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**Eleven Privacy and Civil Liberties Groups Urge U.S.
to Uphold Privacy Values in E.U. Negotiations**

U.S. groups call on E.U. allies to press for strong privacy protections

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Eleven American privacy and civil liberties groups asked the U.S. government today to protect privacy and civil liberties and not to undermine those fundamental rights in high-level negotiations that are underway with the European Union over the sharing of personal information. In letters to President Obama and Senators John Kerry and Richard Lugar – the chair and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – the groups stressed the significance of these negotiations for the privacy of individuals around the world, including Americans. The groups include the American Civil Liberties Union, Center for Digital Democracy, Consumer Federation of American, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Liberty Coalition.

“As information technology advances, it is crucial that we update our privacy laws in order to maintain the privacy that our civilization has valued for centuries,” the groups wrote in their letter to the president. “Much of the world – including countries in Asia and elsewhere – will be looking to this agreement as a benchmark, so it will be a crucial determinant of evolving global standard practices. It would be a betrayal of American values for our government to fail to uphold privacy in this pact, and it would not serve the long-term interests of the people of the United States.”

“We regard this as an issue of the highest priority,” the groups wrote.

At issue are ongoing high-level negotiations for an “umbrella” agreement on information sharing concerning all matters related to “terrorism” – which itself has become an infinitely elastic term – and national security. This overarching agreement would govern specific agreements on topics such as airline passenger name records, the monitoring of international financial transactions (SWIFT), and any other agreements, present and future, that involve the exchange of data between governments. As this umbrella agreement is being negotiated, there are separate negotiations for “umbrella” rules for personal commercial consumer privacy.

The U.S. privacy groups have reached out to their European counterparts – privacy and civil liberties NGOs – and are working with them to see that the strongest possible agreement is reached – one that reflects the broader interests of both populations, rather than, as their letter to President Obama put it, “the narrow, questionable desires of bureaucratic security agencies for ever more data about individuals.”

In their letters, the groups expressed fear that the United States would pressure the E.U. into weakening its own comparatively strong protections of privacy and other fundamental rights, rather than strengthening American privacy rules. The groups urged compliance with the

Fair Information Practices, a set of principles that are regarded around the world as the human-rights gold standard for the protection of data privacy.

The groups asked President Obama to “stand behind these principles, which were originally formulated here before they spread around the world.” They asked Senators Kerry and Lugar to “carefully track” the negotiations, including holding hearings on the issues at stake, and help ensure that they do not undermine privacy.

The letters were signed by 11 groups, including: American Civil Liberties Union, Center for Digital Democracy, Consumer Federation of America, Consumer Watchdog, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Friends of Privacy USA, Identity Project, Liberty Coalition, Patient Privacy Rights, World Privacy Forum and 511Campaign.org.

The letters are available online at <http://www.democraticmedia.org>

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