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Computer & Communications Industry Association

June 18, 2012

The Honorable Dave Camp
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sander Levin
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Internet Freedom and Granting Russia Permanent Normal Trade Relations

Dear Chairman Camp and Ranking Member Levin:

As the Committee prepares to examine the issue of extending permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) to Russia, I write to you on behalf of the Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA) to urge you to consider the issue of human rights and Internet Freedom as an important element in this relationship.

Russian PNTR entails repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which was intended to use trade as leverage against human rights violations and restrictions on freedom in the USSR. During the Cold War, the U.S. was a beacon of hope to those behind the Iron Curtain and the champion of freedom. The Cold War ended with the collapse of the USSR but Russia has increasingly seen a return to authoritarianism. It seems that the tide of freedom in Russia has been receding rather than advancing. Now is the time for the U.S. to again call attention to what Jackson-Vanik stood for: freedom and human rights.

CCIA has long characterized Internet freedom as nothing less than freedom of expression in the 21st century, and has opposed Internet censorship efforts by governments such as China, which continues to thumb its nose at the concept of Internet freedom a decade after its own WTO accession. As we take stock of our relationship with Russia at this pivotal moment, we should also consider the state of Internet freedom in Russia.

In recent months, there have been stirrings of popular unrest in Russia around the parliamentary and presidential elections. Mass demonstrations were informed and organized by utilizing social networks and the Internet. In response, there have been reports of online monitoring and disruptions by the government against Internet activism,¹ and government officials have made statements in support of Internet

¹ Henry Meyer, "Russia Tightens Censorship Ahead of Poll, Media Watchdog Says," Bloomberg, Dec. 1, 2011, available at < <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-12-01/russia-tightens-censorship-ahead-of-poll-media-watchdog-says.html>>.

surveillance and control.² Russia, with other nondemocratic countries like China, North Korea and Iran, is also advocating for international regulation of the Internet through the United Nations' International Telecommunications Union.

While Russia has not had systemic blocking of the Internet like China's Great Firewall, Reporters Without Borders characterized Russia as a "Country Under Surveillance" in its 2012 Enemies of the Internet report, stating that, "The authorities have used the issue of national security to expand Web monitoring and censorship – even while continuing to promote and develop Internet access for the population at large."³

The State Department's "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011" stated that, "Threats to Internet freedom included physical attacks on bloggers, criminal prosecutions of bloggers for 'extremism' or libel, blocking of specific sites by local service providers, DDoS attacks on sites of opposition groups or independent media, and attempts by security services and some regional authorities to regulate Internet content."⁴

At a time when the Russian government's stance on Internet freedom is clearly worsening, Congress must highlight the importance of this issue. Faced with a potential democratic awakening in the very country that necessitated the enactment of Jackson-Vanik, pursuing Internet freedom in Russia would be an effective 21st century update of the U.S. commitment to human rights and democracy. This issue needs to be part of the committee's discussions as it considers the overall U.S. relationship with Russia, and we greatly appreciate your attention and your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Black
President & CEO
Computer & Communications Industry Association

cc: Members of the House Committee on Ways and Means

² Sanya Khetani, "Russia's Interior Minister Pushes for Extreme Internet Censorship Measures," Business Insider, Mar. 30, 2012, available at < http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-03-30/europe/31259054_1_extremism-duma-mass-media>.

³ Reporters Without Borders, "Enemies of the Internet Report 2012," p. 58, available at < <http://en.rsf.org/russia-russia-12-03-2012,42075.html>>.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, "2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," Russia, p. 28, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dynamic_load_id=186397#section2a>.

Statement to be Attributed to

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