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G-8 Leaders to Call for Tighter Internet Regulation By ERIC PFANNER

Leaders of the Group of 8 industrialized countries are set to issue a provocative call for stronger Internet regulation, a cause championed by the host of the meeting, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, but fiercely opposed by some Internet companies and free-speech groups.

The G-8 leaders will urge the adoption of measures to protect children from online predators, to strengthen privacy rights and to crack down on digital copyright piracy, according to two people who have seen drafts of a communiqué the G-8 will issue at the end of a meeting this week in Deauville, France. At the same time, the document is expected to include a pledge to maintain openness and to support entrepreneurial, rather than government-led, development of the Internet.

This balancing act was reflected Tuesday in a speech by Mr. Sarkozy, who convened a special gathering of the global digerati in Paris on the eve of the G-8 meeting. Calling the rise of the Internet a “revolution,” Mr. Sarkozy compared its impact to that of two previous transforming episodes in global history: the age of exploration and the industrial revolution.

The Internet revolution “doesn’t have a flag, it doesn’t have a slogan, it belongs to everyone,” he said, citing the recent uprisings in the Arab world as examples of its positive effects.

Before an audience that included top executives of some of the world’s largest Internet companies, including Google, Facebook, Amazon and eBay, he added, however: “The universe you represent is not a parallel universe. Nobody should forget that governments are the only legitimate representatives of the will of the people in our democracies. To forget this is to risk democratic chaos and anarchy.”

The pre-Deauville meeting in Paris, called the E-G8 Forum, is providing a public window into the debates that have shaped the expected G-8 communiqué — in addition to serving as a soapbox for Mr. Sarkozy as he gears up his campaign for re-election next spring.

Mr. Sarkozy’s push to turn Internet governance into a G-8 issue, elevating it to the level of more traditional topics like trade, currencies, terrorism or climate change, has been applauded by companies in industries like music, which have been ravaged by digital piracy. But it has drawn concern from Internet companies and outright criticism from some people who see a threat to the openness that has characterized the Internet to date, at least in most Western societies.

During a panel discussion Tuesday, Yochai Benkler, faculty co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, told Finance Minister Christine Lagarde of France that he thought the French approach to online copyright protection was “the wrong way to go.”

“You can make the Internet safe for Lady Gaga or Justin Bieber, or you can make it safe for the next Skype or YouTube,” he said, asking her to relay that message to the G-8 leaders in Deauville.

Ms. Lagarde promised to do so, but added that she thought the rights of content owners and Internet companies could be reconciled.

Mr. Sarkozy is not alone in calling existing laws and regulations inadequate to deal with the challenges of a borderless digital world. Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain said this week that he would ask Parliament to review British privacy laws after Twitter users circumvented court orders preventing newspapers from publishing the names of public figures who are suspected of having had extramarital affairs.

But France has gone further than many other Western countries in pushing for what Mr. Sarkozy has called a “civilized Internet.” Among his initiatives are a so-called three-strikes law that threatens persistent digital pirates with the suspension of their Internet connections. Another new French law authorizes the government to filter out Web sites containing illegal content like child pornography.

The G-8 communiqué, which is still being finalized by the G-8 leaders’ sherpas, or policy emissaries, is not expected to contain specific prescriptions like these. Instead, it will include broad pledges to deal with privacy, piracy and child protection, the people with knowledge of the talks said.

In some cases, even general agreement has been difficult. On digital piracy, for example, Russia, which has been the home of some notorious file-sharing services, is said to have raised objections. And while there had been speculation before the E-G8 Forum that Mr. Sarkozy might call for the creation of a new international body to oversee the Internet, this idea was apparently rejected.

Rod Beckstrom, chief executive of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, which oversees the Internet address system, gave qualified support to Mr. Sarkozy’s

prescriptions, saying the mix of public- and private-sector groups that oversee the global network needed to cooperate more closely.

“To keep the Internet open and unified, the multi-stakeholder community needs to build better relationships with government,” Mr. Beckstrom said. But he added that he thought efforts to control the content of the Internet would prove futile: “I think there are a lot of global leaders trying to grasp at air.”

Eric E. Schmidt, the executive chairman of Google, said technology, rather than regulation, could take care of many of the challenges facing the Internet, including potential limits on capacity as more and more video traffic and other bandwidth-heavy content passes through telecommunications networks.

“Before we decide there is a regulatory solution, let’s ask if there’s a technological solution,” he said. “We will move faster than any of these governments, let alone all of them together.”