**Press Release**

PRAGUE, 27 May 2014 **- Czech Internet companies protest against Google and are ready to defend themselves**

Google's actions damage the Czech Internet sector, which is prepared to take defensive measures. The steps taken and planned for this purpose were presented at today's press conference of the Association for Internet Advertising (SPIR), which represents the most significant Czech Internet content providers, media agencies and other Internet market entities.

‘Google is in many ways an admirable company with great services and for years has played a key role in the growth of the Internet’, says SPIR chairman Ján Simkanič. ‘Recently, however, the company’s actions have begun to damage local Internet companies in the Czech Republic and elsewhere in Europe, including many members of our Association. Google increasingly makes use of foreign work and provides users misleading information in order to get the greatest benefit for itself’.

Czech subjects are annoyed the most by the Google Images service, which since 2013 has displayed searched images in extremely large ‘views’, often in their original resolution. In practice, the company offers users foreign content without compensating its creators and owners and without at least encouraging users to visit the source page. Another problem is the preferential treatment given to its own specialized services such as Google Shopping in Google searches. ‘Users often mistakenly believe that Google offers them the best results of natural searches’, explains Jan Vetyška, the director of the Association for Electronic Commerce (APEK). ‘The truth is that users can hardly distinguish between a natural search result and an ad. What’s more, the advertising system favours certain services and retailers, threatening the existence of the others’.

SPIR is therefore participating in the anti-trust proceedings against Google led by the European Commission. The Association also calls on the Czech government to take measures to protect the Czech Internet and thus put pressure on the EU’s executive body to decide in June whether to give the green light to the unacceptable practices of the world’s largest search engine. In that case, the SPIR would challenge Google’s activities in the Czech courts and is ready to launch an information campaign aimed at the public to clearly explain the problems Google is causing.

From a long-term perspective, a positive ruling by the European Commission would represent a serious complication for the Czech Internet economy and in all likelihood would lead to the demise of many smaller Internet firms (e-shops, media) while also weakening larger ones. Such effects would impact not only the domestic economy and employment but also the competitiveness of the Czech Republic. Internet users would get search results that are in the best interests of Google, not necessarily those best for themselves. ‘It's unacceptable that Google acts with greater respect for the German and French markets, where the company takes some measures to limit harm to the competition. We trust that the European Commission will not allow discrimination against countries based on their economic and political strength’, adds Simkanič.

SPIR, which is currently made up of sixty members, is a professional association that has been involved in Internet advertising since 2000. In addition to operating uniform, widely-respected research of Internet traffic and the socio-demographic profile of Internet visitors known as NetMonitor, the Association also runs the Internet advertising monitoring project AdMonitoring, organizes the IAC Internet marketing conference, provides expert analyses of the development of the Internet market in the Czech Republic, and is a self-regulator audiovisual and copyrighted content on the Internet. The Association also oversees the self-regulatory framework for online behavioural advertising (OBA) in the country.

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