



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

The interactive platforms of Web 2.0 are about to fundamentally change the Internet. And there are great challenges ahead for media (political) communication. So called social networks, weblogs, microblogging systems, as well as platforms for the exchange of photos, videos or texts have revolutionized our media communication behavior. What all these have in common is the active participation of the user in the creation and distribution of content as well as worldwide networking and the ensuing global dissemination of the contents.

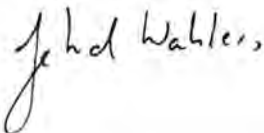
The classic institutions of politics and society are trying to adapt to the speed, complexity and consequences of these changes. The Internet has already become object and medium of politics, without necessarily involving existing institutions. The wide-ranging new opportunities to participate, which can bypass the traditional political infrastructures, have already taken on a global character. National political regulation, reflecting the former status quo of the state and its citizens, is still having to catch up.

Since the Internet forms part of reality and is not a parallel virtual space, it has considerable influence on the different political systems and the associated social and economic conditions. Any euphoria about a global digital community is premature in this context. The articles in this issue illustrate how users are affected by these conditions. Nonetheless, the creative potential of the interactive digital networks for political communication, opinion forming and decision making as well as mobilization should not be underestimated. Especially under restrictive political conditions or in reduced economic circumstances, the possibilities for participation that Web 2.0 facilitates represent an important opportunity for the free expression of political opinion. And the access threshold is very low.

A computer with an Internet connection or a cell phone is all that is required.

Traditional media such as newspapers, radio or TV require a far more elaborate infrastructure. In addition, they are also often hampered by editorial filters, economic and political circumstances. The forward march of Web 2.0, which is far more participatory by nature, will therefore gain in strength in future. If for no other reason than it being far more difficult to control, corrupt, or blackmail – in spite of blocks, censorship and other restrictions in many countries. Furthermore, the new communication quality of these interactive digital networks is based on the involvement of both recipient and sender. Radio, newspapers and TV can only manage this in a minor way.

In future, political communication will therefore be controlled to a considerably lesser extent through the current actors (party organizations, trades unions, or associations). With its platforms and networks, the Internet is itself acting as the channel of political communication and mobilization. The challenge to the actors of the past is to disseminate their ideas and objectives on the Internet and present them there for discussion far more prolifically than they are doing now. In the foreseeable future, the Internet will become the central communication channel for conveying party political content. This is especially important for mainstream parties, which don't focus on the implementation of special or group interests but address a wide spectrum of political interests. While it is certain that the interactive networks of the World Wide Web will revolutionize political communication, it is uncertain whether this will actually produce influential social movements that have the will and the capability of taking on political responsibility in the medium and long term. That requires rather more than just a broadband connection.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G'.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers
Deputy Secretary-General