

On 8 August 2016,

High quality connectivity and net neutrality go hand in hand

Dear Vice-President of the European Commission,
Dear Commissioner,
Dear ICT Ministers,

We encourage you to support the development and implementation of robust net neutrality rules alongside the deployment of high quality broadband and next-generation networks around the world.

The telecom industry has often warned of reluctance to invest in its own networks, when lobbying against proposed regulations that promote competition and protect internet users. In reality, telecommunications companies always realised the economic benefit of investing in their own networks and such negative assumptions are quickly disproven. Recently, a group of 17 telecommunications companies – with the support of equipment manufacturers that rely on them as a market for their products – published a “5G Manifesto” in which they threaten to withhold 5G investment unless regulators water down European Union rules on net neutrality and other rules, including provisions on network access and privacy.

These threats are unsubstantiated and not credible. It is clear that telecommunications companies will invest based on demand and competition, not just based on weak regulation. The current threats in the “5G manifesto” are also false insofar as they allege that net neutrality rules actually harm their financial returns. Extensive economic research on investment in several jurisdictions with strong net neutrality rules in place demonstrates that open internet safeguards do not harm their profits or diminish their investments.

Net neutrality is at the core of the internet’s functionality and is crucial in ensuring the protection of users’ rights to free expression and privacy online. Protecting the open nature of the internet is compatible with – if not an absolute prerequisite for – the availability and the development of the Internet of Things and the ever-increasing number of innovative products and services, such as connected cars and e-health. In fact, the principles on which net neutrality is based, including innovation without a need to obtain permission, end-to-end connectivity, transparency, and non-discrimination, are essential for these innovative products and services. Since these products often rely on significant and constant bandwidth, regulation – rather than a “free pass” rule or blind inattention – will be needed.

Net neutrality rules will ensure that the number of innovative internet-based services and applications will continue to increase. With global demand for faster and better access to the internet on the rise, internet access providers will continue to have a strong incentive to develop and invest in enhanced network capacity. This so-called “virtuous circle” illustrates the long-term economic benefit for telecommunications companies to invest in infrastructure.

Users and, indeed, regulators and lawmakers should not have to endure hollow threats and blackmail everytime a new technical evolution appears. We now have open internet rules in place in a large number of countries around the world, including the European Union, Chile, the United

States and India, and they must be applied. We urge you to clearly reiterate that the principles of open, competitive, innovative and neutral internet are not negotiable.

Clear and robust net neutrality and the deployment of high speed broadband must go hand in hand to respond to the technological challenges of the 21st century. We urge you to protect users' rights to receive and impart information online without interference by telecommunications companies and resist the unsubstantiated demands posited in the 5G Manifesto.

We look forward to working together to safeguard an open, secure and fast internet.

Sincerely,

Access Now, International
ACI-Participa, Honduras
AKVorrat.at - Working Group on Data Retention, Austria
ARTICLE19, International
Asociación por los Derechos Civiles (ADC), Argentina
Asociatia pentru Tehnologie si Internet (ApTI), Romania
Bits of Freedom, The Netherlands
Center for Cyber Security, Pakistan
Chaos Computer Club (CCC), Germany
Derechos Digitales, Latin America
Digitalcourage, Germany
European Digital Rights (EDRi), Europe
Espacio Público, Venezuela
Fight for the Future, International
Free Press Unlimited, The Netherlands
Föreningen för Digitala Fri-och Rättigheter (DFRI), Sweden
Fundación Acceso, Costa Rica
Initiative für Netzfreiheit, Austria
Internet Democracy Project, India
Internet Freedom Foundation, India
Internet Policy Observatory, Pakistan
IT for Change, India
IT-Political Association of Denmark
IPANDETEC, Panamá
La Quadrature du Net, France
OpenMedia, International
Open Rights Group, United Kingdom
Public Knowledge, International
quintessenz, Austria
R3D, Mexico
Susiendo, Comunicación y Cultura Digital, Mexico
TEDIC, Paraguay
Usuarios Digitales, Ecuador
The Unwanted Witness, Uganda
VE Inteligente, Venezuela
Xnet, Spain