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| Neelie Kroes Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda Internet essentials OECD High Level Meeting on the Internet Economy Paris, 28 June 2011  |
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| **SPEECH/11/479****Neelie Kroes**Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda**Internet essentials** http://europa.eu/rapid/exploit/2011/06/SPEECH/EN/s11_479.eni/Pictures/100000000000011C0000010968C92F0B.jpgOECD High Level Meeting on the Internet Economy**Paris, 28 June 2011**Ladies and Gentlemen, It is a pleasure to open, together with such distinguished colleagues, the High Level Meeting on the Internet Economy.First I want to recall that, as you all know very well, over the last decade the Internet has transformed society and become a pillar of the economy. The Internet is essential for our vision of smart, green and inclusive growth in the years and decades to come. And so it is also essential to make it safe, open and accessible to all citizens.Given the importance of the subject, I have no doubt that the coming two days will give us plenty of "food for thought". But it should not be fast food; it should be a leisurely and balanced meal. We should take time to think and find the right solutions.First things first. As the Roman philosopher Seneca said: "if you do not know to which port you are sailing, no wind is favourable". I find this just as true in the seas of modern cyberspace. We must understand where we came from; where we stand at the moment; and especially where we want to get to. Only then can we make the most of the opportunities the Internet offers, and best manage the risks.This reflection is a collective responsibility. Academia, the private sector and civil society have contributed enormously to the success of the Internet. Politicians like me should be mindful of that.But public authorities neither can nor should take a back seat. The fact is that the Internet is of relevance and benefit for citizens, for the economy, and for society. For that reason alone it is of interest to public policy makers. One of the challenges is to respond to that legitimate interest, without damaging the very features of the Internet which make it such a success story: its vibrancy, dynamism, innovation. It's a particular challenge because policy makers are used to operating nationally or regionally; but the Internet operates globally, across borders. To begin to respond, many are reflecting on high-level principles for the Internet; an electronic ethos showing where we want to head to. A framework for the network.For example, the Deauville G8 summit gave a clear statement on the Internet. Not a detailed set of rules, but some high-level, underpinning principles: like openness, transparency, freedom, non-discrimination, fair competition; and respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.Beyond the G8, others like the Council of Europe, and the Aspen Institute – and of course the OECD itself - are looking at how to define "principles" for the Internet. The European Commission, too, has been thinking about this issue. In that context I'd like to offer you a first impression of what we think matters: Internet essentials, imperatives to ensure the Internet remains a success. These are offered not as a final word. But rather to promote a sensible discussion on, perhaps even a measure of convergence between, the different ideas out there.All this is built on one foundation, one assumption: that the Internet is a strategic domain for the European Union. EU policy on the Internet should be informed by the same EU values, priorities and interests which govern action in other areas.And then there are six separate ideas which constitute, for me, "Internet essentials".The first is: let's keep one Internet. I know there are pressures – regulatory, political, and economic – to "fragment" the Internet, often along national borders. Sometimes this results from legitimate concerns, like personal data protection; sometimes it is just plain censorship. But the Internet's most important characteristic is its universality: in principle, every node can communicate with every other. This has important implications for innovation, plurality, democratic values, cohesion and economic growth. And we must safeguard this.The second is that, on the Internet, we are not atoms.The Internet is not just a technological platform. It’s a forum where people interact. When we encounter people in real life, we expect, quite legitimately, that their behaviour will be governed by civic norms and social duties. Not just by compliance to legal minimum standards. Such rights and responsibilities are part of society, and we can't wash our hands of them, even online. I recognise the attractions of a fully libertarian view of the Internet. And of clear ground rules on issues like legal liability. But, ultimately, if there is harmful behaviour out there, then as members of a society we share a duty that goes beyond the purely legalistic. The third idea is that architecture matters. The Internet's architecture can and must evolve to meet new and unforeseen challenges. It will not wait for permission before it does so. But this evolution must be based on a clear understanding of the policy implications.The current architecture of the Internet is fundamental to its dynamics: socially, politically, legally, economically. For example, under the current system, it can be difficult to identify the sender of a message; this can be positive for freedom of expression, but also makes security harder.So we need to invest in research on a "future Internet", but also to have a broad, structured and coherent debate, with the Internet policy and research communities, on the impact of architectural change.The fourth is that barriers to trust are barriers to access. We won't unlock the Internet's potential until users can have confidence in it. That includes the protection of privacy, identity and personal data; online safety, especially for children; fighting spam and cyber-crime; and ensuring resilience and stability.The fifth is: let's make the Internet pro-democracy.By itself, the Internet cannot "produce" democracy. Indeed in the absence of clear "rules of the game" it can become a mockery of democratic values, a place where those who survive and are heard are only the most powerful, the loudest, the most technologically savvy.Yet, Internet-based tools can foster democratic life. For example, by making public information available and searchable. Providing platforms for discussion and collective action. And supporting bottom-up approaches to "problem solving", so that the citizen can co-create solutions. Using such tools and others, the Internet can be an instrument for democracy, and we need to promote it as such. The sixth is: let's make the Internet multi-stakeholder and transparent. The multi-stakeholder governance model is a good one, and the Commission has always supported it. In this field and others.But it must be transparent and guarantee accountability. We need a common understanding of the roles of each player. In particular we must recognise the duties of democratic institutions towards their citizens.Without this the multi-stakeholder model will simply crumble, under the combined weight of short-term thinking by those who control Internet resources, and political pressure by everyone else.Application of this principle would be in particular important to address deficiencies in the current functioning of ICANN. The views of governments representing their citizens on essential public policy issues are all too often ignored. This situation is absolutely unsustainable and needs to be significantly improved. These are the ideas I am reflecting on, right now. Together we could call them a "Compact for the Internet": an Internet of **C**ivic responsibility, **O**ne Internet, that is **M**ulti-stakeholder, **P**ro-democracy, **A**rchitecturally sound, **C**onfidence inspiring, and **T**ransparently governed.Two things this Compact is not. First, it's not digital dogma: these are guidelines, not cyber-commandments. Because by nature I am a pragmatic person. And, because "commandments" imply something "set in stone", if I may say so. But this approach would only serve to shackle, rather than to guide, the dynamic development of the Internet. Even once we flesh them out some more, and strengthen them through further discussion, these ideas will have to be interpreted with pragmatism and flexibility. I promise you if we ever do write them on "tablets" it will be the more modern sort!And, second, it is not about regulating the Internet – as I've said before, regulation should be an exceptional last resort, and in any case keyhole surgery rather than amputation. But with such a Compact, such a vision, we can ensure that as the Internet develops into new areas, we do not lose its essential characteristics. For example I am currently thinking about how the Internet of Things should be governed – in a way that addresses not just architecture but also trust, privacy, security and standards. This is a good example of where participation from many stakeholders, not just from Europe, will be essential.I intend to offer more details on my thinking on this Compact at the forthcoming Internet Governance Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. I think we have a lot of work to do between now and then – therefore let me not delay you any further. But I hope that, with your input and some fairly detailed thinking, we can develop them fully. To return to Seneca, principles on their own won't get us to our destination, but at least we'll be able to set sail. I wish you a most fruitful debate today and tomorrow and I am certainly looking forward to seeing the output of such an impressive gathering of minds. |