Towards a Stronger Internet
Principles for the Next Digital Decade

Setting the scene

The year ahead will be a big year in EU digital policy, as 2024 will see EU policymakers set legislative priorities for the coming 5 years. The EU’s ambitious goals are demonstrated by long-term initiatives such as Web 4.0 and virtual worlds, the Declaration for the Future of the Internet, Europe's Digital Decade, and the Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles.

With these ambitions in mind, CENTR, the association of European country code top-level domain registries (ccTLDs), such as .eu and .de, proposes principles to safeguard Europe’s digital future in the upcoming decade.

CENTR’s principles draw upon years of experience of our members, which operate and maintain the technical Domain Name System (DNS) infrastructure. The DNS is a well-established network protocol providing a navigation function to link user-friendly domain names to numeric Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and is used by any service running on the internet.

However, these technical infrastructure actors are not always taken into consideration in EU legislation, which sometimes interferes with their ability to perform their essential services for digital society.

In EU digital policy, there is a pressing need for awareness of the technical standards and protocols which form the backbone of the internet and on which its future must be built. The next generation of EU policymakers must take a holistic view of all the layers of the internet, thus helping to strengthen the overall global digital ecosystem. Without this, the future of the internet is uncertain.
**Competition**

EU policymakers should remain technologically neutral in legislation affecting the internet infrastructure, while creating a level playing field by insisting on the use of open standards.

Diverse, decentralised systems ensure that there is no single point of failure – actors compete for solutions and thereby strengthen the network's overall resilience.

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**Access & Cybersecurity**

EU policymakers should remove and prevent any friction in future legislation that would hamper easy access to European digital identifiers, including domain names.

Europe needs a regulatory environment that allows for competitive, reliable, and secure access to online identifiers such as domain names for both European citizens and businesses.

EU policymakers should support collaboration in the area of cybersecurity, based on sharing existing good practices established across internet infrastructure.

There is no cyber resilience without pulling together the know-how of all parties involved and fostering private-public endeavours where possible.

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**Interoperability**

EU policymakers must formally recognise open standards developed in the international internet standard setting processes, and, where possible, promote their uptake via public procurement to support a free Next Generation Internet which is open for citizens and businesses alike.

The internet's success and scalability has only been possible due to open standards that are publicly available and are developed via transparent processes open to broad participation.
Online Content

European legislators must respect the principles of due process and proportionality in any future legislation that deals with removal or blocking of online content.

Interventions addressing content removal with the involvement of domain name actors must respect due process, transparency and involve a competent public authority, to safeguard human rights.

European legislators should abstain from legislative interventions without a comprehensive and publicly available evidential basis.

European internet infrastructure has proven to be reliable and secure. Legislation that directly or indirectly refers to intervention at internet infrastructure level as a solution to a range of societal problems must be backed by public impact assessments and fact-based research.

Governance

The EU must ensure continuous support for the evolving multistakeholder model by actively participating in and insisting on its relevance for the Next Generation Internet.

There is no future of the open and free internet without all stakeholders' continuous support for the internet's multistakeholder model. Duplicating internet governance efforts via national/regional legislation or through other multilateral fora risks creating technical fragmentation and weakening the universality of the internet.
About CENTR

CENTR is the association of European country code top-level domain (ccTLD) registries, such as .de for Germany or .si for Slovenia. We currently count 52 full and 9 associate members – together, they are responsible for over 80% of all registered domain names worldwide.

Our objectives are to promote and participate in the development of high standards and best practices among ccTLD registries.