



## Info

# Parliament backs Internet freedom

The "fight for freedom of expression has today largely shifted on-line" the European Parliament notes in a resolution adopted during its July plenary. In view of the ever more far-reaching methods of controlling the Internet and the increasing number of so called "cyber-dissidents", the Parliament calls for an EU code of conduct to limit western businesses that contribute to censoring the internet in repressive countries. The US is already preparing a similar measure.

"The Internet has become *the* means of expression for political dissidents, human rights defenders and independent journalists worldwide" the Parliament notes. At the same time, authoritarian governments use more and more sophisticated filtering and surveillance technology - often coming from western companies. The Chinese government has even persuaded companies such as Yahoo, Google and Microsoft to facilitate the censorship of their services.

### Imprisoned in Cyberspace?

According to human rights organisations, most of the cyber-dissidents detained in prison are in China a country which recently concluded an agreement with the search engine "Google" to operate there as long as certain web pages were blocked. The Paris-based "Reporters Without Frontiers" group which campaigns for press freedom have been particularly critical of China which has its share of "cyber-dissidents". They include the recently released Chinese blogger and documentary filmmaker Hao Wu, the journalist Shi Tao and cyber-dissident Yang Zili.

Convinced that the freedom of expression is a key yardstick to judge whether a society is democratic and open, the Parliament strongly condemns restrictions on Internet content (apart from when it is illegal), as well as the harassment and imprisonment of Internet users. It calls on the EU to take steps to promote free speech on the web and to help release detained Internet users.

### Parliament's President Borrell raises concerns

During his visit to China last week, EP President Josep Borrell welcomed the release of cyber-dissident Hao Wu - a week after the Parliament adopted its resolution that referred to his case. "There is still a long way to go and I raised Parliament concerns about remaining restrictions on the freedom of expression" the President said in a statement concluding his visit.

President Borrell also called upon China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which article 19 seeks to guarantee unrestricted freedom of expression.