

Internet rules at center of 'e-G8' forum in Paris

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Internet leaders arrives at the Elysee Palace at their lunch for opening e-G8 Forum, in Paris. French President Nicolas Sarkozy said Tuesday that governments need to lay down and enforce rules in the digital world- even as they need to foster creativity and economic growth with the Internet. From left, Rupert Murdoch ,Chairman and Chief Executive Officer News Corporation, his wife Wendi, and Maurice Levy, CEO of Publicis group, right. Man second right not identified (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

France wants better regulation of the Internet. Google's executive chairman says policymakers should tread lightly and avoid "stupid" rules.

Bridging such differences about how the [Internet](#) could or should be more regulated took center stage Tuesday at an "e-G8" meeting aimed to parlay the digital world's growing economic clout into a cohesive message for world leaders at the Group of Eight summit later this week

in Normandy.

The two-day Paris gathering has brought together Internet and media world gurus such as Google Inc. executive chairman [Eric Schmidt](#), News Corp. Chairman and CEO [Rupert Murdoch](#) and Facebook founder and CEO [Mark Zuckerberg](#). And the discussion includes issues such as protecting children from "evil stuff" on line, preventing [illegal downloading](#) of copyrighted materials and shielding Facebook users from unsolicited invitations.

The e-G8 comes amid concerns in the industry that some countries - including several in Europe such as France - have taken measures or enacted laws that could curb Internet freedoms.

French President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#), kicking off the conference, said governments need to lay down and enforce rules in the digital world - even as they need to foster creativity and economic growth with the Internet.

It's unclear whether he'll win over digital executives with this argument, or whether the G-8 summit - which doesn't include countries such as China, a major source of online activity and online regulation - will agree on a single policy going forward.

Sarkozy said he faced mistrust over his push for the "e-G8" when Japan's earthquake, fiscal troubles in Europe, and the Arab world revolutions are likely to dominate the G-8 summit in Deauville on Thursday and Friday. Conflicting visions about the Internet - notably about how regulated it should be - has pitted companies such as [Amazon.com](#) and [Google](#) against governments about how to protect privacy and copyrights online.

"We need to hear your aspirations, your needs," Sarkozy told hundreds of business executives, creative minds and journalists at Tuileries

Gardens in Paris. "You need to hear our limits, our red lines."

Policymakers such as Sarkozy say the blistering pace of growth has often left regulators behind. He said a "balance" needed to be struck to prevent misuse of the Internet - such as to protect children online - while boosting its potential as a driver for economic growth.

While praising the executives, he said regulatory curbs are needed.

"Don't let the revolution that you've begun threaten everyone's basic right to a private life and full autonomy," said Sarkozy. "Full transparency ... sooner or later runs into the very principle of individual freedom."

Google's Schmidt said technological changes have led to a "shift in power" toward individuals - whether to illegally release secret documents or transfer copyrighted material, or rally against their repressive regimes.

"My own opinion is that most governments are having trouble with that shift in power," he said. "So rather than sort of complaining about it, which is what everybody does, why don't we see if we can harness it?"

During an e-G8 panel talk, Schmidt said: "You want to tread lightly on regulating brand new, innovative industries. ... Clearly you need some level of regulation for the evil stuff. But I would be careful about overregulating the Internet.

"I cannot imagine any delegate in this conference (who) would want Internet growth to be significantly slowed by a government that slows it down because of some stupid rule that they put in place," he said.

Last week, the U.N.'s independent expert on freedom of speech said governments that curtail users' access to the Internet are violating a basic

human right - regardless of the justification.

Britain last year joined France by announcing it would cut off Internet access to people who illegally download copyright-protected material. The French government has so far issued only warnings under the "three strikes" formula for possible penalties.

Privacy concerns have also raised hackles in Europe.

In January, Facebook and German officials reached a deal over unsolicited invitations sent to nonmembers of the social networking site through its "Friend Finder" feature - which allows Facebook to send email invitations to potential users through current members' address books.

The feature came under fire in Germany for violating privacy laws by allowing unauthorized access to information of third parties. The agreement allows Facebook members more control over the email addresses they share.

Johannes Caspar, a data protection official in Hamburg who negotiated the deal for the Germans, said American laws under which Facebook operates tend to be more laissez-faire than those of Europe about privacy issues.

He said Facebook has cooperated with German investigations about possible privacy law violations, and the onus now is on Europe "to make things clearer" about the rules companies face on the continent.

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