

Headline English

2011, week 4 *Learn English through reading on current world affairs*

1 **Timothy Garton Ash**

2 **Will technology set the world free?**

3 original at:

4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/19/tunisia-revolution-twitter-facebook>

5 'The Kleenex Revolution'? Somehow I think not. Unless, that is, you follow
6 Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi. In a televised denunciation of the
7 popular uprising that has deposed his friendly neighbouring dictator, he
8 ranted: "Even you, my Tunisian brothers, you may be reading this
9 Kleenex and empty talk on the internet." (Kleenex is how Gaddafi refers to
10 WikiLeaks.) "Shall we become the victims of Facebook and Kleenex and
11 YouTube?" To which, since the speaker is another dictator, I devoutly
12 hope that the answer is "Yes". Let Kleenex wipe them away, one after
13 another, like blobs of phlegm.

14 But will it? What contribution do websites, social networks and mobile
15 phones make to popular protest movements?

16 A remarkable young Belarussian activist-analyst, Evgeny Morozov, has
17 just challenged the lazy assumptions behind such politico-journalistic tags
18 in a book called *The Net Delusion*. Morozov has fun deriding and
19 demolishing the naively optimistic visions which seem to accompany the
20 emergence of every new communications technology. (I remember an
21 article a quarter-century ago entitled "The fax will set you free".)

22 He shows that claims for the contribution of Twitter and Facebook to
23 Iran's green movement were exaggerated. These new technologies can
24 also be used by dictators to watch, entrap and persecute their opponents.
25 Above all, he insists that the internet does not suspend the usual workings
26 of power politics. It is politics that decides whether the dictator will be
27 toppled, as in Tunisia, or the bloggers beaten and locked up, as in
28 Morozov's native Belarus.

29 The internet alone won't set anyone free. Between north Africa and
30 Belarus, we are learning just what it can and can't do

Questions

- 1) What hopes regarding the contribution of technology to the promotion of freedom across the world does the author express in paragraph 1? Does the author really believe what he hopes for will happen?
- 2) What does the author's play on the word "Kleenex" used by Mr. Gadaffi consist of, and what is "Kleenex" anyway?
- 3) Does Evgeny Morozov share the general optimism about technology helping democracy?
- 4) Is the internet the first technology to be hailed as the savior of democracy?
- 5) According to Morozov, can the impact of modern communication technology on the development of democracy be considered completely positive?
- 6) What does, according to Morozov, ultimately decide the outcome of a power struggle?
- 7) Paraphrase 'the dictator will be toppled' (lines 26 and 27).
- 8) What is the overall conclusion of the article extract presented here?
- 9) What is your opinion on the contribution of technology to the spreading of democracy?

Vocabulary

challenge (line 17) – to refuse to accept that something is right, fair, or legal

tag (line 17) – a word or phrase which is used to describe a person, group, or thing, but which is often unfair or not correct:

emergence (line 20) – when something begins to be known or noticed

suspend (line 25) – to cause to cease for a time from operation or effect, as a law, rule, privilege, service; stop

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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