

NZZ Article 16 June 2021

For a Swiss Digital Charter – An ICT4Peace Proposal

Covid-19 has accelerated the transformation to a digital economy and society - among consumers, businesses, healthcare providers, the public sector, tele-workers, etc. Add to this the growing importance of artificial intelligence for business, research and our lives together. Both phenomena are also increasingly exposing the new risks of these technologies, including the rise of misinformation, the vulnerability of our healthcare institutions and other critical infrastructure, the surge in cybercrime, and growing challenges to democracy and fundamental rights.

Strengthening trust on the Internet

While we use these powerful technological tools to build robust economies, we must ensure that standard business practices grow with them to ensure a safe and ethical online marketplace. At the same time, we need to keep pace with the new ideas that are emerging from this rapid digital upsurge and engage more fully with international commercial activities and efforts in the digital space, including the European Union.

These important challenges require innovative and well-thought-out responses aimed at strengthening or restoring trust on the Internet while preserving the best aspects of free, open, prosperous, and democratic societies.

With this in mind, we propose to develop a "Swiss Digital Charter" for commercial players. Working with partners from business, civil society, and government, and based on Swiss values of neutrality, pragmatism, trustworthiness, and respect for fundamental rights, the charter would provide clear principles and guidance to better address the challenges of information and communication technologies - cybersecurity, supply chain security, blockchain, artificial intelligence, and data security while respecting fundamental rights.

To develop the Swiss Digital Charter, we set out to: 1) take stock of current and emerging online challenges for businesses and civil society; 2) identify gaps and areas for improvement in the Swiss framework; 3) take stock of existing initiatives with similar goals and identify best practices; 4) identify opportunities to deepen relationships and knowledge sharing internationally; 5) develop concrete recommendations for prosperous and ethical commercial digitization, including systems and processes with integrity.

A flexible document

The charter would also help foster productive relationships with other key stakeholders such as civil society, government and law enforcement. The document could help companies respond more effectively to challenges in cyberspace while helping to ensure a transparent, fair commercial playing field and a safe online environment for individuals. In doing so, the charter should be a "living document" so that it could be adapted in real time to meet new challenges.

The Charter could make it an important tool for international dialogue, helping to shape discussions and efforts at the international level in line with Swiss values and providing positive impetus for the digital space in Switzerland itself. Ultimately, the charter could help to harness the potential and promise of new technologies for prosperous, ethical and secure societies of tomorrow.

Barbara Weekes, Anne-Marie Buzatu and Daniel Stauffacher are executive members of the ICT4Peace Foundation in Geneva.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)