

Solomon Passy: Universal access to the Internet is a basic human right

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Access to Internet should be guaranteed and free in all public places in the European Union. This is what Solomon and Gergana Passy offer in a letter to the European Commission. It is addressed to three commissioners: Neelie Kroes, Viviane Reding and John Does. The initiative is the natural extension of the introduction of a single European standard for mobile phone chargers, says Solomon Passy.

The idea came during a stay in the Netherlands. "During that time I had to pay 15 euros per hour to use the Internet in the hotel. This is an Internet tyranny by the hotels," said Solomon Passy. "Nowadays, the use of the Internet service is of utmost necessity for everyone, just like hot water and electricity. Therefore, it is outrageous that the European citizens must pay for this right," he said.

Additional incentive for the Passy family is a UN report on basic human rights from May 2011. It indicates that access to Internet is indeed a right. It is not different from the rights to education and freedom for example. "The report gave us strength and courage to rush into the battle," said Passy.

The first question that people ask themselves is who will pay for this service. "The Internet should be regarded as electricity. We are not wondering who pays for the electricity. Everyone pays their own bill. NEK has to supply electricity to the entrance of my building, and from then on, I am paying for it. In such a scheme the technical side of things will be easily provided," said Passy.

If the proposal becomes reality, it will sharply increase the demand for and the number of Internet users. This means that it will reduce the cost of the service. All parties will be content, says the former foreign minister. According to him, the consumers will pay less, and

the providers will earn much more.

At the beginning Solomon and Gergana Passy envisioned benefits primarily for the big cities. However, once the letter to the European Commission, was published, they received a serious response even from the most remote villages in the country. The idea is supported mostly by residents of the border areas.

"For them, it is a life-saving idea, through which they could overcome their isolation. The Internet is their only reliable link to the outside world. Therefore, our proposal can be viewed as a way to combat the depopulation of the border regions," said Solomon Passy .

Another focus is the position of Bulgaria as an initiator and beneficiary of the service. The proposal is a chance for our country to be an exporter of good practices, not just a user, said Passy. Bulgaria is ranked fifth in the world in the quality of Internet services. As a city, Sofia holds the eleventh place in the same ranking. "In 2008 we proposed a common European policy on transport. Our idea was that it will manage to overcome our own disabilities in terms of road safety. But in this situation, it is exactly the opposite," he explained.

It cannot be envisioned when this idea will become reality. "The experience we have with the standardized chargers will help us to navigate more easily," said Passy. A positive step is the commitment that the Polish presidency of the EU undertook to give impetus to the idea, says the former foreign minister.

He said the decision could be taken relatively quickly. However, a more precise technical analysis is needed. "In 2018, Bulgaria will assume the EU presidency. We hope that this idea will be accomplished by then " said Solomon Passy.

The single European standard for mobile phone chargers is a fact. The initiative belongs to Gergana and Solomon Passy. The foundation was laid in 2008, but the implementation took approximately three years. Thanks to the standardized mobile phone charger, each year almost 30 million tons of carbon emissions and electronic waste are being eliminated. This environmental element is the focus of the two Bulgarian politicians' campaign. It is also the main motive of the European Parliament, the French EU Presidency and Vice-President Verheugen to support the proposal.