



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

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STRASBOURG, France —

The body in charge of assigning Internet addresses such as .com and .net should be shorn of its U.S. government links from October and made fully independent, the European Union's information society chief said on Monday.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a not-for-profit organization set up in 1998 but operates under the aegis of the U.S. Department of Commerce, a set-up that raises concerns for some as the Internet is seen as belonging to a wider constituency.

Pressure in the past on ICANN from American politicians to stop .xxx from becoming a domain name for pornography worried some policymakers. ICANN's operating agreement with the U.S. government expires at the end of September.

"This opens the door for the full privatization of ICANN and it also raises the question of to whom ICANN should be accountable, as from 1 October," EU Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding said in a statement.

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She urged U.S. President Barack Obama to agree to a "new, more accountable, more transparent, more democratic and more multilateral form of Internet governance."

ICANN decides on what names can be added to the Internet's top level domains (TLDs), such as .com, but Reding wants it to become completely independent, overseen by an independent judicial body as well as a "G12 for Internet Governance" to discuss Internet and security issues.

"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," Reding said.

Such a "G12" would include two representatives from each North America, South America, Europe and Africa, three representatives from Asia and Australia, as well as the chairman of ICANN as a non-voting member.

The European Commission holds a public hearing on Wednesday in Brussels to debate future governance of the Internet.

Despite Dept of Commerce concerns, ICANN agreed last year to relax the rules on TLDs, the suffixes, such as the ubiquitous .com, .net and .org, among others.

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