

Tallinn, 10. Oktober 2010

Ensure Net Neutrality in Europe – against the Internet of two classes

The Internet is our daily medium to communicate with friends and colleagues, access information, act politically, share ideas, watch videos, do business or just surf around the world wide web. The Internet as we know it and used it in the past is based on the net neutrality principle of handling data packets in an equal manner. This principle ensures equal access and chances to distribute and receive information to all Web sites, equipment and individual users. The principle of net neutrality has to guarantee that Internet service providers do not discriminate between different kinds of content and applications online, nor between different users, locations, or protocols. We want to get the best service to every user, strengthen the development of the internet, ensure functionality such as emergency call systems and we want to assure transparency in the process of ISPs handling data-packages. Net Neutrality is an important reason the Internet has promoted economic innovation, democratic participation and free speech. Net Neutrality means that the network's main task is to agnostically move data from one end-point to another, as laid out in the famous "end-to-end principle". It is very important in today's digitalizing world because it saves the access to information and knowledge for everyone.

This neutrality principle is in danger. Some Internet service providers in the USA and in Europe call for an end of net neutrality. They have a commercial incentive to discriminate the previously free flow of data traffic on interconnected networks, upset its level playing field and influence who gets heard online. They want to charge transmission fees for a faster distribution or privileged space in a portfolio which automatically results in slower distribution to everyone else.

The end of network neutrality would mean the end of the Internet we know today. Rules set by Internet access providers will then frame online communications, pushing the way we communicate back to day when line-switching was the main principle. Certain applications and websites would be blocked, some platforms could be accessed faster than others. There is a risk that individual users would no longer have the opportunity to easily publish content online. The fundamental right of freedom of speech would be restricted. The Internet with its low entry barriers for new ideas, products and platforms is a motor for innovation. If net neutrality is not a given anymore, this engine will be choked down. Then small companies can no longer compete with major media enterprises. Then it is no longer quality, security or creativity that measures success on the Internet but the ability to pay for privileged access. Once installed, technologies for traffic discrimination such as deep packet inspection will automatically lead to even more intrusive measures. Countries like China and Iran are just two out of many examples; the current debate about internet blocking in Brussels is a mere preparation for the real battle to control – or to free – information and communication.

We urge the European Union and the countries of Europe to ensure Net Neutrality on a legislative way. Do not give up this essential principle. We don't want financially strong or government-supported information riding first class on the internet. It is not due to Internet service providers to choose which data to privilege with higher quality or faster service. We don't want an Internet of two classes. We do not want to fall back to the age of line-switched communications. We call for Net Neutrality to protect our most democratic medium and secure the possibilities of innovation and openness it represents.