

RIPE NCC Response to the *Declaration of Digital Principles – the ‘European way’ for the digital society*

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The RIPE NCC welcomes the EU initiative to discuss and define an overarching set of principles to guide policymaking in the digital space. We recognise that the rapid evolution of Internet-related technologies and their use by citizens across all sectors of society presents a diverse range of new policymaking challenges. A commonly accepted framework of principles within which we can shape responses to these challenges is essential if we are to ensure cohesive, holistic digital policies that will not conflict with or detract from each other.

The importance of such holistic solutions, however, suggests the need for an additional principle in this framework. Reflecting and building on the publicly stated positions of various EU institutional representatives, we would suggest including the following principle:

Commitment to a globally interoperable, unfragmented Internet

Such a principle would provide an important corollary to several of the other suggested principles, including “A secure and trusted online environment” and “Ethical principles for human-centred algorithms”, by formally recognising the fundamentally global nature of the Internet, and the global development, governance and standardisation activities that are intrinsic to matters such as Internet security or the adoption and use of specific algorithms.

Policy measures at the regional and national levels are necessary to facilitate and safeguard citizens’ use of the Internet. However, the global nature of the Internet is essential to much of its value, and while this global nature creates certain risks (which public policies can help to mitigate), there is also the risk that regional or national policies will serve to fragment the global Internet and diminish its usefulness and value.

A commitment to a globally interoperable, unfragmented Internet would translate to a consideration of how EU public policy might affect the global Internet and its users. It would encourage caution where there is the potential for public policies to adversely affect the ability of individuals and businesses to make full use of the Internet, as such an outcome would not only conflict with the EU’s commitment to global human rights, but could serve to encourage other policymakers around the world to develop similarly far-reaching and disruptive measures. Ultimately, such geopolitical regulatory escalation could lead to severe disruption of the global Internet and negative outcomes for the millions who use the Internet for legitimate business and social activities.

A principle that prioritises consideration of wider impact calls for a consultative approach to policy development – something which is already a hallmark of much EU policymaking. It is also reflected in the EU’s ongoing support for and commitment to a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance. Underpinning such an approach is an understanding that Internet-related policymaking across diverse venues, whether governmental or in the technical standards space, must produce outcomes that can coexist harmoniously if we are to realise the potential benefits that a global Internet promises.

We hope that the European Commission and all relevant EU institutions will consider our suggestion for this additional digital principle, and the RIPE NCC would be happy to engage further to address any concerns or questions that our proposal might raise.