

**Open Letter to the European Commission
Regarding
Access to Internet on EU territory -- the Fifth
Freedom and Fundamental Human Right**

To:

**NEELIE KROES
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR DIGITAL AGENDA**

**VIVIANE REDING
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR JUSTICE, FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP**

**JOHN DALLI
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH AND CONSUMER POLICY**

cc

**Kristalina Georgieva
European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response**

Sofia, June 20th, 2011

Dear Commissioners,

We would like to congratulate you for all the achievements of the European Commission in the fields of digital agenda, of justice, fundamental rights and citizenship and of health and consumer policies.

We, being average EU consumers, highly appreciate the activities of the EC regarding Internet and the access to it, as well as the priority which you attach to this topic. We particularly value your vision of the Digital Agenda for Europe 2010-2020, its current achievements and the envisaged future results.

We would like to draw your attention to one particular but yet critical issue on the intersection of your respective three portfolios. This is the free of charge pan-European access to high-speed and reliable Internet services in all public areas (hotels, airports, restaurants, cafes, petrol stations, stadiums, theatres, shopping malls, parks, vehicle stops and stations, public restrooms etc), in all public transportation vehicles (airplanes, subway, trains, shuttles, boats etc.) as well as in all Governmental and Municipal offices and real estate properties on EU territory. What we have in mind is both, cable and wireless high-speed Internet.

Nowadays, to pay €10-15 for Internet at five-star hotel located in the heart of Europe is equivalent to be charged for the hot water in your bathroom or for the electricity in this same hotel or even for the air you breathe. From this point of view, Bulgarians are more privileged than others: Bulgaria is 5th in the world in quality of broadband Internet, while Sofia is 11th city in the world in the quality of Internet connection (according to a research of Cisco Systems, conducted by Oxford University www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=121236). However all Europeans deserve much more than that.

Therefore, we encourage you to take necessary steps leading to lifting the restrictions to access of EU citizens and visitors to Internet. Having in mind your remarkable leadership on reducing the roaming charges, we believe that such steps can be taken as soon as this coming summer, to facilitate the EU citizens' travel during the vacation season. Speaking of roaming, we value this as another big success

story of the EC, which eventually leads to broader Internet access. (We do believe that your efforts in that direction deserve full support until we eventually succeed to entirely eliminate all roaming taxes both in EU and worldwide.)

Next short term goal in securing free access to Internet should be the EC to help guarantee free access to the devices for *operating* the Internet service. Namely PC's, lap tops, iPads and likewise, also should be freely available at key public areas. Guaranteeing access to Internet without securing access to the equipment is similar to guaranteeing access to electricity without providing the light bulbs or the TV sets at the hotel rooms. We will appreciate it if you expand your current policies to consider steps in that direction.

We believe that a helpful tool in your future deliberations on this topic will be the recent UN Report *On the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, May 16th, 2011, which recognises the right of all individuals to have Internet access as one of the basic human rights such as the right to education and freedom. This report recommends Internet to be made widely available, accessible and affordable to all people, which is in full compliance with the policy and the strategic vision of the EC.

We highly appreciate the immediate implications of this Report in countries with restrictive Internet usage policy. However it obviously has an effect on EU territory, which may lead to a significant improvement of Internet environment and therefore help the EC speed up the implementation of its policies and adopt new ones to upgrade its current agenda.

We do believe that access to Internet should be regarded as the newest, Fifth Freedom of the EU, alongside the free movement of goods, capitals, services and people and the Facebook revolutions in Africa and the Middle East have just proven this. The EC has always been among the world's top leading institutions in digital agenda, human rights and consumer protection and we believe that our suggestion is in full compliance and logical continuation of the existing policies of the EC.

Dear Commissioners:

Based on our very positive cooperation with the EC in the past we do believe in our joint success this time as well. May be you know that a letter of ours of May 2008, addressed to then EC's Vice President Guenter Verheugen initiated the procedure for standardisation of all chargers for mobile phones, policy that is in effect as of early 2011. We do hope that this time the process will be much faster especially having in mind the EC's momentum. We know that some bureaucratic obstacles and narrow corporate interests have to be overcome during this process but we are deeply convinced that the broad public recognition of the results will be a great reward for your efforts. We are always at your disposal for further discussions on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Solomon Passy
President & Founder / The Atlantic Club of Bulgaria www.atlantic-club.org
Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs (2001-2005)
UN Security Council Chairman (2002, 2003)
OSCE Chairman-in-Office (2004)
Chairman of Foreign / Defence Parliamentary Committees (2005-2009 / 2001)

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