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Is a global treaty needed to protect Internet freedom? - Council of Europe conference

Strasbourg, 06.04.2011 – Recent events in Northern Africa and developments related to the Wikileaks case have clearly shown how access to the Internet content and services can be easily disrupted. The Internet can be switched off, snatching from millions of people the possibility to communicate or access information. The fundamental right to freedom of expression may be jeopardized and values of democracy may be put in question. Against this background, what kind of responsibility should states have to preserve the Internet?

With the aim of looking for answers to this question, the Council of Europe organises on 18-19 April 2011 in Strasbourg the conference "Internet Freedom: From principles to global treaty law?" Representatives of governments, the private sector, civil society and the technical community, will discuss, among other issues, 10 [Internet Governance principles drafted](#) by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Cross-border Internet.

In addition, this expert group has examined possible ways [to protect and promote Internet's universality, integrity and openness](#). In this respect, it has prepared a draft recommendation to member states which, together with the draft Internet governance principles has been launched for a broad consultation process with Internet stakeholders. Once completed, both documents will be submitted for adoption to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

The conference will also discuss whether there is scope for further international law action to preserve the Internet as a means of safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information.

The conference will be opened by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Among the panelists there will be representatives of Council of Europe member states, the US Department of State, the International Telecommunications Union, EBU, ICANN, Verizon, Telefónica, AT&T, Skype, and of organisations and institutions throughout the world.

More information is available at [Internet Freedom: "From principles to a global treaty?"](#)

[Link to the programme](#)

[Link to video "From principles to global treaty law?"](#)

Practical information

The conference, which is **open to the press**, will be held in room G3 of the Council of Europe Agora building (1 quai Jacoutot). It will start at 9.30 am on Monday 18 April, and finish at 12.30 on Tuesday 19 April.

Media representatives may request an accreditation to the contact below.

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Additional information

The eventual discontinuation of Internet access or of failure (including power failures) affecting infrastructures or larger groups of Internet users would have serious effects on Internet users with relevant social, economic, legal and human rights implications. Incidents may occur which have a broad impact on Internet access, caused by natural accidents, human error or malfeasance.

The Council of Europe [conference of specialised ministers](#) held in Reykjavik in May 2009 called on all states and non-state actors "to explore ways, building upon current arrangements, to ensure that critical Internet resources are managed in the public interest and as a public asset, ensuring the delivery of public service value, in full respect of international law, including human rights law" and asked "to explore the feasibility of elaborating an instrument designed to preserve or reinforce the protection of the cross-border flow of Internet traffic".

Following up on the call by ministers at the Reykjavik conference, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers asked its competent intergovernmental body of experts to explore a possible international law response to the states' common objective of preserving the functioning and the openness of the Internet.