

Press release

**Launch of the European internet coregulation network
to promote European collaboration on key internet issues
World Summit for Information Society**

- **Coregulation**: a multi-stakeholder approach associating public authorities, private companies and civil society
- **A network** initiated by Le Forum des droits sur l'internet and **supported by the European Commission and the French government**
- **Members from 7 countries** (Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom)

GENEVA, December 11, 2003 – In an address today at the World Summit for Information Society, Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner responsible for Enterprise and Information society, unveiled the European coregulation network initiated by the French organization, Le Forum des droits sur l'internet, in partnership with organizations from 6 European countries.

International by definition, the internet is a complex space, with extremely diverse players including States, private companies, and civil society. Its evolution seems often unpredictable, following technological breakthroughs and usage changes. It has become necessary to work out a new way to generate rules in this changing environment.

"I support the European Internet coregulation network initiative, and hope it will feed the discussions between the public and the private sectors at the European level on the key issues for the internet development," said Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner responsible for Enterprise and Information society.

« To face these challenges a concerted action is necessary : action of States of course, but also of international organizations, of civil society and private sector, promoting the coregulation approach, experienced successfully in France. It is essential to take into account the contributions of these non governmental actors to bridge the digital divide,» said Jean-Pierre Raffarin, French Prime Minister.

Coregulation, a new process of elaborating rules in the internet space

Coregulation aims at organizing a cooperation on rights and usage issues between all players of the internet sharing responsibility in building the rules : representatives of States, private companies and the civil society. Through this cooperation process, the players have the opportunity to reach a consensus point on each subject, facilitating the respect of the adopted rules. It also allows to implement aside of the State regulation (rules, laws, international agreements), new means coming from self regulation like best practices, technical means, efficient networks to share information, etc. This process does not aim at discrediting State intervention, as only states can transform the coregulation results into legal frameworks.

“Building consensus and helping States decision-making processes is essential to the coregulation network, based on a multi-stakeholder approach. Le Forum des droits sur l’internet has been operating with this approach for more than 2 years in France and progressively reached a unique place in the regulation process.” said Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, General manager of Le Forum des droits sur l’internet.

The necessity of a multistake-holder approach is gaining widespread acceptance :

The European commission already considered the use of coregulation in its White Paper on European governance; The European Council’s recent declaration on Freedom of communication on the internet adopted on May 28, 2003 is urging all members States to encourage self or coregulation as regards internet content. New bodies sharing the same vision are appearing at national level in Europe and in Asia.

A network to act at the European level

Europe has the experience of building harmonization from diversified cultures, and shares an inheritance of values. Therefore, Europe has a role to play in the construction of the information society. Moreover, as many international institutions, Europe has to answer to the growing need for participation to the decision-making process expressed by the players. An open process of cooperation on the rules can fulfil this goal.

The World Summit for Information Society has determined that one of its main political objectives is to associate civil society and private companies to the state deliberations. In this context, it is particularly interesting to illustrate the potential of such partnerships with a concrete initiative. The European coregulation network is an illustration of such an association.

The European internet coregulation network has 4 objectives :

- **Build a resource and expertise network on internet legal issues** at the European level. Thanks to the network, members will be able to share experiences, good practices and knowledge.
- **Organize public debates with all stakeholders** (representatives of States, private companies and the civil society) at the European level on the key right and usage internet issues (such as spam, child protection, intellectual property rights, etc.).
- **Feed the European institutions with proposals** on the subjects of common interests.
- **Be prepared to help in the WSIS follow-up process**
The network will position its works in the perspective of the Tunis Summit to take place in November 2005.

Members from 7 European countries

The following organizations are already part of the network:

Austria: Ronald Hechenberger, Österreichisches Institut für Angewandte Telekommunikation

Belgium: Thibault Verbiest, Observatoire des Droits de l’Internet – Observatorium van de Rechten op het Internet

France: Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, Forum des droits sur l’internet

Italy: Giorgio Pacifici, Forum per la tecnologia della informazione

Hungary: Laszlo Z. Karvalics, Information society research institute

Sweden: Christer Sturmark, Swedish government ICT-political strategy group and Peter Seipel, Swedish law and informatics research Institute

United Kingdom: Peter Robbins, Internet Watch foundation and William H. Dutton, Oxford Internet Institute

The network is built as an open structure. Organizations in other European countries are welcome to participate in this new process. The network also aims at building a structured dialogue with other international players on subjects of common interest.

"This new network seeks to anchor its work in high quality research, creating a major role for the Oxford Internet Institute and collaborating academic institutions. We look forward to bringing leading research to bear on informing debate of the most critical social and economic policy issues concerning the Internet. This innovative network is a win-win for the future of the Internet and Europe," said William Dutton, Director of the Oxford Internet Institute (UK).

"The European internet coregulation network is a very important initiative and we strongly support it, as the development of the e-society absolutely needs an independent European network in order to debate the issues and propose solutions in the fields of ICT governance, e-democracy, privacy and security", said Giorgio Pacifici, President of Forum per la tecnologia della informazione (Italy).

The website www.internet-coregulation.org is the concrete illustration of the common will of its participants. It presents the network, its projects, its members and proposes links to their websites. It will include later more functionalities such as a collaborative work platform.

Flexibility, a core concept of the European coregulation network

Flexible, decentralized, evolving, the network is very similar to the internet in its way of functioning. It will be built progressively under the impulse of its members. In this peer network, all organizations will be associated at the same level, without any hierarchy between them. Density and configuration of the network will vary according to the demands of its members and also to the different issues. The working groups will be created with the interested members and will publish recommendations accordingly.

The first meeting of the European internet coregulation network will take place in March 2004 in Paris. It will be the opportunity for the members to set their priorities for the next months.

Le Forum des droits sur l'internet is an organization supported by the French government, working on the rights and uses issues related to the Internet. Its mission is to inform the public and organize cooperation between public authorities, private companies and users on these subjects.

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