

Estonian courts to use Facebook, Twitter to tap suspects

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The Facebook logo is seen on a television screen display at the Samsung booth at the 2011 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada. Estonia's justice ministry has asked parliament to adopt amendments to enable courts to use Facebook and Twitter accounts to contact crime suspects, a ministry spokesman said Monday.

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"One of the main reasons why court cases proceed slowly in Estonia is often the very slow delivery of relevant documents to those involved," justice ministry spokesman Priit Talv told AFP Monday, referring to the laborious process of serving suspects with subpoenas.

"Around a third of all civil cases are constantly in phase of documents delivery. With the new legal steps planned to take force in January 2013, we want to expand the electronic means of courts to deliver these documents" including subpoenas, he added.

According to the draft bill, a person contacted by court via their email, Facebook or [Twitter](#) account will receive a note with a link to the court documents.

But the subpoena will be legally delivered only after he or she has clicked the link and visited the official site that can be accessed with an electronic identification ID-card issued to all adult Estonians.

"In addition to those criminal suspects who deliberately try to hide their [mail](#) or residence address there are many people whose address is either not registered or they travel a lot. Reaching people via electronic means is both cheaper and quicker," Talv said.

Known as E-stonia, the tiny ex-Soviet Baltic republic of 1.3 million which joined the European Union in 2004 and the eurozone in 2011 is among the world's most wired and IT savvy nations.

Lawyers said Monday the step will also bring Estonia closer to making information gathered from [social networking sites](#) valid as court evidence.

"It would be helpful for example in cases when one of the parents refuses to pay child support and claims to be too poor to pay a penny, but the very same person can be found in Facebook posing in front of his or her expensive house or car or resting at a resort," lawyers Maret Hallikma and Anton Sigal wrote Monday in Paevaleht, a leading Estonian daily.

According to a recent study, 65 percent of all Internet users in Estonia -- a figure rising to 80 percent for those under 40 -- visit their [Facebook](#) account at least once a week.

Twitter is less popular, with just five percent of Estonian Internet users logging on at least once a week.

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