



**Conference on Internet Freedom:
A constant factor of Democratic Security in Europe**

**Opening Address by Thorbjørn Jagland,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

Strasbourg, 9 September 2016

Check against delivery

I don't need to tell anyone here what is *good* about the Internet.

Its ability to connect people; to educate; to drive commerce;

The opportunity it creates to hold the powerful account...

...strengthening our democracies and, therefore, our democratic stability.

I don't need to tell anyone here what is *dangerous* about the Internet.

The spaces it creates for terrorists and criminals;
for hate and bullying;

It's misuse by irresponsible companies and
authoritarian regimes.

And, so, this very modern invention presents us
with a rather old dilemma – one which has
confronted mankind after almost every major
technological breakthrough:

How do we retain the liberating and unrestricted
nature of this technology...

...while controlling its darker potential?

A free Internet is not a free-for-all.

An open Internet cannot mean completely open to
abuse.

These are not easy lines to draw.

And our biggest problem is that – right now – we are not sufficiently drawing them *together*.

Yes, the world is inching, slowly, towards a system of global governance for the Internet...

...where we agree, collectively, what behaviour is and isn't acceptable online.

But, overall, governments are still moving at different speeds, in different directions, employing different approaches.

To give you one example: earlier this year I commissioned a study on the ways in which member states block and filter Internet content:

The variation was staggering.

We shouldn't aim for complete harmonisation of such practices – it's neither feasible nor necessary.

But there *do* have to be some agreed rules;

Common standards to ensure that, no matter where you live – and now I am talking about Europe...

...you can exercise your human rights online, in full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of our Court.

This, for us, is what Internet freedom means.

So, I am clear: the role of the Council of Europe is helping our members take a more unified approach, in line with our shared values.

And I thank the OSCE, the German Chairmanship and the Estonian Government for their commitment to this goal.

We already have common standards on preventing cybercrime, on tackling terrorism online and on data protection.

We are preparing draft guidelines to consolidate existing standards on blocking and filtering content.

And the Recommendation on Internet Freedom adopted by the Committee of Ministers in April is an important further step.

Member states should think of the Recommendation as a kind of “litmus test” for Internet freedom.

For the first time ever, they have one clear, comprehensive set of indicators...

...by which they can test their laws and practices...

...to measure how well they are guaranteeing freedom online.

Are citizens’ digital rights enshrined in good laws, overseen by independent regulators?

Are the authorities doing enough to ensure that the Internet is accessible and affordable to all parts of society?

When the state blocks access or content, or carries out surveillance, are its actions legal and proportionate, giving sufficient protection to freedom of expression and the right to privacy?

Can journalists operate freely and without censorship? *[And let me welcome Ms Dunja Mijatovic [OSCE Special Rep on Media Freedom], who is a tireless champion for journalists' rights – something we care deeply about here at CoE].*

These are vital questions, and our indicators will, I hope, be used by civil society journalists and the private sector too – we don't just want governments to mark their own exam papers.

We, in Strasbourg, can then put national assessments together, giving us some much needed clarity of the state of Internet freedom across the continent, as a whole.

It's a process, and I want to thank you all for being a part of it.

As you know: we should be delighted that the Recommendation has been *agreed*...

...but effective *implementation* is the next big task.

That is why I wanted to come here to address this meeting – to show the importance I attach to this task. And, with that, I hand over to you. Thank you.