

Press Release

22 October 2009

Embargoed until 22 October 2009, 15:30 CET**Internet Blocking Strikes Out**

Government attempts to block access to the Internet are mounting throughout Europe - but look set to backfire, a new study published today concludes.

The Open Society Institute funded the report which is titled "*Internet Blocking: Balancing Cybercrime Responses in Democratic Societies*." Four experienced professionals, Cormac Callanan of Ireland, Marco Gercke of Germany, Estelle De Marco of France, and Hein Dries-Ziekenheiner of the Netherlands, collaborated on the research. Callanan, who is also a member of the Irish Internet Safety Advisory Council, presented the report at a press conference in Brussels.

We all know about efforts to censor the Internet in undemocratic countries such as China. But the study shows how efforts to block Internet content are spreading throughout democratic Europe. In Germany, Britain, Italy and Scandinavia, the measures are intended to block pages containing child pornography. In France, the proposed "three strikes" law would cut access to users who upload pirated content. In Turkey, the Telecommunications ministry has blocked more than 6,000 websites, including YouTube, Geocities, DailyMotion, and WordPress.

Though some of the motivations behind Internet blocking are understandable – everyone wants to crack down on child pornography, for example – the new study concludes that the measures are ineffective. Many technical ways exist to get around blocking technologies. More importantly, the blocking measures are intrusive and often abuse fundamental freedoms. These systems either over-block or under-block content *and* do not prevent the serious offender from gaining access.

"Attempts to block offensive content all too often backfire," Callanan says. "Technically, it is difficult. Legally, it is problematic. Above all, it represents a real threat to the free transfer of information and conflicts with basic democratic principles."

**For more information, please contact
Cormac Callanan, m: +353 87 257 7791**

"It is remarkable that this kind of research was not published by the Commission before it launched its proposal for EU-wide blocking of websites. Protection of children is a matter of the utmost importance, but this does not mean that the Commission can propose measures that may well be entirely ineffectual but which will have long-term consequences for the right of freedom of communication in Europe."

Graham Watson MEP, former President of the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament

"This study helps to reveal the technological issues and political context regarding the growing debate on cybercrime and internet blocking."

Birgit Sippel MEP, member of the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament

"A very thorough and thoughtful study. It should be consulted by any policy-maker considering embarking on a content blocking policy".

Malcolm Hutty, President, EuroISPA (European Internet Service Providers Association)

