[IS] Resolution on the Protection of Freedom of Expression and Information

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On 16 June 2010 the Icelandic Parliament adopted a resolution on the protection of freedom of expression and information. In the resolution the government is invited to find ways to strengthen freedom of expression, the protection of sources of information and whistleblowers. To this end the government shall, inter alia, review the legislative framework and prepare amendments to it, study the laws of other countries in order to use best practice to bring Iceland to the forefront in this respect, map the State's preparations, in particular from a security point of view, because of the operations of international data centres in the country. The Minister of Education and Culture shall inform the Parliament every three months about progress with implementing the resolution.

When the proposal for a resolution was introduced in Parliament by members of all parties last winter it raised considerable interest at the international level. The explanatory report spoke about changing the country so that it would provide a progressive environment for the registration and operations of international media and publishers, start-ups, human rights organisations and data centers. This would strenghten democracy, encourage necessary reform in the country and increase transparency. This might also increase the nation's standing at the international level and stimulate the economy.

A report issued by the relevant Parliamentary Committee which dealt with the proposal strikes a more careful note. It remarks that the extent to which Iceland can take a leading role in increasing freedom of expression ensuring that the laws of other countries do not apply to computing in data centers in Iceland has to be studied more closely. One might rather think, according to the report, that Iceland needs to regain trust from neighbouring countries following the economic collapse in 2008. Iceland needs to pay attention to other states and to international conventions which are binding upon it. One lesson from the economic collapse was, according to the report, that wanting to excel too quickly is sometimes dangerous. The government needs to be well prepared before further steps are taken. There is for example no Computer Emergency Response Team in the country. Cable connections with Europe are also sometimes unstable. Iceland does not have the powers to get involved with libel legislation in other countries. Furthermore, there is no intention to create a safe haven where international law is not applicable.

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http://www.althingi.is/altext/138/s/1392.html

Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland establishing a unique legal framework as regards the protection of freedom of expression and information

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