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Internet freedoms are under threat ? politicians must act [1]

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Today the Adam Smith Institute is calling on the government [3]to commit to a ?Digital Freedom Charter? ahead of the Communications Bill. The charter should set out principles to protect competition, innovation and growth in and around digital communications and the Internet.

The Internet is currently under threat from an increasing regulatory burden. Only if politicians in power and opposition commit themselves to Digital Freedom Charter can we ensure that the Internet remains a place where people can conduct business, engage with others and communicate freely. The charter should include the following principles:

· **Freedom from EU/EC regulation:** UK based businesses should not be impacted by regulation from the European Commission. EU regulation, such as the Privacy and Communications Bill and General Data Protection Regulation, increase compliance costs. This means money and time is taken away from businesses and invested in compliance. Businesses should not be forced to comply with onerous regulations ? instead the UK should enforce existing competition and anti-trust laws.

· **Freedom to Contract:** Websites should be free to form contracts with their users. The government should not seek to get involved with the relationship between a user and website. If a user has agreed to terms on a website, but feels that this contract has been violated, this should be dealt with by laws that already exist for breaches of contract. The EU is wrong to push for the regulating of user terms on social media sites like Facebook. Users are not coerced to join social media sites, which make their money out of targeted advertising, and therefore need access to user data. There is a danger that the privacy regulation called for by a vocal minority will end up punishing all users by killing the dominant and popular free-to-use social media business model.

· **Freedom to Finance:** Individuals and firms need to be responsible for how they spend and invest their money, in order to allow market discovery processes to take place. Government investment in content creation, broadcasting, and communications infrastructure are distortionary, crowding out the private sector and using up resources in an inefficient way.

· **Autonomy for families and individuals:** Family and individual autonomy is of the utmost importance. There is a growing fashion for government to decide what should and should not be viewed online. Such website blocking would put the UK in the same place as Russia, China and other authoritarian states. Website blocking doesn?t work. The government should leave the decisions to individuals and families rather than having a government committee decide what we view online.

Dominique Lazanski, author of the report, adds, ?The internet has brought countless benefits to our society, but is under threat from piecemeal regulation. Although well intentioned, it is fundamentally misguided and leads to the increasing erosion of Internet freedom.

?We need this Digital Freedom Charter to ensure the Internet remains a free and innovative market place.

The state must roll back its involvement in the growing digital industry and stop state funded content, state mandated website blocking, and the state sanctioning of businesses.?

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