



## Europeans: U.S. Should Give Up Control of Internet

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The United States has too much control over the Internet and needs to give it up, a European Union bureaucrat declared Monday.

EU Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding, a Luxembourgian, called for "full privatization" of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), demanding that it be removed from the supervision of the U.S. Department of Commerce when its operating agreement expires on Sept. 30.

"In the long run, it is not defensible that the government department of only one country has oversight of an Internet function which is used by hundreds of millions of people in countries all over the world," said Reding in a statement.

She purports to be calling for less, not more, government involvement in the Internet, using a free-market argument against the Commerce Department's control of ICANN.

• [Click here to read Reding's statement.](#)

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Longtime Euroskeptics may be surprised by that approach, as the European Commission normally sees fit to issue binding regulations governing all aspects of public life on all member states, right down to the sizes of apples and oranges in street markets.

ICANN is a non-profit organization based in Marina del Rey, Calif., which among other tasks supervises the top-level domains of the Internet, such as ".com" and ".net," as well as country-code domains such as ".fr" and ".uk."

The U.S. military and defense-research labs at universities across the country built the Internet in the 1970s, and ever since then it's essentially been controlled by the U.S. government.

This has upset other countries' governments. In 2005, a U.N. body tried to persuade the U.S. to hand over control, arguing that no one nation should run such a vital means of communication.

The U.S. successfully quashed that attempt, partly by pointing out that it's been a very hands-off landlord and mostly lets ICANN do whatever it wants.

One exception to that trend involved ICANN's proposed ".xxx" domain for pornographic Web sites, which would have kept online porn in its own sector.

Pressure from American politicians killed the idea two years ago, causing consternation among their less prudish European counterparts.

Yet Reding may have undermined her own free-market argument by simultaneously proposing a new international body, a "G12 for Internet Governance" that would oversee ICANN and be made up of voting representatives from around the world.

Like the 2005 plan, that would essentially be handing over Internet control not to the free market, but to the same creaky collection of international bureaucrats who control the EU and the U.N. — which might mean a lot more government involvement in day-to-day Internet operations.

The European Commission plans to hold a series of public hearings on the issue beginning Wednesday in Brussels.

*Reuters contributed to this report.*

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