

European Dialogue on Internet Governance 2008 – 2020

# **Media and Content: A Decade of Change**

## Coping with the digital shake-up

Yrjö Länsipuro





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## About EuroDIG

Launched in 2008, EuroDIG, the European Dialogue on Internet Governance, is a unique annual event that brings together Internet stakeholders from throughout Europe (and beyond), and from across the spectrum of government, industry, civil society, academia and the technical community. Stakeholders and participants work over the course of each year

to develop, in a bottom-up fashion, a dynamic agenda that explores the pressing issues surrounding how we develop, use, regulate and govern the Internet. EuroDIG participants come away with broader, more informed perspectives on these issues and new partners in responding to the challenges of the information society.

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## Foreword: A decade of discussion on media issues



*Noel Curran – Director General,  
European Broadcasting Union (EBU)*

Thank you EuroDIG for producing this excellent report and giving us the opportunity to reflect on the past ten years. We have achieved a lot together and we look forward to continued collaboration with you, because together we can achieve so much more.

When we set out on this journey we couldn't predict how the internet would develop. However, we were convinced that only through collaboration and multi-stakeholder dialogue could we ensure that free and independent media and reliable news and information were not completely sidelined by global media interests, or governments seeking to limit freedom of expression. Sharing this joint purpose, we worked to ensure internet gov-

ernance for the benefit of all Europe's citizens.

Over the past ten years global platforms grew and increased their power enormously. Although their influence has been hugely positive across societies all around the world, it is increasingly negative, inflicting lasting damage on our societies. EuroDIG's second conference, hosted by the EBU, already recognised that access to content and the quality and diversity of content were crucial. It was agreed that a working group should consider how to protect unrestricted user access to online content, applications and services.

Back in 2009, we had yet to imagine just how powerful the algorithms deployed by tech

giants could become. Global online platforms have evolved from distributors to powerful gatekeepers, disrupting the way European content is displayed, attributed and remunerated. This cannot continue. EU moves to develop regulation to commit platform operators to transparency and accountability are most welcome. Without such rules, future generations will be unable to find and have access to trusted content and plurality of views.

We commend the European Commission for its commitment to taking a rigorous approach to platforms with the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA). But the devil will be in the detail. The Act will have a heavily debated journey through the legislative process and coming up with effective rules will take time.

We must all keep a strong focus on advocating for sustainable and healthy public service media. We have to ensure that the dominance of global platforms does not restrict consumers' access to the very content they most trust, value and rely on. News offered by public service media is consistently ranked among the most valued. And we've seen the importance of that this year with the reach of their evening news bulletins increasing by 2.5 times during the peak days of the coronavirus crisis.

In addition, we must ensure the platforms' responsibility is in line with their ability to in-

fluence public opinion. On the one hand platforms need to step up their game on illegal and harmful content online, while in parallel safeguards are needed against platforms taking down legitimate content from media providers without warning or explanation. This is key to maintain trust in the media.

The EBU is proud to have worked with EuroDIG to highlight the importance of media pluralism, quality content and independent journalism. As reflected in the report, EuroDIG has always made it clear that these issues should not be abandoned, allowing market forces and the interests of new players unfettered domination of the media landscape.

We share the belief that high quality trusted news and information fosters democracy and enables citizens to make informed choices and actively participate in society. Disinformation undermines trust, spreads fear and divides communities. As pointed out in the report, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights this issue: faced with a deluge of misinformation citizens either believe nothing or believe anything. Neither will help resolve the crisis. It is clear that global platform operators have a major role to play. Ensuring better access will help tackle disinformation. By giving visibility to diverse media on platforms, particularly media of general public interest, citizens will be better informed.

Down through the years EuroDIG has always said that Europe needs a fair and transparent online environment if we are to protect its digital sovereignty and ensure future generations can continue to enjoy access to trusted news and information and a rich plurality of views.

Over the past ten years we have established a solid foundation, effective multi-

stakeholder collaboration and a great partnership with EuroDIG. This, I am confident, will help us achieve our common goal of committing global online platforms to transparency and accountability, so the next generation can continue to benefit from strong and diverse media that upholds our common values and empowers our citizens.



## Introduction



*Yrjö Lämsipuro – Subject Matter Expert for media and content*

The thirteen years of the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) cover a transformative period in the development of the Internet. Quantitative growth figures were not as impressive as before 2008, when a corresponding time period had seen the expansion of the Internet user base from a few dozens of millions to 1.4 billion. In relative terms, its further growth to about 4 billion users in 2020 was more modest, although it crossed the half-way mark towards covering all mankind. But perhaps more important than sheer numbers, the impact of the Internet revolution truly changed the world during the latter period. The Internet-based economy reached spectacular heights, and its paragons

dwarfed yesterday's industrial giants. Social networks have given hundreds of millions of people the feel of living in a global village. At the same time, however, unintended consequences reared their ugly head and the Internet became a more dangerous place. The hype cooled off and disillusionment set in as opportunities began to look like challenges, and hopes turned into fears. Information society enthusiasts had to concede that “the future ain't what it used to be” but there is no turning back. Whatever the Internet has become and whatever it will develop into, the world cannot exist without it. What used to be nice to have is now a must-have despite the downsides and risks.

The media sector was one of the first industries to be shaken by the winds of change whipped up by the Internet at the turn of the millennium. During the second decade, it was hit by a perfect storm and the statistics bear witness to turmoil and transformation. Audiences, advertising revenues, resources and societal influence shifted from the “old” to “new” media. Journalism as a profession was left struggling and tens of thousands of its practitioners were rendered unemployed. Content was still king but now it was created by individual users (or murky operatives posing as such) and social media platforms became kingdoms and soon empires. New words and phrases such as *post-truth*, *fake news*, *alternative facts* and *information pollution* appeared in languages, editorials and in speeches at Internet-related conferences, including EuroDIG.

How did the succession of annual EuroDIG sessions from 2008 to 2020 reflect these developments? Were they seen in the rear-view mirror only, or was there an attempt to anticipate what was ahead, around the next corner?

After reviewing the various annual EuroDIG Messages, recordings and transcripts of its sessions, and my personal recollections and notes, I have endeavoured to trace how EuroDIG has dealt with topics related to media and content year by year. I have been heavily involved in

the EuroDIG process since its beginning, so this is a report by a participant observer, not a neutral outsider.

The choice of topics and sub-topics within the media and content category reflected proposals received from the European Internet community in response to the annual requests for themes. Typically, a few dozen proposals every year would relate to media and content. These were assessed and adopted at planning meetings convened by EuroDIG’s Secretariat with the participation of experts in the relevant fields, as proposals for plenaries, workshops or other types of sessions, each planned and managed by an organising team. This process is an organic part of EuroDIG which makes it much more than simply an annual conference.

Over the years proposals for the EuroDIG programme’s media and content segment have fallen roughly into three main baskets.

The first basket covered the highlights of the transition from analogue to digital, from traditional mass media to personalised, user-chosen and largely user-generated content, produced and delivered in a myriad of different ways and mostly free of geographic or regulatory constraints. This revolution was first viewed with a generally benevolent curiosity. The opportunity to receive immediate digital feedback from readers, listeners and viewers,

instead of in the past as letters to the editor or phone-ins to the radio and television stations, was sincerely welcomed by established media actors. However, the consolidation of new media into large global platforms and their inexorable growth into dominance soon raised concerns about the sustainability of traditional media business models. What had been thought to be just the tail of the established media would soon be wagging the entire dog.

The need for improvements in digital media literacy was a second perennial category of is-

ues, closely related to the previous one. This last line of defence for ordinary Internet users was seen as increasingly urgent and important, especially as disinformation started to spread throughout social media networks.

A third basket of frequently raised issues related to copyright. Its traditional forms were felt by many to be out of place – “copywrong” – in the Internet world. Discussions continued year after year, in parallel with the process of copyright reform in the European Union.

## Strasbourg 2008

The inaugural EuroDIG annual multi-stakeholder forum was held in Strasbourg on 20 – 21 October 2008. It was organised – or perhaps we might say improvised given the short notice – just five months after the idea of a multi-stakeholder European Internet forum was born. It adopted, with some modifications, the original programme template of the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) established in 2006 which had not treated media and content issues as a separate topic. However, they were touched upon, albeit tangen-

tially from the perspective of security, in the Strasbourg outcome, the “EuroDIG Messages.” Under the heading “Security, privacy and openness”, Internet users were reminded about the need “to be more aware of the opportunities and risks of their online expression and communication”. The treatment of personal information by social networking sites was considered to be a common issue of concern, especially with regard to young people.

## Geneva 2009

Hosted by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in Geneva, EuroDIG’s second annual meeting (14 – 15 September 2009) devoted a lot more attention to media and content issues. There were two plenary sessions with slightly overlapping topics: **“Access to content online: regulation, business models, quality and freedom of expression”** (Plenary 1) and **“Online social media – governance is-**

**sues from a user perspective”** (Plenary 2). There was also a workshop on **“Effective media literacy for the end user”** (Workshop 5) and one with the forward-looking theme of the **“Internet of 2020 – future services, future challenges”** (Workshop 6) which included an extensive discussion on the future of social media.

**Plenary 1** focused on the following questions:

- How did user-generated content influence the diversity and quality of information and content?
- How would future business models look with regard to quality, information and content?
- What would be the role of public service information, content and media in the online environment?
- How should media and online content regulation develop in order to serve users' demands?
- From a user perspective, what online information and content would in future have to be paid for and what would be free?

These were all excellent questions but perhaps understandably there were no definitive answers. Participants did agree at least that Internet users should be able to access the content of their choice, in line with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights relating to freedom of expression. It was also suggested that a multistakeholder working group should be established under the auspices of the Council of Europe to prepare guidance on protecting and fostering unrestricted user access to online content, applications and services.

The EBU and relevant stakeholders were asked to work on the concept of quality content: what it means, and how to produce and diffuse it.

**Plenary 2** focused on freedom of expression from to the user's point of view, including the right of reply and other means of redress. The session covered a wide range of emerging critical issues including the following.

The participants tried to identify who was a typical user of social media and to understand his/her needs, desires and online behaviour. There was a call for interactive and creative opportunities for users.

Relevant social phenomena were also examined. The feeling of a safe community or "bubble" of friends was considered to be addictive, especially for young people who as a consequence willingly concede their rights to privacy in exchange for inclusion.

Media literacy was underlined as an important – but not the only – response to the challenge of online social networks. The need for concerted efforts to improve formal and informal education in this respect was recognised.

The responsibilities of providers of services and technologies were also considered. The business models behind the provision of their apparently "free" services were examined and compared with the self-regulatory privacy

policies that these companies claimed to follow.

The importance of quality content and services, and the relationship of trust between providers and users was emphasised.

The need for terms and conditions offered by social network providers to be made clearer, simpler and more transparent was stressed. It was agreed that possible sanctions (e.g. the cutting of access to services) would need to be proportional to the infractions, and respect the human rights of users.

It was also suggested that the major social networks should engage in Internet governance discussions.

**Workshop 5** took issue with the need for effective media literacy for the end-user and focused on identifying relevant media education initiatives in Europe. The discussion in the workshop revealed gaps in media education and agreed there was a need for a new set of information skills. The most salient takeaways

concerned improving teacher training, creating synergies between formal and informal education, and developing a human rights-based European model of digital literacy.

**Workshop 6** concluded its vision of the Internet in 2020 with the following auspicious prediction:

“Social networks will likely gain in importance. Facebook-style networks may develop towards virtual “facerooms” where “friends meet and spend time together” thereby adding pressure on legislation and rules to become more technology-neutral and modern. Twitter-like services could become more prominent. Peer-filtering and peer-reviewing could become more important. A stable legal framework which addresses human rights, such as the right to privacy, should be implemented in order in particular to avoid or reduce the risk of civil society losing confidence in new technological possibilities.”

## Madrid 2010

At the third EuroDIG in Madrid (29 – 30 April 2010), media and content issues were the topic of Plenary 1: **“Online content policies in Europe – where are we going?”** and were touched upon during two workshops: Workshop 3: **“Internet as a platform for innovation and development of new business models”** and Workshop 5: **“Children and social media – opportunities and risks, rules and responsibilities”**.

The first part of **Plenary 1** dealt with questions of liability, i.e. who was responsible for what on the Internet. The second part covered the issue of blocking content by the Internet industry.

The following questions were asked: What direction was European content policy heading in? Was there a common direction? Was it on the right track, and if not, what should be changed and how?

Judging from the discussion, the liability of Internet service providers (ISPs) seemed to have a stable legal framework. However, determining whether or not they had “actual knowledge” of illegal content made matters more complicated.

It was pointed out that users were increasingly held liable for their online activities, e.g.

for copyright infringements and new sanctions were being used such as cutting off access to the Internet.

With regard to the blocking of Internet content, reference was made to contemporary legislative initiatives to block child pornography websites and to tackling the problem at the source by taking down websites. It was noted that procedural safeguards and minimum requirements when applying blocking mechanisms were being developed.

It was pointed out that a common policy direction exists in Europe. The EU Directive 2000/31/EC on electronic commerce set out rules for the liability of providers of information society services. With regard to users’ liability for their online activity, no common rules exist, however.

On the question of blocking, it was apparent that a variety of national level practices existed, ranging from a “no blocking at all” policy to quite drastic measures to remove online content.

Turning to the question of whether Europe was on the right track, the workshop noted that there was no clear common or holistic strategy that could be identified in the two specific areas of liability and blocking. A crucial

question was that it had become increasingly unclear – in particular with regard to user-generated content – what “actual knowledge of illegal activity or information” meant which could lead to the liability of the service provider. Some workshop participants claimed that the courts – not the service providers – should decide upon the legality of the content. Some were afraid that increasing the liability of service providers could lead to over-cautious behaviour which would be in conflict with the freedom of expression of users. Several interventions questioned the proportionality of sanctions for illegal online activities.

With regard to blocking, a number of participants questioned the practice in general, referring to other methods of combating illegal activities at the source of the problem. Some argued that in the vast majority of cases, take-down could be achieved within hours, even in cross-border cases. In addition, practical problems, such as the efficiency of blocking and the probability of “over-blocking,” needed to be taken into consideration. Participants who were in favour of blocking mechanisms referred to them as “a second best solution”: While taking down the content and hunting down the criminals should be the priority, blocking had proven to be fast and effective. There was general agreement that the proportionality of any blocking measure should be

ensured in relation to the freedom to receive and impart information.

Many of the innovations and new business models discussed in [Workshop 3](#) related to online content. The digitalisation of cultural and heritage content was generally supported. The challenge was how to develop sustainable business models where creators were remunerated and a return on investment was assured. Specific points and proposals made during the workshop debate included:

- European legislation should be harmonised, suppressing territorial boundaries and obstacles such as licensing rights at the national or regional level.
- Stop the “old” Europe from being “old”: if opportunities are to be created for European companies, it must be possible to promote projects for global markets.
- Access to online content should be made possible from any country or territory if national IP-based access restrictions were lifted. A space or platform should be created to promote dialogue and cooperation agreements between the different national stakeholders.
- New business models should explore and develop “mash-up” digital derivative works (in contrast with the direct translation of analogue content in the digital



world), and conclude agreements between content creators, telco operators and content aggregators in order to share revenue.

**Workshop 5** considered the opportunities and risks in children's use of social media, and discussed what kind of rules would be needed and who should impose them. The following conclusions were drawn:

- The inclusion of the voice of children and young people was considered to be beneficial in influencing public discourse.
- It was seen as a risk that many parents were not capable of teaching their children how to use the Internet safely.

- It was often the case that the same young people are susceptible to harm online as offline.
- It was also argued by some participants that an excessively protective approach to children's use of the Internet can be counter-productive.

In conclusion, the workshop proposed that media literacy should be one of the priority issues of Internet governance, and that parents and teachers needed support in addressing this need.

## Belgrade 2011

By the time EuroDIG held its fourth meeting in Belgrade (30 – 31 May 2011), the Internet had acquired a new role on the world stage, applauded by many, detested by others. Unhindered by national or physical borders, the Internet was seen as carrying the message of human rights and liberal democracy, helping to topple political tyrants of both the left and the right of the political spectrum. In some

countries, digital statecraft was elevated to the forefront of diplomacy.

The title of the second part of the opening session – **“Internet for democracy. Tool, or trap, or what?”** – reflected the heady atmosphere of the Arab Spring and other manifestations of the Internet's revolutionary potential while also warning that the new tools of the

Internet age were available to the enemies of democracy too.

Similarly, several other EuroDIG sessions addressed wider social and economic themes. Plenary 3 discussed **“New media, freedoms and responsibilities”** and Workshop 5 focused on **“Freedom of expression and hate speech”**. The theme of Workshop 6 was **“Digital literacy towards economic and social development”** and Workshop 7 addressed the challenge of **“Cybercrime and social networking sites – a new threat?”**.

In his video keynote speech at the **opening session**, the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Carl Bildt, delivered a strong plea for Europeans to put the freedom of the Internet first and not to over-regulate, as seemed to be happening even in democratic societies: “Our emphasis should be on the freedom issues of the net. There are other voices in the world that are pressing in a different direction. We should be on our guard against those particular tendencies. And I believe we need to develop as unified and as strong European voice on these issues as we can.”

Carl Bildt also pointed out that the Internet paved the way for freedom of information and made it much harder for dictatorships and authoritarian regimes to control it. Blocking and filtering of content should be avoided. While

some governments had become more sophisticated in resorting to these methods, it was emphasised that such behavior was not consistent with European standards and principles, and was therefore unacceptable. Solutions must reflect European standards and principles, as well as the plurality of European societies. Restricting rights and freedoms could not be the answer to public problems like malicious content. The way forward was rather to address these issues in society. A free society should retain a free Internet.

During the debate in the opening session it was argued that the Internet was a valuable tool for helping countries and societies in transition to promote democratisation. The role of law enforcement had to be reconsidered so that principles like openness were not endangered and abused for security reasons. Debates on this issue needed to include all stakeholders and parties.

Youth representatives underlined that the Internet was not just about the benefits promised by new technology, but about what people used it for – this could be good or bad. New options like e-voting systems might be useful tools but first of all more effective public participation in democracy must be promoted and achieved.

Discussions pointed out the need for more public awareness of the positive and negative

aspects of social networks, particularly the privacy implications and potential for interference.

Taking note of significant changes in the media landscape, including the dissemination, exchange and personalisation of information, **Plenary 3** concluded that users' media consumption habits and behaviours were changing. There was a clear indication that the declining circulation of print media was due to its being replaced by access to free and interactive digital media, especially by younger users. The feeling of communicating with the whole world was underlined as a unique feature of the new media.

Trust in and the reliability of online content were considered to be key aspects of media in the future, noting in particular the trade-off between providing personal data to third parties and access to apparently "free" media content. In this context, media literacy was considered with regard to the verification of sources as being trusted and reliable, consistent with other professional media standards.

It was stressed that the regulation of media freedoms and responsibilities should be limited, flexible and proportionate, with particular regard for human rights. Some participants questioned the need for new regulation and, as a corollary, placing the burden on con-

sumers to decide on trust in media content. A new Council of Europe proposed recommendation on a new notion of media was discussed as a way forward in identifying and distinguishing the graduated freedoms and responsibilities for the emerging media and intermediaries.

**Workshop 5** noted that it was difficult to resolve the issue of freedom of expression and hate speech. Different national definitions of hate speech were referred to in the context of internationally-accepted principles.

It was pointed out that the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime drawn up by the Council of Europe was open to signatories of non-member states. The Council had launched specific initiatives to promote restrictions on hate speech and tolerance education, with greater emphasis on the latter. The role of education, rather than of legislation, was also highlighted, as was the importance of educating children from a much younger age.

Attempts to make service providers and other intermediaries responsible for preventing hate speech were seen as a disturbing development. The South-East Europe television news regional exchange, ERNO, was presented as an example of successful cooperation among broadcasters in how to identify and address the problem of hate speech.

Stakeholders discussing digital literacy in **Workshop 6** discussed the continued existence of the digital divide, firstly with regard to access (infrastructure, technical equipment and devices and geographical differences); and secondly regarding use by different groups of people (children, youth, parents, teachers etc).

The workshop focused on what should be done to reduce these gaps, as well as addressing tomorrow's challenges. The overall goal was to make everyone literate online, able to act independently and to make informed choices and decisions.

The issue of access was highly important and linked to social inclusion. One solution for capacity building in Europe had been to establish "telecentres" as service providers for people to access computers and the Internet.

Regarding Internet use, it was agreed that youth organisations should be incentivised to offer more opportunities for young people. Peer-to-peer learning programmes needed to be extended (e.g. parents-parents, teachers-teachers, young people). School curricula needed to be redesigned in order to empower children and young people; minimum e-literacy standards needed to be defined and agreed.

Tomorrow's challenges lay within the increased use of Internet technology and applications on mobile devices. How was society going to deal with the transparency aspects of these applications and services?

There was discussion in **Workshop 7** about the legitimate collection, use and transfer by social media networks of aggregated personal data and their interception by third parties for criminal purposes. Identity theft as a crime was discussed with regard to the application of the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime.

Reclaiming one's personal identity, in particular the ability of users to complain or seek redress across borders (within the EU and beyond) was underlined. The provision of hotlines and more effective dialogue with the providers of social networks were also referred to.

There was also discussion about the lack of awareness of users – including children and their parents – and the need to empower them with regard to the configuration of their privacy settings to protect their personal security and data. The "right to be forgotten" on social networks was also discussed as a means to empower users in managing their online identities.

## Stockholm 2012

The fifth EuroDIG meeting in Stockholm (14 – 15 June 2012) bore the mark of Sweden’s strong commitment to the freedom and openness of the Internet. This was against the backdrop of actions by the U.S.A. during the previous year to strengthen the extraterritorial reach of their copyright regime (SOPA, PIPA, ACTA etc. ...).

The key message of Plenary 1 on **“Intellectual property rights in the digital environment”** was its conclusion that “intellectual property rights and the right to freedom of expression and access to information regardless of frontiers in the digital environment, cannot be resolved solely by traditional approaches, laws, rules and regulations, nor by individual stakeholders such as governments. There was a need to explore new ways of reconciling the interests of rights-holders and users, especially young people, who wanted to share information and content in a lawful manner. Open access and the public interest were key concerns in this respect.

The only session directly related to the media was Workshop 6 on **“Digital broadcast merging with Internet services – How will the**

**media ecosystem change?”** which sought to answer three questions. Firstly, how traditional media would cope in the new world. Secondly, how content would be accessed and whether the Internet would remain “free.” And thirdly, how journalism would need to adapt and change in the world of new media.

On the first topic, the panelists (who were mostly Swedish) saw the coexistence of traditional and new media in a positive light. It was valued as an interactive relationship from which the former derived benefits in terms of crowdsourcing and feedback. Another feature of the new landscape was that politicians and businesses could use social media to bypass traditional media – for example tweeting statements instead of holding a press conference.

When it came to access to and distribution of the media, old and new technologies competed in developing their business models, even clashing occasionally. However, there was consensus agreement that markets would resolve the situation and that no new regulation was needed.

As to what would happen to journalism and its practitioners, journalists were getting new

tools and needed to master them. They were also seen in new roles as moderators or referees of social media. A journalism student participating in the workshop expressed it this way: “The role of a journalist, as I see it in the future, is that you have to be someone that you can trust. From information that is published by journalists, you should know that you have both sides of a story, maybe three sides of a story.”

Even though the student said it was totally against what he had learned at the journalism school, he also expressed the hope of less sensationalism in the future: “We write headlines that generate clicks. I think that in the future, we have to take a step back. I hear from friends that, oh, you are going to be a journalist. Oh, you just write that stuff that clicks. Lucky for us we have wiki leaks that do the job. That’s how my generation looks at journalists ...”

## Lisbon 2013

In its media and content discussion, the sixth EuroDIG in Lisbon (20 – 21 June 2013) decided to follow the money trail: “**Who makes money with content? Who should pay for content?**” was the theme of Plenary 6. Related topics “**Culture, copyright and the future of access to digital content in Europe**” were the issues discussed in Workshop 2. “**Cross-border hate speech and defamation – living together online**” was the theme of Workshop 8.

**Plenary 6** put the question quite bluntly: who makes money with whose content, on whose terms? And who pays for this content? The

session agreed that while the answers to these questions had been relatively uncomplicated in the pre-digital world, the evolution of the Internet had led to significant changes in terms of production, distribution and access to content, thus making it more difficult to find straightforward answers. Technological changes had created disruptions in the content-related business, led to an increase in the quantity of available content, and created new possibilities for users to access it.

When the concept of copyright was originally introduced, its primary aim was to reward writers and artists, while at the same

time allowing wider access to content and enabling the progress of science. However, the new realities of the online space have overwhelmed the copyright model and created challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the interests of all parties – notably the content producers, publishers and consumers – are taken into account and protected.

Three main issues were raised in the plenary discussion in relation to the existing copyright model:

- The matter of choice: while there was a need to allow creators to have an economic gain from their creative activities, it was necessary to take into account the fact that there were creators who did not necessarily want to make money out of their content and they should be entitled to exercise their choice;
- To what extent did the existing models allow access to content, under what circumstances, and with what limitations and exceptions;
- To what extent did content creators really benefit from the economic value of their content?

Some participants emphasised that there were alternatives to copyright which offered

solutions for some of these challenges, one of them being the provision of free licences by the Creative Commons initiative. Opposing views maintained that such solutions did not address the situation of people who needed to support themselves from their creative activities. The question, however, is whether to support the current model or move towards something new.

For some participants, a suitable approach would be to have all stakeholders work on best practice recommendations which would eventually form the basis of national or international legislation. This would help ensure fairness throughout value chains. For effective solutions, collaborative approaches among all stakeholders were needed in order to make such solutions effective.

Finally, a question was raised as to whether the copyright debate followed traditional paths too narrowly and whether for example the circulation of the content rather than the content itself was the problem.

Starting from the premise that ability to access, share and re-use cultural content was in the public interest, and that the current European copyright framework was not providing the best support, **Workshop 2** discussed which issues would need to be addressed in any reform of EU copyright law. The conclu-

sion was drawn that to be pioneers, it was necessary to figure out how to create a copyright regime that encouraged innovation, with clear boundaries between commercial and non-commercial use.

**Workshop 8** discussed how to address hate speech and defamation in shared cross-border online spaces where not only different national laws but also different social values applied. The questions raised in this workshop were:

- Were the current tools for handling cross-border hate speech and defamation effective?
- Could national laws or terms of service deal efficiently with cross-border online defamation and how do they interface?
- Did we have the tools and frameworks to handle diversity in common cross-border online-spaces?

The discussion produced the following main conclusions:

- Risk of fragmentation: the current piecemeal solutions in different national jurisdictions for tackling the problem of hate speech and defamation created the dan-

ger of cyberspace fragmenting as a result of for example techniques like ISP blocks and Geo-IP filtering that rejected connections coming to or from a geographic location and ISP blocks.

- Importance of transparency: companies were dealing with the definition and restriction of free speech by prohibiting hate speech and defamation in their terms of service. Therefore, measures taken by these entities – especially takedown procedures – needed to be fully transparent for users in order to ensure fairness.
- The role of education in the prevention of hate speech and defamation was important as demonstrated by the Council of Europe’s “No Hate Speech” youth campaign.
- Hotlines and safer Internet centres were the most commonly available tools for Internet users in Europe to combat online hate speech and defamation.
- The importance of multi-stakeholder process: the problems of hate speech and defamation must be addressed through open and inclusive dialogue in order to identify best practices and to avoid disproportionate policy and legal responses.



## Berlin 2014

The seventh EuroDIG event was held in Berlin (12 – 13 June 2014) under the perhaps ominous heading “**Digital society at stake – Europe and the future of the Internet**” in the aftermath of Edward Snowden’s revelations about instances of mass surveillance by the US National Security Agency (NSA). Media and content themes were not a major focus for the forum but the perennial topic of “**Copyright in the digital age**” continued to be debated in Workshop 6 with the following contribution to the EuroDIG messages that year:

- The intended purpose and the current function of copyright laws needed to be re-considered.
- Copyright laws permitted different usages online and offline. Considering the current digital reality, the same rights that apply offline should also apply online.
- Multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration to elaborate on new alternative copyright regulation was generally encouraged.

## Sofia 2015

The eighth meeting of EuroDIG in Sofia (4 – 5 December 2015) assessed the progress of “**Media in the digital age**” in Plenary 1 and “**EU copyright reform**” in Workshop 6.

The outcomes of **Plenary 1** were summarised by the rapporteur as follows:

There had been a massive transformation of the media ecosystem and how people use

the media. We faced a proliferation of information and media services. Young people rely less on traditional media and more on new media, including social media. The customisation of information delivery had a narrowing effect which can allow global Internet companies to become gatekeepers for users. This raised issues of quality, diversity and reliability of information, as well as of trust. Partici-

participants held diverging views about whether this was raising or lowering the diversity and quality of media and journalism. The participants also explored questions concerning diversity and quality in media and journalism and highlighted the following:

1. Media regulation may need to be adapted to the digital age as it does not necessarily deliver media diversity and quality.
2. How do we ensure the diversity of information in the digital age? What standards are needed?
3. Do we need more regulation of new media and citizen journalism?
4. How can we enhance the protection and social responsibility of non-professional journalism?
5. Is the title of a journalist being undermined by citizen journalism?
6. Can millions of Internet users communicate with each other in a meaningful way?
7. Do we need a new concept of “public service journalism”?

8. Do we need public service search engines or at least public service algorithms? Many participants, including those from Eastern European countries, raised concerns about alarming developments regarding media freedom and the relations between their governments and the media.

The following messages from **Workshop 6** included a caveat that EuroDIG may not have a sufficiently broad enough framework for European copyright discussions:

1. Copyright covers a wide range of problems for a large range of different actors. Systematic discussion on overall issues is difficult.
2. Copyright is contentious and remains an area where consensus between all stakeholder groups is far away.
3. EuroDIG may not be the best platform to discuss how to further engage a broader public in the ongoing European debates.

## Brussels 2016

The ninth EuroDIG took place in Brussels (9 – 10 June 2016) when disruptive impacts of the Internet in the media and content sector were analysed in Workshop 1: **“Content is the king, revisited”**. A technical reality check about regulating content was undertaken in Workshop 3: **“Technical basics everyone should know before discussing online content control”**.

The title of **Workshop 1** was in reference to the 1996 essay by Bill Gates when he argued that *“Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet, just as it was in broadcasting.”* The workshop revisited the essay to find out whether his prediction had become reality and if yes, did it still hold true after all the Internet-induced transformations. The rapporteur outlined the main points of the discussion as follows:

- Who’s the king now: Platforms? Advertising? Money? Soundbites? Or content, but defined differently. Or down with the king, long live the people?
- Content can now be produced and distributed by “everybody” and recycled without checking facts. Information inflated by re-

cycling occupies space and pushes out other content.

- Do we need gatekeepers back? Or should some hierarchy be imposed on the information deluge? More information doesn’t lead to better informed people. Would quality control be needed?
- How to police hate speech? Media literacy training might help. But it should be made with an open mind. Angry speech is not hate speech.
- Code of conduct for big platforms. Unity of the net under U.S. law?
- Has the Internet been good for democracy? It has taken out the economic basis of quality journalism. Even if we like free content, there’s a price to pay.
- Content will be produced and producers should be paid, but the structures don’t necessarily remain the same.

The messages of **Workshop 3** were expressed in three concise sentences:

1. A networked system is defined by open and scalable standards (e.g. with regard to the domain name system, IPv4, IPv6).
2. The Internet’s architecture renders blocking of access technically infeasible.

3. Content control necessarily entails complex questions surrounding freedom of expression, the legitimate interest of law en-

forcement, and the rights of infrastructure providers to conduct business.

## Tallinn 2017

EuroDIG held its tenth meeting in Tallinn (6 – 7 June 2017). As the Secretariat noted in the summary report, there could not have been a better place to discuss the digital future and to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EuroDIG than in Estonia which is arguably the leading European country in its use of new online technologies and establishing new concepts such as digital citizenship.

On a more sombre note, Estonia had also had first-hand experience of being targeted by sustained and concentrated digital attacks, both in terms of threats to cybersecurity and malicious content. Against this background and in addition to other disturbing recent trends, Plenary 2 **“The Internet in the post-truth era”** assumed a particularly dark significance. Workshop 7 meanwhile continued the dialogue on copyright and discussed **“The EU’s copyright reform proposal – which impacts on users’ fundamental rights?”**

The rapporteur for **Plenary 2** summarised the main points of discussion as follows:

- “Fake news” had become a kind of buzzword and it was important to define what it was and what it was not. It was not simply bad journalism or news reporting that one didn’t agree with. “Fake news” was in fact not news but was information intentionally disseminated in order to spread confusion in society, or to discredit democracy or solely for economic gain.
- So-called “fake news” had fed the polarisation of societies and this in turn created more opportunities for disinformation. It disrupted the status of truth, undermined the value of objectivity and the principles of professional journalism. People who had felt constrained by objectivity who didn’t like and trust it, were emancipating themselves now that they had the tools. The information landscape was not verti-

cal any more. When the “old media” tried to check and correct user-generated stories, they in turn were accused of spreading “fake news.”

- New norms were not needed; instead existing ones should be implemented. Government regulation was not the way to solve the “fake news” problem, and could lead to the suppression of legitimate voices. Instead, existing mechanisms of self-regulation and co-regulation should be given a larger role; and new approaches should be discussed such as according public trustee media status to platforms which should become more accountable and transparent, e.g. about the standards they applied in different countries.
- Enhancing media literacy education was the most effective way of combating “fake news” and should be taken to new heights. Media literacy education should be seen as a political survival project for society, and a right for the individual, especially children. Skills and resources of journalists should also be enhanced.

The messages from **Workshop 7** identified problems with the new EU copyright reform proposals at that time:

- There were concerns about how technology revolutionised the commercial world and current business models, with particular regard to their incompatibility with new obligations (e.g. content-filtering technologies).
- There was consensus that imposing filtering obligations on intermediaries was a bad step that should be opposed.
- There was discussion about potential problems with automatic monitoring and whether this could affect other rights such as human rights.
- Reform proposals should address other rights such as freedom of panorama (the right to take photos or videos of public buildings and monuments without regard to the rights of their creators). This included the harmonisation of both non-commercial and commercial uses.
- The so-called “copyfighters” prepared a position paper reflecting the views of young people on modern copyright reform. They identified seven key areas in need of reform including: territoriality, geo-blocking, fair use, intermediaries, remix culture, education – open access and ancillary rights of media publishers.
- There was broad consensus that Article 13 of the draft directive was problematic; in particular there was uncertainty and concern about cultural heritage.
- There was a general consensus against geoblocking. However, it should be al-

- lowed for promotional purposes by artists timed with the release of content locally.
- A fair use exception to existing copyright exceptions should be future-proofed al-

though it was recognised that this would be very difficult.

- The importance of educating users on copyright was underlined.

## Tbilisi 2018

EuroDIG held its eleventh meeting in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi (5 – 6 June 2018). Sessions relating to media and content included Plenary 2: **“Information disorder: causes, risks and remedies”**; Workshop 1: **“Platform and data neutrality – Access to content”** and Workshop 10: **“Your freedom of expression vs. mine – who’s in control”**.

**Plenary 2** took forward the theme of so-called “fake news” from the previous year in Tallinn, with the opportunity to take into account a year of intense analysis and research by the Council of Europe and the European Union in particular. The key messages from the session were:

- Information disorder was much more than the crude description of “fake news”. It included a) misinformation when false information is shared but no harm is intended;

b) disinformation when false information is knowingly shared in order to cause harm; and c) malinformation, when genuine information is shared deliberately in order to cause harm.

- In order to find effective remedies, it was necessary to be clear about why disinformation is intentionally created, promoted and amplified in the first place. Often it aimed to undermine and discredit democracy which can only thrive if people were able to make informed choices. Its methods were more indirect, ingenious and devious than those of propaganda although both may have the same ultimate objective.
- All stakeholder constituencies could each play effective roles in countering disinformation. If governments used regulation as a remedy, it should not be done in such a way as to undermine freedom of expres-

sion. Before blocking non-acceptable content, the social media platforms should be sure that they were directly tackling the cause of the problem, not merely the symptoms. The established media – including the public service media – should provide reliable information and fact-checking based on ethical and professional standards. The technical community should develop algorithms and AI-based solutions that counter disinformation. Civil society should engage in producing narratives that promote democratic values, expose the harmful impacts of disinformation and counteract radicalisation.

**Workshop 1** discussed the growing role of social media platforms and considered their responsibilities. The participants concluded that:

- The debate around the neutrality of social media platforms should go beyond Internet service providers, bearing in mind also that the potentially different biases of online platforms could also lead to discriminatory treatment of their users. The lack of platform neutrality was particularly alarming due to their worldwide reach and market dominance.
- There was a divergence of views on whether platforms should disclose their al-

gorithms. On the one hand, their goal was to optimise the user's experience. Why should companies disclose algorithms if they were protected by intellectual property rights and if they allowed platforms to improve users' experience? On the other hand, when private companies have achieved such high levels of importance and influence in society and economic activity, they should have some degree of accountability.

- Concepts of corporate social responsibility were now well-established in many countries and this could be used as a model for social media platforms in determining the appropriate balance of private commercial interests and public responsibilities.

**Workshop 10** also considered issues of responsibility and accountability, and its conclusions included the following:

- Greater transparency in how algorithms were developed was needed and there should be a public debate on the approaches taken by private companies.
- When discussing ways to tackle disinformation, it was necessary to assess the implications for both democracy and freedom of expression.
- Quality journalism was essential for maintaining democracy.

- Finding the right balance between disinformation and freedom of expression was important and educational awareness-

raising was needed in order to achieve this balance and to help people understand the information that they receive.

## The Hague 2019

Following the UN IGF in 2018 held in Paris when President Emmanuel Macron of France had expressed alarm about the lengthening list of “Internet pathologies”, the 2019 EuroDIG event held in The Hague (18 – 20 June 2019) again inevitably focused on recent negative developments and tragic events, notably the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, when the massacre of 51 people was broadcast live on Facebook.

The closing plenary (Plenary 7) **“Tackling online harms – a regulatory minefield? Present and future”** presented various approaches by governments and other actors to combatting online harms while at the same time avoiding harming the Internet itself. The session received inputs from two prior workshops: Workshop 8 – **“Fending of trolls – journalists in defence of democracy”** and Workshop 12 – **“Play the villain – Learn to fight disinformation with news literacy”**. An

important milestone in the history of European regulation of intellectual property was marked by Plenary 6 on **“The European Copyright Reform – What just happened, what’s next, and what does it mean for the Internet?”**

**Workshop 8** focused on the role of journalists in defending democracy by fighting trolls and other agents of disinformation. Cases of trolling during recent elections to the European Parliament and in Ukraine’s general election were discussed. The importance of funding independent quality journalism to fight against disinformation was recognised and many possible models were discussed. A lively discussion developed concerning the relationship between traditional media and the major social media platforms in this regard.

A number of recent public and private initiatives aimed at countering disinformation



and strengthening quality journalism were considered, including mechanisms that would introduce governance of user-generated content. Instead of solutions that might lean towards censorship of online content, many participants believed that increasing transparency was the way forward. It was pointed out that people who nowadays were keen on knowing where their nutrition was coming from and how it was processed, were likely also to be interested in finding out the origin and production chain of the food their brains consume. The key messages from Workshop 8 were:

- Disinformation was a rapidly evolving phenomenon, both in quantity and quality. Institutional solutions to tackle it included a rapid alert system for identifying disinformation, and the implementation of voluntary codes of practice for the online platforms.
- The interplay between political populism and technology had led to an exacerbation of problems generated by extremist and hateful online content. Closer cooperation between online platforms, the creation of fact-sharing networks, and the commissioning of independent research would all help in gaining a comprehensive and analytical understanding of the big data behind the phenomenon of disinformation.
- The challenges posed by the spread of misinformation could not be tackled by a single group of actors; a multi-stakeholder approach was required. Fact-checking activities should not rely solely on the users of media outlets but should be a collaborative effort between the media outlets and the online platforms.
- The current business model for engaging in the digital economy did not favour traditional media outlets which were facing important economic losses while the demand for, and the spread of fake online content remained high. It was essential to stress the independence of the media as a benchmark for democracy, as well as to foster fact-based and ethical quality journalism. Solutions did not include a one-size-fits-all approach but rather those that were based on local responses.
- The spread of misinformation and disinformation was a growing problem and presented major challenges. However, action could be taken to mitigate the impacts: it was not a wholly immutable phenomenon.
- Media literacy programmes and the creation of greater transparency through open collaboration among the various actors as well as in content management decisions, are all essential for addressing

these problems and sustaining the health of our democracies.

**Workshop 12** provided an interactive demonstration of the inoculation approach to tackling disinformation. The example of DROG based in The Hague was presented as a pan-European media literacy initiative involving a team of academics, journalists and media experts. The DROG team believed that the best way to recognise disinformation was to learn how to create it and so in collaboration with researchers from Cambridge University they developed their Bad News Game<sup>1</sup>. Workshop 12 participants were asked to assume the role of “the bad guys” as they walked step by step through the game and learned how to use the key elements of a successful disinformation operation: impersonation, appeal to emotions, polarisation, conspiracy and trolling. The key messages from Workshop 12 were:

- Media literacy and news literacy went hand-in-hand and could provide a solid solution to the disinformation problem. To educate users effectively – especially young people – the issue needed first of all to be unpacked and correctly framed.

An important first step was to discontinue the use of the misleading expression ‘fake news’ and adopt ‘disinformation’ instead.

- Users were more likely to become critical of disinformation if they saw how such disinformation was constructed in practice. As demonstrated in the workshop, one possible way of doing this was by playing the Bad News Game.
- Disinformation was usually achieved through impersonation, appeals to emotions, polarised framing, a conspiracy mindset about institutions and the media, discreditation of institutions and individuals, and trolling behaviour.
- When building a news literacy, it was difficult to balance critical thinking and destructive thinking, namely to balance awareness-raising and critical thinking towards misinformation and disinformation on the one hand, and the danger of spreading distrust or cynicism regarding news on the other.

As was typical of the EuroDIG process whereby preparatory work by session organisers is an

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.getbadnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Bad-News-Game-info-sheet-for-educators-English.pdf>

extremely important part, the organising team of **Plenary 7** had gone through an intensive four-month scoping and mapping exercise with six online meetings in order to identify and classify various activities that are commonly referred to as online harms. The plenary session focused on current government efforts to tackle these – with particular reference to the UK Online Harms White Paper published in early 2019.

The participants considered in particular the human rights implications of these initiatives and the need to take into account and understand the functions of different layers of the Internet in targeting actions against undesirable and harmful content. They considered whether the concept of “statutory duty of care” could be borrowed from the world of physical health and safety concerns, and be applied to social media platforms, instead of their solely acting as neutral intermediaries or publishers. The conformance of ethical rules for content moderation algorithms with principles of human rights was stressed, and the ongoing work in their harmonisation in Europe was noted. Since inevitably the users are the last line of defence against online harms, enhancing media literacy and ensuring its inclusion in school curricula were emphasised. It was noted that children are usually taught about road safety awareness before they are

exposed to the dangers of traffic on the public road. In the same way it was suggested that they should be learning about the “digital highway code” as well. The messages agreed from Plenary 7 in The Hague were:

- Identifying the scope of online harms, as well as having a clear understanding of the terminology, are crucial in order to choose the right response. These include regulatory measures (e.g. legal frameworks based on self- or co-regulation) and the fostering of digital literacy.
- It is important not only to look at how to develop new laws but also to consider existing regulations and human rights frameworks through which content and online harms can be evaluated and enforced.
- We must not overlook the less visible and more difficult-to-identify issues such as cyberbullying or the outsourcing of content filtering conducted by humans.

**Plenary 6** reviewed the long and difficult road that had led to the EU Copyright Directive and its main provisions, as well as the next steps over the two years until summer 2021 when the EU Member States are expected to implement it in their national legislation. The session reflected the controversies that had accompanied its path through the European institutions.

Most of the opinions expressed by participants in the session criticised certain provisions of the Directive, in particular Article 15 on protection of press publications concerning online uses, and Article 17 on the use of protected content by online content-sharing service providers. It was noted, however, that the final versions of these Articles included safeguards of the rights of users.

What was seen by some participants as an attempt to address the issues of intermediary responsibilities and the market dominance of the mainly US-based social media platforms through copyright law was criticised. However, the session recognised that the Copyright Directive was one of the pieces of a comprehensive digital strategy that also included the e-Commerce Directive and in 2021 the Digital Services Act.

Furthermore, member states were seen as having quite a large leeway in shaping their own legislation that eventually each will need to have in place in order to implement the Copyright Directive. This will allow them the scope to mitigate aspects of the provisions

which they do not like, though as a consequence harmonisation across the region would to a certain extent be compromised. The key conclusions and agreed messages of Plenary 6 were:

- The debate surrounding the EU Copyright Directive was not over following its approval and adoption in March 2019 and many uncertainties remained. In particular, the Directive had triggered an important debate about intermediary liability.
- It was now up to the EU member states to take account of some of the most widely criticised elements of the Directive (e.g, the overblocking due to upload filters) by making use of the flexibility they had in implementing it. However, this would be challenging given that the member states have significant leeway in adapting the rules to their respective jurisdictions.
- The application of proportionality and the respect for exceptions to liability rules would play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the Directive.

## Virtual 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 EuroDIG had like most international conferences and other events to be converted into an online event (held on 10 – 12 June 2020). This necessitated changes in the programme structure and schedule and the number of themes and sessions had to be reduced with the result that media and content was the topic of only one session: Workshop 6 “**Social Media – Opportunities, Rights and Responsibilities**”. This returned to the social media theme discussed at several previous EuroDIG events but in a new context as the global health emergency locked down the physical world and many sectors of human activity rapidly moved online in a significant acceleration of the pace of digitalisation.

For people confined to their homes, the Internet became their window on the outside world. The social media that already occupied a major part of many people’s social behaviour now began to take over much of the rest of their activities. This in turn was creating new dependencies that bad actors were quick to exploit.

Disinformation was another major theme for EuroDIG 2020 and by coincidence the day

before the opening of EuroDIG event, the European Commission issued a joint communication on tackling COVID-19 disinformation. EuroDIG duly had “its finger on the pulse” and was quick to respond with a discussion of what the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) had described as an “infodemic”, an information pandemic that includes deliberate attempts to disseminate misleading information. The global reach of technology and the social media should be used to help keep people safe and informed, and action should be taken by the platforms to prevent misinformation from undermining public health campaign messages with potentially tragic consequences.

With regard to the growth in disinformation about the pandemic, it was noted that the European Commission had been working on the complex topic of disinformation for more than two years and its approach had been set out already in an action plan published in December 2018. The COVID-19 crisis underlined the need to move forward quickly on this issue. It was also a test case on how the EU member states should deal with the challenge, not only of the infodemic but of the health emergency as a whole. The main focus had been on how

the major social media platforms had cooperated in a responsible way in combating disinformation about the virus and national responses. The need to support the role of the professional quality media actors was also duly recognised, as was the necessity to organise fact-checking and research in a way that would benefit all member states in all languages.

The session also considered the need to react to political decisions and action that in certain countries aimed to limit freedom of expression in some countries on the pretext of a national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The responses survey of the growing information disorder was presented at EuroDIG. Covering 24 EU members countries, the survey collated information on 146 initiatives. The findings revealed that there was room for improvement regarding the multistakeholder nature of initiatives, their transparency and their coordination across national borders.

The survey also found that people generally had had enough of “fake news” and were anxious to obtain more reliable information which they could trust. Confronted with huge amounts of incorrect information, people had started asking whether anything they saw or heard could be trusted. Ultimately, when people believed nothing at all, they would actually believe anything.

The discussions at EuroDIG provided a reminder that the established professional media, including the public broadcasters, were fighting an uphill battle. It cost nothing to spread fake news but it cost a fortune to counter it. Institutionalised fact-checking was helping but there was no guarantee that it would reach the same people who had been fed the fake news in the first place.

The growing importance of social media meant that in discussions at EuroDIG and elsewhere that the major platforms had become “the elephant in the room.” Securing their willing and active participation in discussions had been a challenge and the discussions had often resulted in widespread condemnation of the platforms in their absence. The virtual participation of a Facebook representative in the virtual Trieste meeting led to a more informative, constructive exchange, however, based on a greater shared understanding of the problem of disinformation in particular and oriented towards improving cooperation in mitigating, if not solving this major challenge. The key messages from Workshop 6 in Trieste were:

- Multi-stakeholder participation was of utmost importance in combating the problem of disinformation and misinformation, in particular involving those directly concerned and impacted by it. There was also

a need for the infrastructure to organise fact checking and research activities the results of which should be available in all languages.

- High-quality trusted news was the best antidote to fake news. To achieve that, there was a need for more reliable funding for public service journalism on the one hand, and the protection of the freedom of the press by national authorities on the other.
- Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic should not be an excuse for governments to restrict freedom of expression.
- Media literacy was crucial in fighting misinformation and disinformation. It was very important to educate and empower people to recognise disinformation and misinformation and to make informed decisions on whom to trust.
- In order to regulate all platforms in a uniform manner, there was a need for a more comprehensive reflection on how to construct a 'regulatory backstop' that created more uniformity, more instruments (with appropriate oversight mechanisms), and where necessary, sanctions.

## Conclusions

Many of the issues discussed under the heading “Media and Content” at successive EuroDIG sessions during the period 2008 to 2020 were connected in one way or another to the fundamental transformation that the Internet has brought about in the media ecosystem. The evidence of this transformation and the symptoms of the emerging problems and policy challenges associated with it, were detected and discussed by EuroDIG as they first appeared and subsequently became more prominent and evolved from year to year.

From the very beginning, EuroDIG paid close attention in particular to the online environment created by the new social media platforms, discussing its governance issues, evaluating the underlying business models and assessing their innovation potential. Their positive aspects were recognised as empowering Internet users, including amongst communities in undemocratic countries.

At the same time, however, negative developments such as hate speech and the growth in misuse of personal data were causing major concerns. These were all issues that were raised and examined by diverse groups of stakeholders and experts in EuroDIG sessions. As the global reach and scale of the rapidly ad-

vancing platforms became more apparent, their business models and their impact on traditional news and public media became the subject of particular scrutiny at EuroDIG.

Furthermore, as terms like “fake news” and “post-truth” entered the common vocabulary of debate about the impacts of these new platforms, EuroDIG began to focus increasingly on information disorder and the growth of new kinds of online harms. Closely related to these concerns has been the emphasis at EuroDIG on promoting digital literacy amongst users and in educational curricula.

The Internet has become an open source for information, entertainment and communication, and not unexpectedly at a time of major reform of copyright law in the European Union, the challenge of how to adapt existing principles of copyright protection to the online world has been a perennial issue for discussion at EuroDIG.

Artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and 5G networks are already starting to make an impact on media and content-related issues. It will be important, therefore, for EuroDIG to keep pace with these dizzying developments in new technologies. As the social and economic transformations brought about



by these new technologies continue at a rapid pace, we can be sure that the benefits, opportunities and challenges for policymakers, decision-takers in the business and technical communities, for the guardians of human rights and for individual users, will all continue to feature prominently in future EuroDIG agendas and programme sessions.

This is becoming even more important as governments and European institutions update their national strategies and policies in support of digital technologies and social and economic transformation. The role of EuroDIG as an open and inclusive wider European multistakeholder sounding board will be crucial therefore for informing and helping to set the direction for the development of new policy approaches for the media and content sectors.

EuroDIG needs also to stand ready and able to assess quickly the impacts on the roles of the Internet and the digital sector generally in response to less predictable global events and emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought this into sharp relief as online aware-

ness-raising and misinformation have become critical issues in the global response.

EuroDIG has proved to be a vitally important regional forum, therefore, for stakeholders – including governments, journalists, civil society experts and individual Internet users – to hold open and inclusive discussions on how to address the challenges relating to the media and content sectors. EuroDIG has also contributed European perspectives to the global debates of these issues, in particular at the UN Internet Governance Forum (the IGF) as a leading member of the expanding number of national and regional IGFs whose role in informing the global agenda of Internet governance debate has become so important since EuroDIG held its first event in 2008.

With its flexible and inclusive planning system, drawing on wide-ranging sources of expertise and resources, EuroDIG has a strong track record in being able to address both the opportunities and the challenges created by the Internet and emerging digital technologies and I believe it will continue to do so in the future.

## About the Author

Active in EuroDIG since 2008, Yrjö Länsipuro now serves as its Subject Matter Expert on media and content issues. His background is in journalism, international broadcasting cooperation, public diplomacy and Internet governance. He is a Board Member and past President of the Finnish Chapter of the Internet Society, and Board Member of EURALO, the European regional organisation of the At-Large community of Internet Corporation for

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