

# Main conclusions of EuroDIG's stakeholder consultation on the report "THE AGE OF DIGITAL INTERDEPENDENCE" by the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation

by Mark Carvell, November 2019

## Summary

All the responses received in the EuroDIG consultation expressed support for the High-Level Panel's valuable and timely report on the contribution of new technologies and digital cooperation as enablers, drivers and accelerators of sustainable development. There was general appreciation for UN Secretary-General Guterres' initiative in convening the panel of experts and commendation for the holistic approach taken by the Panel members in undertaking their research, consultations and analysis in the preparation of their report and its recommendations.

Respondents to the EuroDIG consultation generally agreed with the Panel that significant challenges and barriers need to be addressed in order to maximise the opportunities created by new

technologies for achieving sustainable development. They agreed in particular with the Panel's focus on:

- I) achieving greater inclusivity through universally affordable access;
- II) ensuring fairness, respect for human rights and security in the online world;
- III) the overall approach to digital technology development and implementation should be one that is balanced, transparent and human-centric.

Respondents generally welcomed the Report's emphasis on the value of flexible multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary cooperation that is holistic, fully inclusive and accountable through flexible and agile institutional arrangements.

There was also general agreement with the Panel's conclusions that improvements in several key areas are needed to enhance the effectiveness of existing processes and mechanisms for cooperation. European respondents recommended focussing in particular on:

- I) capacity-building and education, and
- II) policies and regulation that address under-served regions and communities.

Some expressed disappointment, however, that the report did not consider in any detail the potential of digital technologies to contribute solutions for the environmental and climate change issues included in the SDGs. It was also expected that there would be more attenti-

on paid to the role of media in the digital environment.

Several European respondents agreed with the Panel's conclusion that there is a need for more effective coordination of metrics to underpin more effective policy decisions relating to implementation and governance.

Respondents generally agreed with the need of improving existing cooperation frameworks and averse to creating new ones or increasing the functions of multilateral (i.e. inter-governmental) institutions. In particular, respondents cited the number of existing global and regional platforms and initiatives relating to trust and security to which a wide range of European stakeholders including governments are actively committed. There were few expression for support and many expressions of concern on proposed "Global Commitment on Digital Trust and Security."

There was agreement among the European stakeholders who reviewed the options presented for taking forward the

Report's recommendations that the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) should be strengthened (the "IGF+" proposal) with a wider remit on digital technologies, a stronger focus on key issues, and improved coordination and collaboration means to enable concrete and actionable outcomes. At the same time, the IGF itself should remain a bottom up, deliberative entity consistent with its mandate under the Tunis Agenda, with a number of inputs stressing that it should remain non-negotiating.

Furthermore, there was wide support for closer coordination of the IGF's functions, inclusivity and strategic agenda, with the multi-disciplinary UN system. This would be underpinned by direct reporting to the Secretary-General who should also have direct oversight of establishing greater financial sustainability of the IGF as it engages a new phase when considering its contribution to achieving goals under the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. Consultations with the IGF community, involving

the IGF Secretariat and its Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group, should therefore proceed as soon as possible following the discussions of the HLP-Report at the 2019 IGF in Berlin.

In view of these strategic objectives, the establishment of a "Tech Envoy" post in the Secretary-General's office was welcomed by all the respondents to the EuroDIG consultation. There were expressions of support for the "Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation" in 2020 which would set out the specifics for implementation of the proposals flowing from the High-Level Panel's report. It was urged that further consultations with stakeholders be undertaken on the more detailed proposals such as the Cooperation Accelerator, Policy Incubators and global help desks on which also clarification was sought in view of the risks of duplication with existing similar mechanisms, and the resource implications.

## The Report's Recommendations

The following is a summary of the comments made by European stakeholders relating to the Report's specific recommendations and suggestions.

### ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 1A

*We recommend that by 2030, every adult should have affordable access to digital networks, as well as digitally-enabled financial and health services, as a means to make a substantial contribution to achieving the SDGs. Provision of these services should guard against abuse by building on emerging principles and best practices, one example of which is providing the ability to opt in and opt out, and by encouraging informed public discourse.*

European stakeholders generally supported the 2030 target for affordable access to digital networks and agreed that:

I) affordable universal access so that "no-one is left behind" is an important pre-condition for realising the benefits of digitalisation that address local needs, empower individual and businesses, overcome the barriers faced by women and vulnerable groups in society, and contribute generally to sustainable development;

II) this aim is best addressed through multi-stakeholder dialogue and public/private partnerships (e.g. at the local level community networks) providing universal access to affordable broadband;

III) strategies to increase access should be linked to relevant education policies and training in essential e-skills.

Some respondents also emphasised the importance of ensuring access respects human rights. It was also noted that affordable access helps the generation of local content online. It was noted, however, that access to high quality digital services was not considered in the report,

Current European-led initiatives referred to in responses include the EU-Africa Union Digital Economy Task Force, the Digital4Development Programme, the Alliance for Affordable Internet and Internet Para Todos.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 1B

*We recommend that a broad, multi-stakeholder alliance, involving the UN, create a platform for sharing digital public goods, engaging talent and pooling data sets, in a manner that respects privacy, in areas related to attaining the SDGs.*

While commenting that conceptually this recommendation could be supportable as serving to promote open procedures for information sharing, several European respondents considered that this proposal needed more work to clarify and defi-

ne the scope of "digital public goods" (inclusion of climate change was suggested for example). There was a need also to discuss how the platform would work in practice, potentially building on existing relevant initiatives, so that it would be effective as a multi-stakeholder initiative that meets regional and local needs while not duplicating existing initiatives.

Current relevant initiatives to which European stakeholders (including governments) are currently contributing include the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) and the UN Innovation Network (UNIN).

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 1C

*We call on the private sector, civil society, national governments, multilateral banks and the UN to adopt specific policies to support full digital inclusion and digital equality for women and traditionally marginalised groups. International organisations such as the World Bank and the UN should strengthen research and promote action on barriers women and marginalised groups face to digital inclusion and digital equality.*

There was widespread support amongst the European respondents for this recommendation as one that mirrors many existing initiatives aimed at establishing equal opportunities for women, girls and underserved and marginalised communities.

Current relevant initiatives cited in responses included the UN-Women's Empowerment Principles in support of the SDGs and UN Global Compact and industry initiatives such as Microsoft's Women in Cloud community-led initiative supporting female technology entrepreneurs.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 1D

*We believe that a set of metrics for digital inclusiveness should be urgently agreed, measured worldwide and detailed with sex disaggregated data in the annual reports of institutions such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, other multilateral development banks and the OECD. From this, strategies and plans of action could be developed.*

European stakeholders generally believe that metrics are important to ensure policy and investment decisions at the regional and global level are well-informed and evidence-based. Many of the respondents commented, however, that the Panel's proposal should be to build on the wide range of existing me-

trics (including sector-based sources such as Access to Medicine) through their coordination, standardisation and alignment in order to establish a broader coherent framework of data, rather than run the risk of unnecessary duplication with a new framework of global metrics.

There was also a comment about the need to improve data collection mechanisms and it was also suggested that international institutions such as the UN Broadband Commission would help steer this Recommendation's objectives through greater collaboration. The EU's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) and UNESCO's Internet Universality Indicators were highlighted as proven methodologies in this context.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 2

*We recommend the establishment of regional and global digital help desks to help governments, civil society and the private sector to understand digital issues and develop capacity to steer cooperation related to social and economic impacts of digital technologies.*

A majority of European stakeholders' responses to the proposals for regional and global helpdesks were sceptical about the need for a new network of helpdesks. It was suggested further work be carried out to determine the potential impacts of such helpdesks in achieving strategic capacity-building objectives.

In this regard risks of duplication and/or synergies with existing networks of institutional helpdesks, observatories and similar mechanisms, operated for example by the African Union, the Geneva Internet Platform and the World Health Organisation, as well as national bodies should be considered. It was also suggested that enhanced coordination and awareness raising of existing sources of technical and regulatory advice, policy solutions etc would be a useful function of an expanded "IGF Plus."

## ■ High-Level Panel Recommendation 3A

*Given that human rights apply fully in the digital world, we urge the UN Secretary-General to institute an **agencies-wide review of how existing international human rights accords and standards apply to new and emerging digital technologies**. Civil society, governments, the private sector and the public should be invited to submit their views on how to apply existing human rights instruments in the digital age in a proactive and transparent process.*

Responses to the EuroDIG consultation generally welcomed the Panel's focus on the importance and value of reviewing how existing human rights accords and standards are applied to new and emerging technologies, and ensuring that innovation adheres to the key values of human rights (including the right to privacy), freedom of expression, democracy and the rule of law. However, many respondents warned against pursuing these objectives through a new Recommendation, which would overlap with ongoing work in this area notably of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Furthermore, the development of standards by the Council of Europe that can be applied at the global level was also referenced by a number of respondents as very much in the same

direction as the Panel's recommendation and can therefore be linked into further work. For example, Convention 108 relating to the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data has recently been updated; and an experts group convened by the Council of Europe is currently assessing the human rights impacts of algorithms. Child protection online is another major area of focus linked to the Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

In particular it was noted that the Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies published in 2018 was a major step forward in defining how the UN system should promote the deployment of new technologies in order to achieve sustainable development in alignment with the values enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression could also inform future work on these objectives.

From the perspective of the private sector perspective, codifying the roster of applicable and relevant international human rights laws, norms and standards in a compendium would help companies understand the requirements.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 3B

*In the face of growing threats to human rights and safety, including those of children, we call on **social media enterprises to work with governments, international and local civil society organisations and human rights experts around the world to fully understand and respond to concerns about existing or potential human rights violations**.*

There were widespread expressions of support from European respondents (including governments) for Panel's call for multi-stakeholder collaboration that includes crucially a stronger commitment by social media enterprises, and the wider technology sector generally, to address human rights violations on-

line in a transparent and proportionate way. However, these efforts should be subject to adequate safeguards being in place to protect freedom of expression, for example when content is being moderated.

In addition to national frameworks and initiatives such as those of The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, current private sector-led initiatives supported by European stakeholders include:

- EU Alliance to Better Protect Minors Online
- Mobile Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Content
- Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)

## ■ High-Level Panel Recommendation 3C

*We believe that autonomous intelligent systems should be designed in ways that enable their decisions to be explained and humans to be accountable for their use. Audits and certification schemes should monitor **compliance of artificial intelligence (AI) systems with engineering and ethical standards**, which should be developed using multi-stakeholder and multilateral approaches. Life and death decisions should not be delegated to machines. We call for enhanced digital cooperation with multiple stakeholders to think through the design and application of these standards and principles such as transparency and non-bias in autonomous intelligent systems in different social settings.*

European stakeholders generally expressed strong support for the Panel's recognition of the importance of artificial intelligence, in particular, in relation with the promotion of sustainable development, in diverse sectors including agriculture and healthcare. There was also support for the development of global ethical guidelines and standards, and generally ensuring that AI systems are designed to be human-centric through responsible and inclusive use, data privacy, trust, respect for universal rights and accountability.

It was also noted, however, in several submissions to EuroDIG that there is considerable amount of cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder activity being undertaken in various nation-

al strategic AI initiatives (e.g. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom) and the development of AI principles and guidelines in international fora such as the EU, Council of Europe, the OECD, the G7 and the G20. Respondents believed that the results of these should not be pre-empted by more detailed proposals to take forward the Panel's recommendations, for example on auditing and certification. More time is needed at this

developmental stage to allow current initiatives and industry projects to improve understanding of the impacts and challenges of AI, and to identify solutions that would have wide multi-stakeholder support, based on best practice and underpinned by widely recognised AI principles through an alignment of those agreed by the EU, the Council of Europe, the OECD and the G20.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 4

*We recommend the development of a **Global Commitment on Digital Trust and Security** to shape a shared vision, identify attributes of digital stability, elucidate and strengthen the implementation of norms for responsible uses of technology, and propose priorities for action.*

While welcoming the Panel's focus on security, most of the European stakeholders, including the IGOs and a majority of national governments, who responded to the EuroDIG consultation did not support the recommendation for a new international instrument on trust and security as creating a major risk of duplicating the existing global work in this area undertaken under existing declarations and commitments that are widely supported by European stakeholders, notably:

- The reports of the UN Group of Government Experts and its current Open Ended Working Group
- the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace;
- the Global Commission on Stability in Cyberspace (GCSC);

- the Geneva Dialogue on Responsible Behaviour in Cyberspace
- the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE)

Relevant industry-led initiatives include:

- the Cybersecurity Tech Accord
- the Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security (MANRS)

Some respondents agreed, however, with the desirability of establishing a multi-stakeholder basis for global stakeholder collaboration in the mapping, review and coordination of the outcomes of these various existing high-level initiatives so that there is a stronger consensus on their universal implementation as a priority for future work. It is important that multilateral discussions undertaken in the UN system should be leveraged by multi-stakeholder expertise and it was suggested that such coordination could be facilitated by IGF if it were strengthened under the Panel's "IGF Plus" proposal.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 5A

*We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the UN Secretary-General facilitate an agile and open **consultation process to develop updated mechanisms for global digital cooperation**, with the options discussed in Chapter 4 as a starting point. We suggest an initial goal of marking the UN's 75th anniversary in 2020 with a "**Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation**" to enshrine shared values, principles, understandings and objectives for an improved global digital cooperation architecture. As part of this process, we understand that the UN Secretary-General may appoint a **Technology Envoy**.*

While underlining long-standing commitments to the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance, there was wide recognition amongst the respondents to the EuroDIG consultation that there are shortcomings with the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF), relating in particular to inclusivity of participation, meaningful policy outcomes and financial sustainability with a broader base of longer term financial support managed by a strengthened IGF Trust Fund than that which exists.

The European respondents generally agreed, therefore, that the multi-stakeholder mechanisms for fostering global

digital cooperation need updating but also that there is no demonstrable need to create a new mechanism or frameworks for digital cooperation: the current deficiencies and challenges brought about by new technologies can be best addressed by building on current structures of stakeholder cooperation.

Accordingly, the option favoured by European stakeholders amongst the ones presented by the High-Level Panel to address these shortcomings, was to revamp the current Internet Governance Forum under the Panel's "IGF+" proposal. There were no expressions of support for the distributed co-governance and digital commons architecture options which were rejected by some respondents as unnecessary and risking the creation of complex and duplicated structures: far better to build on existing structures that have been proven to work well. Some also expressed disagreement with the notion that the global commons analogy with space and the sea was correct in view of how digital technologies give rise to important public policy issues.

Stakeholders believed it to be important, however, to strengthen the IGF while also retaining its inherent multi-stakeholder bottom-up character without deviating from the existing mandate from the World Summit on the Information Society which had been reaffirmed by the UN General Assem-



bly when the IGF's mandate was renewed in 2015, with a number of inputs stressing that it should remain non-negotiating. It was recalled that the WSIS+10 Review recognised that the IGF had a proven track record as a multi-stakeholder mechanism both for generating stakeholder cooperation and for identifying issues for action to be undertaken by other entities and processes. This approach was further enhanced by the extended network of regional and national fora (the NRIs) that have sprung up in the wake of the global forum and there was a suggestion in the EuroDIG responses that the complementarity and interaction between the NRIs and the global IGF would benefit from being more formalised.

Nonetheless stakeholders agreed with the Panel that it will be important to ensure that more focussed and actionable concrete outputs flow from the multi-stakeholder debates undertaken at the annual global forum. A more streamlined and strategic approach to agenda-setting would help achieve this that would inter alia facilitate a sustained focus on digital capacity-building and key related issues such as data ethics, inclusivity, human rights, gender, child protection and climate change. The IGF+ would through these changes and improvements enable it better to fulfil its existing mandate.

Furthermore, the level of awareness of the opportunities provided by the IGF and of its outputs (e.g. on best practice) need to be increased beyond the current Internet governance community through more strategic marketing and collaborative engagement with other entities and policy development mechanisms such as UNCTAD. Implementation of the "IGF+" proposal should take into consideration all these aims and the tried and tested characteristics of successful stakeholder engagement, as reviewed and endorsed previously by the WSIS+10 and NETMundial processes.

There were also suggestions to the EuroDIG consultation that the IGF title or brand be reviewed in view of the wider remit on digital technologies envisaged both by the Panel and many stakeholders.

There was broad support from EuroDIG respondents to the notion that arrangements within the IGF should be improved in order to enhance support to meaningful participation by stakeholder especially from underserved communities, and to improve effectiveness of follow-up and intersessional coordination amongst stakeholder oriented to achieving tangible and actionable outputs. In this regard, the Observatory and

Helpdesk, the Cooperation Accelerator and Policy Incubators were welcomed, in principle, as serving to address said needs. However, there also were questions about how these functions would operate in practice and be resourced while also seeking synergies with current IGF inter-sessional activities on best practice (the BPFs). Stakeholders generally agreed, therefore, that further detailed discussions on these proposals are needed to assess for example how these functions – or elements of them – could be integrated in the proposed "IGF+".

Similarly, there were questions raised about how the Panel's proposal for a network of global help desks would operate in practice and be resourced, without conflicting with existing sources of policy guidance on new technologies and policy best practice. There is a need therefore to examine this proposal in order to obtain clarity on the logistics, resourcing and practicalities.

As a next step, European stakeholders recommend that the UN Secretary-General facilitate an agile and open consultation process with stakeholders, including the media sector whose role was felt to be under-stated in the Panel's report.

There were also expressions of strong support from the respondents for the Panel's proposal to appoint a Tech Envoy (as a successor to the previous Special Adviser on Internet governance in the Secretary-General's office) who should be an expert on the social, economic, developmental and human rights impacts of digital technologies. It was proposed by some that the Tech Envoy should be tasked with leading on the process for developing the IGF+ proposal as a priority, working closely with the IGF's Secretariat and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG).

While there were expressions of caution about framing it as another call for action, the proposed Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation in 2020 was generally welcomed by respondents to the EuroDIG consultation as a timely re-affirmation of commitments that inter alia recognise the strengthened IGF+ as functioning to advance digital cooperation in closer synchronisation with the multi-disciplinary UN system and the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. It is also expected that the awareness level amongst governments would also increase as a result thereby helping to address the persistent challenge of attracting a higher level of participation from the Global South.

## ■ High-level Panel Recommendation 5B

***We support a multi-stakeholder "systems" approach for cooperation and regulation that is adaptive, agile, inclusive and fit for purpose for the fast-changing digital age.***

Respondents to the EuroDIG consultation welcomed the strong emphasis throughout the Panel's report on multi-stakeholder cooperation and expressed support for this recommendation

as advancing the holistic approach for cooperation and regulation in step with the rapid development of new technologies such as AI. It was noted that this usefully complements the emphasis in the UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies of promoting global values and human rights, inclusion, transparency, working in partnerships, building on existing capabilities and mandates.

# Annex

## Respondents to the EuroDIG consultation

All responses can be found at <https://comment.eurodig.org/digital-cooperation-report/>

### European IGOs

- Council of Europe
- European Commission

### National Governments

- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom

### European National IGFs

- Croatia
- Ukraine (X IGF-UA)

### European Non-governmental Organisations

- European Broadcasting Union (EBU)
- RIPE NCC (European Regional Internet Registry)

### Global Non-governmental Organisations

- International Chamber of Commerce BASIS (Business Action to Support the Information Society)
- Internet Society (ISOC)
- International Trademark Association (INTA)
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

### Individual Stakeholders

- Amali De Silva-Mitchell – Futurist
- Argyro Karanasiou – University of Greenwich
- Dr Bissera Zankova – "Media 21" Foundation, Bulgaria
- Galia Kondova – School of Business FHNW Basel

### Industry

- Microsoft

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Mark Carvell



Mark is a former career civil servant in the UK Government's ministries for trade (DTI), business (BEIS) and digital (DCMS) during 1980-2019. He represented the UK in the ITU, UN and G7/G20 negotiations relating to ICT and digital policy. He also represented the UK on the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Media and the Information Society (CDMSI) and on ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC). He was Vice Chair of the GAC in 2017-18 and was a member of the Internet Governance Forum's Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) in 2013-15. He has also acted as an adviser to the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) on Internet governance.

Mark currently works as an independent advisor and is assisting EuroDIG in its stakeholder consultations relating to the report of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

### Background

In July 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres established the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. Co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Jack Ma, the Panel consisted of 22 international experts from government, the private sector, academia, the technical community and civil society. Its goal was to identify good examples and propose modalities for working cooperatively across sectors, disciplines and borders to address challenges in the digital age. On 10 June, the Panel submitted the report to the UN Secretary General. You find the report and further information on [www.un.org/en/digital-cooperation-panel/](http://www.un.org/en/digital-cooperation-panel/).

### Collating European views on the Report of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation

The IGF, EuroDIG and other relevant platforms for inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue have laid important ground for the work of the Panel and play a key role in discussing digital cooperation and governance. At its preparatory meeting in January 2019, the EuroDIG community decided to provide for a space to discuss and assess the HLP report and collate views from all stakeholders from all over Europe on the report and its recommendations.

In June 2019 European stakeholders were invited to express their views on the Report "The Age of Digital Interdependence". EuroDIG set up a platform that allowed to comment on a paragraph by paragraph basis or by submitting a holistic assessment of the report and its findings. The comments are published in chronological order in which they were received at <https://comment.eurodig.org/digital-cooperationreport/comments-by-email/>

Mark Carvell, former UK government representative, chaired the project and summarised all contributions in a single document that we herewith make available to the global public for further discussion at the UN Internet Governance Forum in Berlin in November 2019 or at any other occasion.

It is important to note that EuroDIG sees this process as one opportunity to trigger a debate and exchange on the findings of the Panel and does not intend to consider itself as the only platform to discuss views on and possible follow-up actions to the findings of the report. EuroDIG welcomes other initiatives that provide for a space to discuss and assess the Panel's report and invites all European stakeholders to also participate in these.