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Digital Freedom in Foreign Policy

EU must be a force for positive change

The internet and new technologies are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of Europeans and citizens everywhere. While several EU Member States have identified access to internet as a fundamental right, more and more, repressive regimes try to control and censor the internet, sometimes with the complicity of European companies. This is unacceptable, and is one of the practices the Greens and the European Parliament voted today to discourage.

Information and power monopolies that had been left unchallenged for a long time are under threat. As well as playing a much publicised role during the Arab Spring, globally, technologies are changing societies, the functioning of our democracies, our economies and human rights issues. And repressive regimes are feeling under threat and fighting back. In a connected world the EU must not just have a strategy to deal with new technologies, but must act as a global player and support those who struggle against repression in the digital and the real world.

The European Parliament today voted for a report on a Digital Freedom Strategy in EU Foreign Policy with a number of very important amendments from the Greens/EFA group included.

As we heard during our conference, Bloggers for Democracy, last week, European companies are sometimes complicit in the repression of digital activists, supplying regimes with the tools of the trade. Today, we said that such companies who deploy repressive government policies against human rights activists must be excluded from EU procurement procedures.

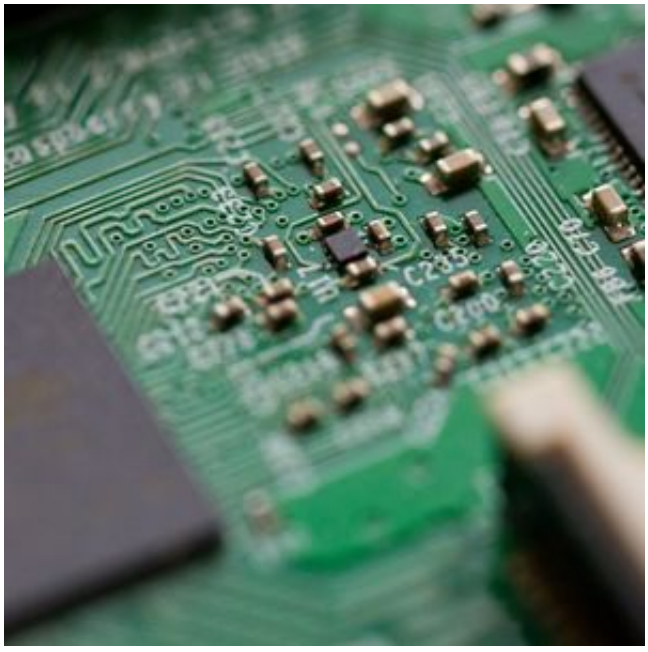
Also added were calls to include developing ICTs in conflict areas to promote peace-building, support for the principle of net neutrality, and that trade negotiation mandates must be conducive to the promotion of the values of democracy and the rule of law.

The EU has an economic and political weight that it can leverage as a global player for smart policy for the digital world. The vote today will help to make it a force for positive change.

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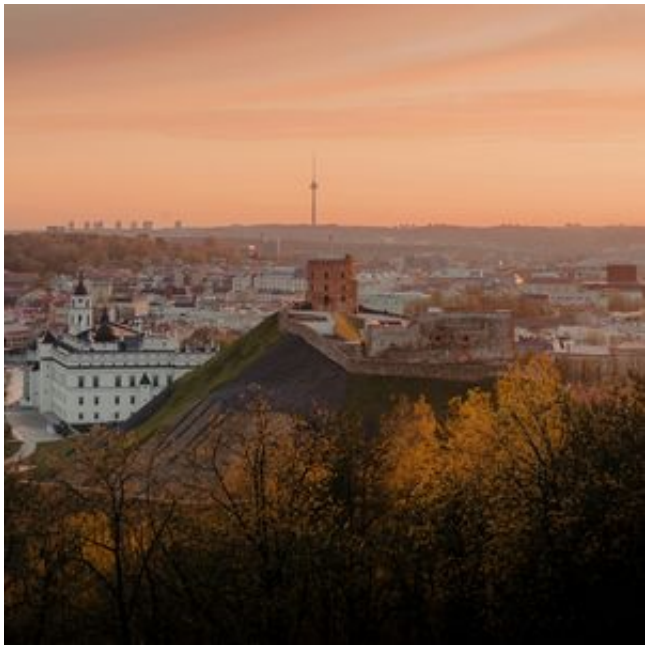
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