Press release

**#Chatcontrol: Campaign against the abolition of digital privacy**

**Why the "European Task Force against Child Abuse" opened letters to EU parliamentarians**

Ein Bild, das Text, drinnen enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung   
*EU-Parliamentarians have received rather strange mail. Photo: Varvara Borodkina / gbs*

**Citizens have a right to confidentiality of communication – as declared in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. But members of the European Parliament have been receiving suspicious mail these days: The letters have been torn open, inspected by a “European Task Force against Child Abuse” and sealed with a warning label. Those who research discover that this is a campaign by the Giordano Bruno Foundation (gbs), protesting in this way against the planned search of private chats and emails.**

Experiences from the NSA surveillance scandal have shown that politicians often only react when affected themselves. And who would want to be associated with child pornography? What the EU parliamentarians experience with the gbs letter campaign could soon happen to everyone in the EU in a slightly different form, explains Peder Iblher, Rapporteur Digital Fundamental Rights at the Giordano Bruno Foundation: „The EU Commission’s bill, the so-called ‘ePrivacy Derogation’, provides for sexually ambiguous content to be automatically shared with the police or an NGO and brought close to child abuse. While the law clearly violates European fundamental rights, hardly any parliamentarians dare to argue against the justification that this is fighting child abuse.“

The legislative initiative will be submitted to the European Parliament for a decision on July 6. And it does much more harm than good, as Iblher explains: “Experiences with such search methods show that the error rate is extremely high, charges are hardly ever filed, and cunning offenders have long since used other channels. A climate of uncertainty and suspicion, criminalization of young people and the risk of leaks, hacks and abuse would be a high price to pay for little effect. Most acts remain offline anyway and would be far better avoided with prevention and well-equipped police investigations.“

**A first step towards full mass surveillance?**

Initially, the search of all chat messages by providers will be voluntarily – so anyone who uses certain applications would have to agree to it. But the creation of a mandatory surveillance infrastructure is firmly planned in a second step: “That would in fact mean the end of electronic secrecy of correspondence in Europe!” says Iblher. “And in a further step, there are even ideas for the circumvention of encryption. The bitter consequence is obvious: If privacy is criminal, only criminals have privacy. Because they find ways to circumvent the controls.”

The letter campaign initiated by Iblher is intended to make clear to EU parliamentarians what it means “when one’s own correspondence is scrutinized and anyone could suddenly find themselves in the crosshairs of investigations: Even an intimate selfie taken by youngsters would find its way to the police, where it would be examined, analyzed and perhaps kept. What is still private when the state is allowed to snoop around everywhere? Who’s to say that searches won’t be subjected to political interests very soon? And who knows if all the employees of the NGOs and police involved are trustworthy?”

**72 percent of Europeans against mass surveillance**

The letter to the EU parliamentarians, signed by Peder Iblher and gbs board spokesman Michael Schmidt-Salomon, lists decisive arguments against warrantless mass surveillance. The authors also refer to the express will of the European population. According to a representative [survey](https://nextcloud.pp-eu.eu/index.php/s/5bkdRGyxnAciNBz), a clear majority of 72 percent of European citizens are against the warrantless search of their electronic communications.

In their letter, Iblher and Schmidt-Salomon emphasize that the Giordano Bruno Foundation has been working for children’s rights [for many years](https://www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de/en/news/childrens-rights-basic-law), working with and for [victims of sexual abuse](https://www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de/en/ruthless-examination-abuse-scandal). It is therefore all the more important to the Foundation that the *good purpose*, the prevention of sexual violence against children, is not abused to legitimize a *bad means*, namely warrantless mass surveillance. Their final appeal to the EU parliamentarians: “Crimes against children are terrible and demand decisive action! But warrantless surveillance of our communications is totally inappropriate and creates a climate of mistrust in Europe. We therefore urge you to oppose the bill when it comes before Parliament on July 6!”

• For more background information, please visit the gbs blog on digital human rights: [digitalhumanrights.blog/en](https://digitalhumanrights.blog/en).

• The letter can be co-signed by everyone on [OpenPetition.org](https://www.openpetition.eu/petition/online/preserve-eprivacy-protect-childrens-rights-stop-chatcontrol).