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Internet Address Group Approves Overhaul

By SUSAN STELLIN

The group that manages the Internet's address system moved forward with its reorganization process yesterday, approving the outline of a plan that is intended to streamline operations and speed decision-making.

Discussion of the proposal occupied much of a weeklong meeting held in Bucharest, Romania, by the group, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. Known as Icann, the nonprofit group is based in Marina del Rey, Calif., and manages the address system under contract with the United States Commerce Department.

Earlier this year, Icann embarked on a reorganization process that ignited debate over how a small private-sector organization based in the United States could address policy questions related to the Internet's address system in a way that took into account often divergent public, private and global interests.

In summarizing the plan approved 18 to 0 by Icann's board, Stuart Lynn, the president and chief executive of the group, said in a conference call, "What we're talking about is an organization that is much more reflective of the public interest balanced with the private interest, that is much more communicative and that is much more effective in getting things done."

Mr. Lynn acknowledged continuing criticism of the plan but said, "At some point you've got to say hey, we're not going to please everybody so we've got to move on."

The most disputed aspect of the plan, which is still vague in many respects, is how individual Internet users will be represented in Ican's decisions on various issues. Such issues include how expired addresses, also called domain names, are reallocated; how much personal information about domain name owners is sold to marketers and made available in a public database; and which new domain name extensions — .info, for instance — are added to the address system.

In the Ican structure originally outlined by the Commerce Department in 1998, half the group's board members were supposed to represent the public or individual Internet users. Of Ican's 19 current directors, 5 were chosen by online elections in October 2000. (One of the five, Karl Auerbach, is suing the board over access to Ican's records and did not attend the meeting in Bucharest or vote on the reorganization plan.)

In another unpopular move, the board rejected the idea of choosing board members by online election, citing as barriers the cost and the difficulty of preventing fraud or capture by specific interests. The reorganization plan approved yesterday does not articulate an alternative mechanism for public participation.

Alan Davidson, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a public interest group in Washington, said that although the overhaul plan was somewhat improved from earlier versions, "it is still lacking in checks on Ican's power and its accountability to the public."

The plan specifies that Ican will have a 15-member board made up of 8 directors chosen by a nominating committee, 2 directors from each of Ican's three so-called supporting organizations (which mostly represent interests related to the management and sale of domain names) and Ican's president. The nominating committee will have 19 members chosen by various constituencies, but 1 member representing individual users and 4 members representing public interest groups will in effect be chosen by the current board.

Ican critics view that arrangement as virtually the elimination of a public voice, an issue that members of Congress and officials

from the Commerce Department have said that they are watching closely.

Icann's contract with the Commerce Department is up for renewal in September. Nancy J. Victory, assistant secretary of commerce for communications and information, has said that the department is awaiting the outcome of Icann's own reorganization efforts before weighing in on the matter.

In a separate action at the Bucharest meeting, Icann's board approved a proposal allowing domain name owners 30 days to renew addresses after their registration expires. The board also approved a proposal to refund \$6,000 of each \$35,000 fee that 11 groups paid in applying to run the .org extension, which [VeriSign Inc.](#) is giving up later this year. A decision on VeriSign's successor is expected by late August.