

After split from US, internet gatekeeper is 'grassroots'

November 29 2016, by Rob Lever



ICANN became independent on October 1, 2016 after the expiration of an 18-year contract to manage the technical functions of the internet address system which ensure that users arrive at certain websites

The internet address system gatekeeper, independent after a split from the US government, is now in a phase where "the grassroots are in charge," its top executive said Tuesday.

Goran Marby, president and chief executive of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, said in an interview that nothing has

changed for people using the [internet](#) after the expiration of its contract with the US Commerce Department.

This means that "nothing happened and everything happened," Marby told AFP in an interview in Washington.

"The internet is a grassroots thing, and now the grassroots are in charge."

The nonprofit, California-based ICANN became independent on October 1 after the expiration of an 18-year contract to manage the technical functions of the [internet address](#) system which ensure that users arrive at certain websites, such as through [domain names](#) including .com or .gov.

The separation came despite some critics in the US Congress who argued that Washington was "giving away" the internet, allowing authoritarian regimes to be able to exercise greater control.

But ICANN officials and backers argued that the longstanding plan to privatize its functions would give greater credibility to the internet and temper critics around the world who claimed the US controlled the internet.

US officials said Washington agreed to cede this "symbolic" role to blunt the arguments of Russia and China and other authoritarian regimes seeking greater control over the internet.

Under the so-called "multi-stakeholder" model giving a role to various interest groups such as academics, businesses, technical experts and governments, no single entity can assert control over the internet's technical underpinnings, Marby said.

"It's an entity that no one can control," he said.

"It's built into the system that no country, no entity, no government, no organization, no person can control what we can do."



No single entity can assert control over the internet's technical underpinnings, Goran Marby, president and chief executive of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, said in an interview

This makes for a unique governance model that is sometimes difficult to understand, he said: "I don't think there is any place in history where this has happened before, and I think that shows the strength of this process."

Service, not content

Still, he pointed out that ICANN is purely a technical administration and

does not make decisions on how the internet is used.

ICANN's system allows for "interoperability" without control of networks within individual countries. It does not have a role if countries block, filter or censor the internet, he said.

"Our mission is to make interoperability work," he said.

"It's up to the people of the world to use it the way they want it to be used. We provide the service, not the content."

But it is an accomplishment to have 3.6 billion users connected through ICANN's protocols for communications, online commerce and other services, he noted.

Failure to become independent, Marby had warned ahead of the transition, could have eroded credibility of ICANN and fueled efforts to create alternative networks.

ICANN still must grapple with controversial decisions on how to deal with requests for new domain names, and who manages these functions.

In recent years the organization dealt with issues such as [control](#) of domains like .wine and .book, and the creation of unorthodox ones like .sucks.

Marby said the stakeholder model appears to be adapted for these issues.

"It works out through a consensus process," he said. "The model seems to be working to take care of these conflicts."

Citation: After split from US, internet gatekeeper is 'grassroots' (2016, November 29) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-11-internet-gatekeeper-grassroots.html>

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