materials that might be used for internet monitoring and/or telecommunication surveillance in violation of human rights.

· In this framework the EU foresees in its Action Plan the development of **EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression** online and offline, including the protection of bloggers and journalists.

· These actions build on work already conducted, including in the framework of the joint EEAS – DG CNNECT **“No Disconnect” Strategy** announced on December 2011, by Vice-President of the European Commission Neelie Kroes to assist civil society organisations, political dissidents and citizens living in non-democratic conditions with tools to circumvent arbitrary disruptions of the Internet and other electronic communications technologies.

· The main pillars of the No Disconnect Strategy are: tools to increase the freedom to communicate; education and training on how to use Internet technologies in high-risk environments; better technological capabilities to understand in real-time what is happening "on the ground"; and strengthened cooperation.

· These actions have been channeled through a number of broader Human Rights instruments of the EU such as the **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights that since 2012 provides specific funding for cyber-censorship projects to address violations of human rights using ICT;** or through the Human Rights and Strategic Framework Action Plan to ensure "Freedom of expression online and offline" are questions scoring high in the EU's foreign policy agenda-shaping.

· The EU recognizes the need to advance on the principles of **Corporate Social Responsibility** through the No-Disconnect Strategy which has developed **Business and Human Rights Guidelines for the ICT sector** and has also refined its Research and Development portfolio to provide new funds for the development of counter-censorship technologies.

· On-going actions are the development of Collective Awareness Platforms; mesh networks; technological tools to increase the security and privacy of Internet-based applications; increased availability of bed-testing facilities for privacy enhancing technologies and development of platforms for the monitoring of network connectivity alterations and legal, social and political developments related to the use of Internet for the exercise of human rights.

· But it is important to see these efforts as part of a broader picture. The EU is ready to increase its **efforts to engage in international fora** as an example during the UN Third Committee (Human Rights) meeting on 6 December 2012 in New York, the EU deplored the trend of increased censorship and condemned restriction on the Internet.

· Governments, civil society, academia and private sector need to cooperate across the Atlantic. We need to find common ways to support those who are using Internet and ICTs for good purposes and limit the abuse of technology by governments walking away from the rule of law, in the Middle East and beyond.

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