

European Dialogue on Internet Governance 2008 – 2021

Internet Governance: A Decade of Evolution

Reflections on the history and steers
for the future

Mark Carvell



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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



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Office of Communications (OFCOM)*

Many believe that we are currently – and allow me to say: once again – at a crossroads when it comes to European and global Internet and digital cooperation and governance.

Since the time when the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and EuroDIG were created, we have seen a shift in the debates about Internet and digital governance. In the noughties, we mainly discussed how to shape Internet governance (IG) so that all people can benefit from the opportunities of the internet. Today, we are increasingly concerned about how to mitigate risks associated with the digital transformation of our societies and economies, as this transformation creates winners as well as

losers. Many of us worry about the spread of misinformation and hatred in an increasingly fragmented public space, about cybercrime and cyberattacks or about applications of AI that could threaten our fundamental rights and free societies.

Since early 2020, the pandemic has shown us more clearly than ever before the enormous potential of digital technologies to improve and also to save lives. It has also made us aware of how much we rely on the Internet and digital technologies and how essential it has become to preserve the stability and resiliency of the digital world – both the infrastructure and the data and information circulating within it.

So, how can we succeed in developing a governance model that ensures that Internet and digital technologies are used for the peaceful development of our economies and societies to the benefit of all? In this regard, it is worth recalling what the late former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in 2004 about the governance of the Internet: *“In managing, promoting and protecting its presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who invented it.”* He also foresaw that *“clearly, there is a need for governance, but that does not necessarily mean that it has to be done in the traditional way, for something that is so very different.”*¹

Since its creation, EuroDIG has taken up IG issues from the IGF and discussed them in the European context. It has also brought new issues into the global debate. This report provides you with an overview of the most important contributions in this regard, for which I would like to warmly thank Mark Carvell, a long-standing and active member of the EuroDIG community.

When in June 2019, the UN Secretary-General presented the report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation called “The Age of Interdependence”, many European stake-

holders agreed with its proposal to strengthen the IGF and its political impact. We agreed that the experience, insights and solutions of the global Internet community should be better taken into account by the decision-makers in governments and the private sector, who still take their decisions too often in their silos and do not fully consider the needs of all people affected by their decisions.

But, if we all agree that we should strengthen inclusive digital cooperation and strengthen the political impact of community discussions at the IGF, why is it then so difficult to agree even on such a small step like setting up a body to bring the voices of the IGF community to the decision-makers? For me, one main reason is that many actors distrust each other and are afraid that any new structure could be hijacked and abused by others. Therefore, many actors tend to prevent the emergence of a new structure, unless they themselves expect to be able to control it.

So, how can we be innovative and experiment with cooperation and governance models, if we do not trust each other? The only way is to be creative and at the same time earn the trust of all who are affected. In this regard, the story of the creation and development of

¹ www.un.org/press/en/2004/sgsm9220.doc.htm

EuroDIG can serve as an example. After the experience of the first UN IGF meetings in 2006 and 2007, many called for a similar platform for open and inclusive multistakeholder dialogue in Europe. There had been discussions in many institutions, but none of them could claim to be the sole legitimate one to set up a European IGF.

During the ICANN meeting in Paris in June 2008, a handful of individuals working for different stakeholders had a conversation over a glass of wine and realised that they all shared the same vision of a European IGF: Such a platform would need to be open and inclusive and not be controlled by any single institution or interest. Furthermore, there would need to be an inclusive bottom-up process like that of the UN IGF to make sure that all voices had the opportunity to be heard.

They decided not to wait for any institution's top-down decision to create a European IGF, but to set up such a space in a bottom-up way by themselves. Knowing that they did not have the legitimacy to call it "IGF", they simply called it the European Dialogue on Internet Governance – and "EuroDIG" for short. It would then be for the European IG community to decide whether they would trust in EuroDIG and consider it to be their European IGF or not.

The Council of Europe was willing to provide the venue for the first EuroDIG confer-

ence, not acting as a formal "host" but simply as the "facilitator" in order to make clear that the Council did not intend to be the sole "owner" of EuroDIG. The first EuroDIG event duly took place in Strasbourg in October 2008. The second EuroDIG was co-organised by the Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) and the European Broadcasting Union at the EBU's headquarters in Geneva in September 2009.

The rest of the story of EuroDIG is well-known. EuroDIG has been able to earn the trust of the European IG community and it has officially been recognised by the UN IGF and its stakeholders as the European IGF. It has grown to be one of the biggest and most innovative of around 140 national and regional IGFs worldwide. It developed the concept of the "EuroDIG Messages", a tangible but non-negotiated outcome, which was adopted by the global IGF at its 2017 meeting in Geneva. It has continued to inspire other IGFs through experimenting with new formats, such as the parliamentary roundtable and the shorter "Flash" sessions.

What is less well-known, is that while the number of participants and their expectations for EuroDIG have kept growing, EuroDIG has constantly sought to develop its organisational framework. It created its legal structure as an association under Swiss law, profession-

alised its secretariat, introduced the concept of institutional partners, developed a programme development structure with the help of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and most importantly, it established clear separation between the structure responsible for the organisation of EuroDIG and its programme development process. In so doing, EuroDIG has managed to remain a trusted neutral platform that is transparent and accountable in all its proceedings. Since its creation by a handful of people, EuroDIG has developed into a well-established organisation and process that now has legitimacy and acceptance due to a governance policy that has kept in step with its development.

However, there are still challenges. Like the global IGF, EuroDIG is struggling to increase the numbers of high-level representatives from all stakeholder groups and to enhance its political impact, so that the voices expressed at EuroDIG are also heard by decision-makers. It continues to struggle with a very limited funding base provided by voluntary contributions, which prevent it from making full use of its potential. In addition, while stabilising its process and funding, EuroDIG needs to maintain an open, innovative and experimental spirit. In this regard, I would like to thank Sandra Hoferichter and Thomas Schneider for providing in this report their personal insiders'

views of the institutional development and the ongoing challenges of a bottom-up institution like EuroDIG.

To recap: what can we learn from the EuroDIG experience for the development of the global IG architecture of Internet governance? Firstly, in a situation where not all actors trust each other, it may be impossible to wait for consensus to emerge. We need people that share a vision and dare to be innovative and creative, while endeavouring to earn the trust of everyone, based on formal and informal safeguards that ensure appropriate levels not only of openness and inclusivity, but also of neutrality, transparency, and accountability. Secondly, this should not be a single, one-off process. Earning and sustaining trust requires a constant effort to engage in an open dialogue about governance, resources and the organisational structure of such an initiative to make sure that the results are acceptable for all.

Since our hosting of the first phase of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (the "WSIS") in 2003, we at OFCOM have been supporting – on a strategic level as well as with funds – initiatives to develop the architecture of Internet governance, as long as such initiatives are based on sound principles, and are able to earn the trust of all the stakeholders who are affected. Open and inclusive dialogue

is the first level that is necessary in this regard. With the global IGF and EuroDIG, we have been able to contribute to the creation of such platforms for dialogue.

Given the urgency of the challenges we are currently facing, we need now to take a major further step towards achieving an appropriate model of digital cooperation and Internet governance. We therefore welcome the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and the appointment of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, as important milestones that underscore the increasing need for collaboration and coordination on digital cooperation at the global level. Accordingly, we are also committed to strengthening the IGF, and helping it to evolve into the "IGF+" as the foundation of a cooperation and governance model that allows all voices to be heard and taken into account by decision-makers. We believe it is crucial therefore that the IGF's new Leadership Panel is successful in helping to relay the views and recommendations of stakeholders to all decision-makers. It will be important, however, to ensure that the Panel

is accountable and neutral, serving the best interests of the global IG community without any risk of it favouring the position of any stakeholder community. In order to get there, we need continuing to evolve, innovate and be receptive to proposals from the IG community.

At the 40th ICANN meeting in San Francisco in 2011, Bill Clinton said that developing Internet governance is not a straight process, but more of a "*stumbling forward*". We are willing to stumble forward together with all stakeholders based on a shared vision and a foundation of trust which ensures that we hold hands and "*stumble together in the right direction*".² This means that we need to cooperate in developing an architecture of digital cooperation that is based on an iterative process of continuous innovation and stable development. That allows us all as stakeholders to shape the rules for a digital space that offers equal opportunities to all people worldwide to benefit from its enormous potential to live freely and peacefully, and no one is left behind.

² <https://www.wired.com/2011/03/clinton-icann/>

Introduction



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Evolution of EuroDIG as a pan-European platform for dialogue and action

The first decade of the EuroDIG multistakeholder forum established its credentials and role as the pre-eminent European forum for the enacting of the principles set out in the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS, 2003-05) in a diverse, multistakeholder non-negotiating but influential policy and best

practice forum. It continues to be a driver of new cooperative, multistakeholder governance models and to be an exemplar of multistakeholder best practice for other regions to adopt.

EuroDIG has a strong record of diverse multistakeholder support from all sectors and stakeholder communities, including the pri-

vate sector, governments, the technical community, civil society and academia. It has benefitted from the participation and inputs from a wide range of experts, including research analysts, government policymakers, parliamentarians, business leaders and young entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, EuroDIG has helped European stakeholder communities to engage in the global process of the UN Internet Governance Forum (the IGF) created by the WSIS and launched with its first event in Athens in 2006. This has enabled stakeholders from the European continent to influence the global political agenda on Internet and digital policy.

During its first few years, the main areas of focus of the EuroDIG discussions and its principal outputs as “*messages*” for policymakers in the public sector and for decision-takers in business, largely concerned issues relating to technical governance of the Internet. However, the agenda evolved towards the end of its first decade to encompass a much broader agenda concerning the global public interest as the Internet progressively impacted almost every aspect of social and economic life.

The governance of EuroDIG and its agenda-setting has proved to be flexible and responsive to this changing global policy context. Throughout its history there have been innovative and evolutionary shifts in the format

and content of its annual forum and in its programmes of sessions and workshops. A new global agenda set by the UN Secretary-General in 2000 that builds on the achievements of the WSIS but aims to address perceived weaknesses and imbalances in the multistakeholder approach, aims to devise a new comprehensive framework for multistakeholder global cooperation.

The recent launch of the UN’s Global Digital Compact has given impetus to EuroDIG to develop the facility to respond quickly to specific developments in the geo-politics of the Internet through activities such as consultation exercises and webinar events. The recent addition of intersessional EuroDIG activities focussed on specific issues, is in line with the global IGF becoming more of a year-round process with a vibrant programme of intersessional activities aimed at delivering concrete outcomes such as policy recommendations, guidelines and toolkits for adoption and implementation by policymakers and decision-takers worldwide.

A review of the record of EuroDIG since its launch in 2008 demonstrates that it has become widely recognized by public and private institutions, inter-governmental organisations and individual governments worldwide as the leading forum for discussing and developing responses that reflect European perspectives.

Its facility to submit inputs to global processes of Internet governance – for example on net neutrality and digital cooperation – have helped the forum to advance the global Internet governance agenda and broaden its appeal to all stakeholder constituencies.

The EuroDIG process for fully inclusive multistakeholder dialogue has helped substantial-

ly to promote and advance the European vision of how Internet and digital technologies and applications can best serve the interests of citizens, social welfare and economic opportunity through its overarching mission to support and sustain the single, open, neutral and interoperable global Internet.

The way forward in the next decade of change

The principles underpinning this model of governance that were endorsed by the WSIS will come under increasing scrutiny in the period leading up to, and during, the UN process of the 20th anniversary review of the WSIS in 2025. There will be pressure from some governments to revert to traditional top-down centralised systems of governance for the global digital economy and the operation of its Internet-based infrastructure.

EuroDIG will need to adapt its modes of working in order to play its part in influencing the course of this global dialogue by defending and promoting multistakeholder governance, and protecting the single, unfragmented, open and interoperable Internet. The Euro-

pean experience of the last twenty years demonstrates that if the frameworks for digital cooperation can be strengthened this will provide the best global framework for creating new economic opportunities that support sustainable development; for developing innovative solutions in support of climate change mitigation; and for developing the kind of public-private collaboration to address the problem areas of cyber threats and crime, online child protection, disinformation and harmful content and abuse that increasingly undermine the democratic process.

The mechanisms for collaboration can be devised only if there is a platform for all stakeholders to exchange views and discuss poten-

tial cooperative solutions – including experts from the technical community, policymakers from governments and the intergovernmental organisations (including the UN agencies and the UN Secretary-General’s Office of the Envoy for Technology), civil society, parliamentarians from all levels of administrations, academic experts and representatives of the next gen-

eration of Internet users. The successful track record of EuroDIG since its inception in 2008 demonstrates that if it is allocated sufficient resources, it can provide this crucial platform for the geographical European region at this important juncture in the global geo-politics of Internet governance.

EuroDIG from concept to annual forum

Creation of the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The commonly accepted definition of Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.

The global Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was established by the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005. Its mandate was set in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society and included the following functions and activities:

- discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order

to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet;

- facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body;
- interface with appropriate intergovernmental organisations and other institutions on matters under their purview;
- facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities.

Emergence of national and regional IGFs

Following the UN's establishment of the global Internet Governance Forum and the convening of its first multistakeholder event in Athens in 2006, many national and regional Internet governance initiatives ("NRIs") have emerged with the aim of facilitating debate of national and regional relevance to global issues. In Europe, the UK, France, Italy, Germany and Finland led this trend at the national level while EuroDIG was established as an open regional platform for informal and inclusive discussion and exchange of views. EuroDIG's first event was in 2008 in Strasbourg and this in turn also served to stimulate the creation of more national IGFs in the European region.

The global total of NRIs has steadily increased to over 130 and they now form in effect a worldwide network the exchange of information of which is now coordinated by the UN IGF's Secretariat. It is expected that the roles and outcomes of NRIs will be becoming increasingly integrated as channels for substan-

tive inputs into the global IGF process and into the evolving landscape of global digital cooperation as envisaged by the UN Secretary-General.

While the NRIs will continue to operate independently serving the interests of their respective local communities, they are generally committed to the same values and principles as the global IGF in providing an open, transparent and inclusive non-negotiating forum for all stakeholders, operating non-commercially, with multistakeholder participation in all activities in support of bottom-up decision-making process. While their programmes reflect national and regional interests, concerns and public policy priorities, it is usually the case that wider perspectives and international developments are also addressed in their programmes for stakeholder discussions. This paper describes how EuroDIG has engaged on the global Internet governance agenda.

Formal establishment of the European Internet governance forum: EuroDIG

The overall aims of EuroDIG are to provide an inclusive, open and transparent process with a focus on an annual event which convenes stakeholders from all constituencies – private sector, technical community, individual and corporate users, civil society, government ministries, regulatory agencies, parliamentarians and academia – to help shape pan-European perspectives about Internet governance.

Furthermore, aided by its European partners, EuroDIG stated its intent after its first pan-European forum for dialogue held in Strasbourg in 2008 to provide the means for facilitate the dissemination and delivery of European perspectives into other international multistakeholder and multilateral fora and initiatives, and present these to the global IGF convened by the UN.

A key strength of EuroDIG is its ability to share with other regional communities worldwide European experience on a range of issues such as security, the rule of law, democracy and human rights on the Internet, online child protection, sustainability of critical Internet resources and infrastructure, and the impact of new and emerging technologies such as 5G

and the Internet of Things. The Strasbourg event made clear its mission to “strengthen a people-centred approach to the Internet, in particular to promote transparency, accountability and participation at all levels.”

EuroDIG is a dynamic process of stakeholder engagement which is reviewed by its funding partners and membership with the aim of ensuring the process of dialogue and delivering consensus-based outcomes keeps in step with national and global priorities, continues to be innovative, maximises diversity of participation through effective outreach and engagement, and builds on its proven strengths and achievements.

The agenda of EuroDIG’s annual forum covers both high level strategic and philosophical questions of governance and specific functional and operational challenges for Internet governance and digital transformation of national economies and society.

Furthermore, EuroDIG has developed a strong track record in facilitating rigorous examination of the concept, values and limitations of multistakeholder governance and promoting the multistakeholder model. It is

actively responsive to global initiatives in this field (including the UN) by holding stakeholder consultations on specific proposals and reporting the outcomes of these as substantive inputs and recommendations.

EuroDIG 2008 – 2011: Support for the open Internet infrastructure

In addition to proceeding to bed down and expand the reach and diversity of its multi-stakeholder deliberations, the agendas of the EuroDIG annual events in this initial period largely reflected the pre-eminent global policy focus at that time on technical governance issues relating to the functioning of the Internet:

- the debates about the continued sustainability of the founding Internet principle of “net neutrality”;
- the expansion of the addressing space through a new Internet protocol (“IPv6”);
- the expiry of the Joint Project Agreement (JPA) between the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the US Department of Commerce on 30 September 2009.

The overriding concern for these deliberations and stakeholder consultations, as stated at the second EuroDIG forum held in Geneva that year, was that the multistakeholder model of Internet governance “should enhance the stability, reliability, resilience and security of the functioning of the Internet.”

Net neutrality

EuroDIG facilitated several valuable, informative and influential reviews conducted by leading experts of the arguments for defending and maintaining an open Internet with non-discriminatory management of network traffic on an equal basis in the face of the emerging

challenges of the mobile Internet, social networks, cloud computing and search engines. These arguments included freedom of expression, transparency and sustaining trust in functional operations, fair competition across the Internet infrastructure and value chain,

combatting anti-competitive behaviour, and advancing the objective of promoting stakeholder innovation and investment in networks and online services.

These multistakeholder discussions led to the formulation of a EuroDIG statement of conclusions which set out the following key principles underlying the open Internet:

1. no discrimination of traffic based on sender or receiver;
2. unrestricted user choice and access and use of content, applications and services by consumers – businesses – citizens;

3. appropriate, reasonable and non-discriminatory traffic management.

The EuroDIG messages made clear, however, that more certainty was needed on rights and obligations with a clearer definition of ‘reasonable’ traffic management and the technical necessity and benefits of traffic management and prioritisation (for example whether bandwidth concerns were short-term problems and resolvable).

IPv6 transition

EuroDIG’s review of the progress with addressing the limitations of IPv4 space in the numbering system for the Internet concluded that there needed to be more proactive measures to stimulate the transition from IPv4 to IPv6 both by public sector institutions (e.g. in public procurement) and by private companies,

including the Internet service providers (ISPs). Concerns were also expressed about how existing regulations were impeding IPv6 adoption and there was a call to ensure regulators were better informed about the critical importance IPv6 transition.

Globalisation of ICANN

EuroDIG discussions in support of and developing the private-sector led global infrastructure of the Internet, in particular the numbering and addressing resources, largely revolved around one crucial policy objective: detaching ICANN as the coordinator of the unique global domain name system (DNS) from US government oversight and building on its existing tried and tested multi-stakeholder, private sector-led framework. The specific focus in this regard was progress with the complex negotiations in ICANN for the transfer of the root server system management functions that had been performed under U.S. Government contract by the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority – the so-called “IANA stewardship transition” – the successful implementation of which was reviewed during the EuroDIG forum in Sofia in 2015.

There was broad consensus expressed in the EuroDIG discussions that transparency and accountability were fundamental to any Internet governance structure and that ICANN had made significant progress in terms of transparency in its policy development and consultation processes “at least equally, if not more, transparent than many international and intergovernmental organisations.”

It was important nonetheless to ensure that in view of its function of managing a resource of a global public interest, ICANN should be accountable to the global Internet community rather than only to special interest groups, and that in particular the structures for civil society participation should be further developed.

Moreover, EuroDIG signalled a clear message in Geneva that ICANN’s future structure of oversight should be internationally representative of the global Internet community and not limited to individual governments or stakeholder interests. The role and competence of governments within the ICANN model needed to be more clearly defined in protecting the public interest and respect for international law. ICANN’s Governmental Advisory Committee (the GAC) should be strengthened accordingly in line with their contributions to DNS policy development and ICANN’s community-wide decision-making process.

Concerning the governance of individual top-level domains, a key EuroDIG message was that public policy with regard to country code top level domains (ccTLDs) should remain within the sovereign rights of states and be established locally rather than by ICANN, unless it could be shown that a policy issue

had a global impact and needed to be resolved within an international framework. With regard to generic top-level domains (gTLDs), ICANN’s expansion of the domain name space through the introduction of new domains in competition with established market-dominant registries (notably .com) and the introduction of non-Latin script internationalised domain names (IDNs) were supported as generating European businesses and users’ new opportunities for creative innovation and increased choice.



Get an inside view on how EuroDIG developed as an organisation and in its processes on pages 49 – 55

EuroDIG 2012 – 2016: The global public interest

The EuroDIG forum in 2011 in Belgrade opened a new phase for EuroDIG when it started to examine a) the fundamental principles of multistakeholder Internet governance; and b) the complexities of its impact on the daily lives and the work of Internet users. The focus of the annual EuroDIG programme shifted, therefore, from primarily a range of technical governance issues relating to the resilience and security of critical Internet resources, to issues that “matter to the end-user.”

In terms of outputs from these multistakeholder discussions, this required more determination and commitment to communicating consensus-based EuroDIG messages that can be “translated into practical, meaningful policy” for decision-takers elsewhere. This should be the aim of all similar multistakeholder platforms for dialogue about Internet issues and indeed it was an important objective of the UN Secretary-General’s Roadmap on Digital Cooperation published in June 2020.

Multistakeholderism and multilateralism: Europe’s response to NETmundial

The multistakeholder discussions at EuroDIG and the global IGF about new transformative opportunities and the challenges associated with Internet technologies take place against the background of various traditionally top-down multilateral proposals in the UN and other intergovernmental bodies which envisage specific treaties and laws to address issues such as cyber-security, illegal and harm-

ful content, and copyright and data protection.

Inevitably this led to discussion at EuroDIG about how best to resolve the tension between the emergence of multistakeholder process endorsed by the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003-05 and the long-standing multilateral government-led institutional system of governance. Some fun-

damental questions were raised at EuroDIG as to

1. what kind of regulation, if any, was necessary to keep the Internet open, free and safe; and
2. how such a universal approach to policy responses can keep in step with the rapid pace of Internet technology development and address the borderless nature of the Internet.

Many of the critical governance challenges addressed in EuroDIG such as net neutrality and online rights were discussed at the “NETmundial” meeting on the future of the Internet governance ecosystem held in Sao Paulo in April 2014. The outcome of that conference was agreement of a number of principles and a roadmap for implementation, the implications of which were discussed at EuroDIG in Berlin that year. This prepared the way for more focus at EuroDIG on Europe’s role in improving the Internet governance landscape.

While there were expressions of concern in Berlin about the inclusiveness of the NETmundial process, in particular with regard to civil society representation, the NETmundial outcomes were broadly welcomed by European stakeholders as underlining some critical challenges about the respective roles of stakeholders – in particular governments –

and the relative positions of civil society and corporate business in Internet governance processes. There were clear messages for EuroDIG and the IGF about the need to review and strengthen the multistakeholder model of governance and ensure the equal participation of stakeholder communities in their respective roles.

The Berlin EuroDIG forum also proved to be a timely opportunity for the European Commission to present for stakeholders’ comments its Communication on Internet Policy and Governance: “Europe’s role in shaping the future of Internet Governance.” The communication reaffirmed that only if the Internet is firmly anchored in the defence of human rights and democratic values, and where the same values and rights that apply offline are also protected online, can the benefits of the digital revolution be realised: a key message that EuroDIG endorsed.

The Communication also reaffirmed the European Union’s unequivocal support for the multistakeholder model of Internet governance with the full involvement of all relevant actors and organisations. There was recognition of the momentum for change generated by the NETmundial process that would lead the way to address the current challenges of the global political landscape with more active emerging powers advocating governance

structures led by governments in place of the multistakeholder approach, and the growing risk of Internet fragmentation that this contention would likely trigger.

The Communication's response, which in several key aspects anticipated the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation, was to set out as policy priorities for Europe areas for improving and strengthening the multistakeholder processes of governance – including the global IGF and EuroDIG, restoring trust (following the Snowden disclosures on surveillance), and ensuring the continued stability and security of the single interoperable Internet.

The Commission also set out its proposal to establish a global Internet policy observatory:

the GIPO online platform which went live in 2015 as a much-needed tool to assist administrations worldwide which lack the resources and expertise to engage in the complexities of Internet governance processes. This was presented at EuroDIG as a valuable capacity-building initiative that a) monitors Internet-related policy, regulatory and technological developments across the world; and b) shares knowledge among all actors in national, regional and global Internet governance – with particular regard for the interests and concerns of countries, local NGOs and interest groups that had been marginalised in previous Internet debates and decisions.

Principles, policies and practice

Stakeholders at EuroDIG have always placed great emphasis on the human rights framework as a foundation for Internet governance that promotes “*the maximum of rights and a minimum of restrictions*”. A consistent EuroDIG message has been that access to Internet content is the basis for a functioning information

society, and access should therefore be a fundamental right while “any intentions to build digital walls ... should be opposed.” A European Charter on Internet Rights and Principles was therefore presented as a means to safeguard fundamental rights as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The Council of Europe's strategic objectives are to build democracy online, to protect Internet users, and to ensure respect and protection for human rights online. The EuroDIG forum in Brussels in 2016 provided an important and timely opportunity for the Council to present its strategy on Internet governance issues which relate to human rights and fundamental freedoms. The overall aim of the strategy is to ensure that public policy for the Internet is people-centred and respectful of the core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

To this end, the strategy set out a series of specific activities, including:

- strengthening European dialogue and the exchange of good practices on the creation, access and management of digital culture, including the digitisation of culture, to promote citizen engagement, access to culture, openness, inclusion and tolerance in democratic societies.
- the organisation of multi-stakeholder platform exchanges, preparation of policy guidelines for member States, cultural institutions and practitioners and the development of an interactive website on the Internet of citizens.

National sovereignty, fragmentation and jurisdiction

The risk of Internet fragmentation has been a persistent undercurrent during successive annual EuroDIG events, commencing in 2012 when the EuroDIG event was hosted in Stockholm. The fundamental question raised there was: “*who sets the rules for the Internet?*” This reflected the conflicting interests in the digital age where traditional standards, legislation and regulation-based models do not always

provide the appropriate solutions and furthermore can lead to damaging over-regulation that prevents the benefits of online technologies being realised for the good of society and economic prosperity.

Moreover, these regulation-based policy interventions risk seriously jeopardising the Internet's principle of “permissionless innovation” which had been the driver of the rapid

growth of the global Internet since its beginning in the early 1990s. Many stakeholders would argue that technical innovation in Internet services and applications would not have been possible in an inter-governmental multi-lateral policy environment, and that the open multi-stakeholder process of Internet governance was more likely to lead to effective solutions while also taking into account human rights considerations.

This fundamental debate was pursued in 2013 at EuroDIG in Lisbon with the questions: “Who defines the public interest?” The conclusions were captured in the following EuroDIG message:

“Understanding the global public interest is in the nature of the Internet itself as being a common, managed collectively and inclusively through participatory democracy.”

This was one of the earliest expressions of an approach to Internet governance that conceptualised the Internet as a common global resource equivalent to the eco-systems for maritime and space. This would be advanced subsequently by the UN Secretary-General in his “Our Common Agenda” report published in 2020.

The IGF and the expanding network of national and regional IGFs led by EuroDIG, is widely advocated as the best model for defin-

ing and promoting the global public interest of a world going through the universal transformations of societies and economies generated by Internet technologies. The EuroDIG community of stakeholders reaffirmed in their messages to the global institutions that the multistakeholder approach is better-suited for that purpose than intergovernmental fora such as the UN and its relevant agencies, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

With respect to resolving the tensions created by conflicting national jurisdictions and national laws relating to issues such as online content, law enforcement access to data and sovereignty aspects of domain names, EuroDIG has received regular updates on the progress of the Internet and Jurisdiction Policy Network, an initiative which is actively supported by several European governments and institutions. EuroDIG sessions have expressed support for creating frameworks to ensure fair process and interoperability between heterogeneous legal regimes through procedural interfaces between states, platforms, operators and users. This would prevent fragmentation of cross-border online spaces into national cyberspaces that match the physical geography of national jurisdictions.

Technical governance challenges

Discussions continued during this later phase in EuroDIG’s history about governance challenges in the technical community and the importance of identifying critical infrastructural issues such as IPv6 transition and DNSSEC security protocol deployment where non-technical stakeholders have an interest because of their relevance to the delivery of Internet services. Bringing the technical and non-technical communities of stakeholders together was emphasised in EuroDIG’s discussions as important in order to enhance cooperation that delivers benefits for users.

The role of Internet exchange points (IXPs) as part of the decentralised core infrastructure of the Internet was examined by EuroDIG during its Berlin forum in 2014, with regard in particular to safeguarding the open, diverse, secure Internet that enhances its capability as a driver for innovation and economic growth. The principal conclusions were that IXPs:

1. provide a solid and reliable infrastructure that has no single point of failure;

2. are neutral marketplaces for interconnection;
3. enhance broadband coverage and promote competition and diversity.

The EuroDIG forum held in Sofia in 2015 also provided the opportunity for the European stakeholder community to assess the final stages of the IANA stewardship transition process as a landmark test case for multi-stakeholder Internet governance which had far-reaching geopolitical implications in the context of the ten-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (the “WSIS+10” process). Ensuring that the transition process would deliver enhanced trust and accountability to stakeholders in all countries was emphasised as critical in enabling European member states to shift the focus of the WSIS+10 review in the UN General Assembly to the role that the Internet plays in supporting the goals of the 2030 Agenda for global development.



Get an inside view on how EuroDIG developed as an organisation and in its processes on pages 56 – 59

EuroDIG 2017 – 2020: Contributions to collaborative global Internet governance

Strengthening the multistakeholder model of Internet governance

The following conclusions of a key session during the EuroDIG forum in Brussels in 2016 which examined “the DNA of European Internet governance initiatives,” summarised the progress and the challenges for strengthening the multistakeholder process in Europe in the years ahead:

1. The European IG ecosystem is very diverse but at the same time innovative and experimental.
2. The models, topics and processes depend on the readiness and awareness of stakeholders’ issues, concerns and national needs. But the main aim for all is to raise awareness amongst the local Internet community and secure the engagement of all relevant diverse stakeholders. There is no ideal IGF in policy making processes but there are best practices to share and implement. Therefore, there is a need of to have common platform for stronger collaboration and communication between all IGFs.
3. The regional IGFs are encouraging IG discussions and IGFs setting the scene can serve as a regional catalyst. International support organizations are the glue for national and regional IG discussions – they encourage local communities and are ready to provide support.
4. The global IGF is interested in input from the national and regional IGFs, in particular on:
 - a) Increasing the collaboration amongst all IG layers.
 - b) Fostering the use and the capacity of using the Internet.
 - c) Connecting citizens: IGF intersessional work on Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion(s).

- d) Developing the UN IGF's 10-year strategy, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Many of these objectives for enhancing the role of NRIs within the global Internet governance system, and for achieving greater impact of their outcomes and messages, were discussed during the European NRI Assemblies held during the EuroDIG events in Tallinn (2017) and Tbilisi (2018). Various practical suggestions were tabled for consideration by national organisers and steering committees, including:

- the need to make IGF initiatives more result-oriented, by moving from an identification of Internet-related challenges, to coming up with solutions for concrete actions;
- many IGF initiatives have difficulty in engaging actors from the private sector, and governments; to address this problem, initiatives need to address issues that are relevant and challenging for these stakeholders;
- the involvement of various stakeholder groups is largely dependent on the national context. In some cases, governments are driving the processes, while in others, it is the civil society or the private sector;
- when planning their presence at the global IGF, NRIs should have a multi-year approach in mind;
- at the global IGF NRIs should present the most important Internet governance issues and challenges tackled at their meetings.
- NRIs should try to identify whether there are common positions among themselves on any of the addressed issues.
- NRIs should encourage their communities to be active both during the planning process for the global IGF, and during the forum itself, by contributing their views and experiences to the discussions.

Formalising youth involvement in EuroDIG

The involvement of youth in EuroDIG and the holding of forum-based activities to enable

young people to discuss their views and share their experiences relating to the Internet and

digital technologies, has been an important consideration throughout the history of the EuroDIG forum. The first youth roundtable was held in 2010 during the Madrid EuroDIG event under the leadership of the Council of Europe. In the following years, cooperation with various European youth organisations and individual young activists, and partnering with the European Commission, ICANN and the Internet Society (ISOC) amongst others, led to the holding of youth membership events in the week immediately before the EuroDIG forum.

Since 2017 these activities have been formally coordinated and organised by EuroDIG's Secretariat under the title The Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance "YOUthDIG" with each annual event establishing a programme of main issues and a published output of key messages for the wider community of policy-makers and decision-takers attending the main EuroDIG sessions.¹

For the three YOUthDIG events held in 2017-19, the length progressively extended to three days of workshops focussed primarily on issues of human rights online, cybersecurity, access and literacy. In addition to the general

call for opening all Internet processes to meaningful youth participation and ensuring young people are better informed about internet issues, the main consensus-based published "YOUthDIG messages" during this period included:

1. prioritising digital literacy in national policies (including developing related information and communications technology skills);
2. the need to combat the harmful effects of disinformation;
3. calls for the protection of human rights online;
4. pleas for stronger collaboration to protect children and other vulnerable groups online, and to respect their privacy and personal data.

It was also indicative of the increasing relevance of youth engagement for the Internet's technical community that in 2019 discussion at YOUthDIG extended into specific technical areas such as developing codes of ethics for the design of algorithms, and IoT security.

¹ https://eurodigwiki.org/wiki/YOuthDIG_2017_messages

The new global agenda: EuroDIG's engagement with the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation

The EuroDIG forum in The Hague in 2019 issued a call for stakeholders to strengthen their co-operation within the digital ecosystem. This was the main theme of the forum and very much in keeping with the objectives of the global policy initiative on digital cooperation that had been launched by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres in 2018 when he appointed a High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. The Panel was co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Jack Ma and comprised 22 international leaders from government, the private sector, academia, the technical community and civil society.

The Panel's goal was to identify good examples of digital cooperation and propose enhancing the modalities for working cooperatively across sectors, disciplines and borders, in order to address the challenges in the digital age.

Between October 2018 and January 2019, the Panel conducted an open consultation process and collected inputs from all interested stakeholders worldwide. The UN published the Panel's report entitled "The Age of Digital Interdependence" in June 2019 in time for its

findings and recommendations to be presented and discussed during the EuroDIG forum held that month in The Hague.

Participating stakeholders in these sessions highlighted that multistakeholderism and multilateralism should not be viewed as fundamentally opposed approaches to Internet governance but rather as complementary in order to take advantage of the benefits of both approaches. Co-operation should therefore not be viewed as something to be imposed on different processes, but rather as a way to "connect the dots" and exchange information and views about the existing processes and initiatives.

Participants welcomed EuroDIG not only providing space to discuss and assess the Panel's report at its annual forum but also its immediate launch of a consultation to collate views from stakeholders in Europe on the report's recommendations. The following summary of the responses to the EuroDIG consultation was presented at the UN IGF in Berlin in November 2019.

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:

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

Respondents also welcomed the Panel'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 prioritising a) capacity-building and education; and b) 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 attention paid to the role of media in the digital environment.

Several 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 for improving existing cooperation frameworks and opposed creating new ones or increasing the functions of multilateral 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 expressions of support for and many expressions of concern about the proposed “Global Commitment on Digital Trust and Security.”

There was agreement among the European stakeholders who reviewed the options presented for taking forward the Panel’s recommendations that the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) should be strengthened in line with the Panel’s proposal for an “IGF Plus” with a wider remit on digital technologies, a stronger focus on key issues, and improved coordination and collaboration 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 responses stressing that it should remain a non-negotiating process.

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 in recognition in particular of the IGF’s potential 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 (the MAG), should therefore proceed as soon as possible following the discussions of the High-Level Panel’s Report during the global IGF in Berlin in 2019.

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 clarification was sought in view of the risks of duplication with existing similar mechanisms, and the resource implications.

As a contribution to the follow up process, national and regional IGFs including EuroDIG formed a joint IGF task force to undertake a survey for providing input on Recommendation 5A/B of the High-Level Panel’s Report. This survey focused on the so-called “IGF Plus” model that was one of the suggested architectures in the report. All stakeholders – individu-

als, organisations, governments, the industry and NRI coordinators, were invited to respond to the survey.

The next key step was the publication in June 2020 of the “Roadmap for Digital Cooperation”. Building on the High-Level Panel’s report and taking into account the various stakeholder consultations (including EuroDIG’s), the Roadmap set out eight areas for action:

- connectivity
- digital public goods
- inclusion
- capacity building
- human rights
- trust and security
- critical infrastructure
- global digital cooperation

European stakeholders were invited to the second EuroDIG intersessional consultation in the form of a “*EuroDIG Extra*” webinar event held in March 2021 relating to paragraph 93(a) of the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and in particular the first recommendation of establishing a “strategic and empowered multi-stakeholder high-level body.” Building on the experience of the existing Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (the MAG), the purpose of the new IGF body (later re-named the Leadership Panel) would be to address urgent issues, coordinate follow-up action on IGF discussions

and relay proposed policy approaches and recommendations from the IGF to the appropriate normative and decision-making fora.

This proposal had generated a lot of discussion in Internet governance circles. In particular, questions were raised about how to reconcile such a new strategic governance mechanism with the well-established multi-stakeholder, bottom-up characteristics of the IGF that were set out in 2005 in the Tunis Agenda. There was concern in particular that this strategic body might be seen as having an oversight role.

The webinar’s agenda was formed around a set of questions that were prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Secretariat, in collaboration with the recently established Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology:

1. What do you consider should be priority functions of this multistakeholder high-level body, should it be established? And what would be the relationship between this body and the existing Multistakeholder Advisory Group (the MAG)?
2. What suggestions do you have on the governance structure and composition of this body (e.g., number of members, representation of stakeholder groups, regional balance, rotation of members)?

3. How could this body be supported and funded?

The broad consensus-based messages from the EuroDIG intersessional “Extra” event were that there was broad support for the idea of having a “multistakeholder high-level board” that would relay outcomes, policy approaches and recommendations to other processes, initiatives and fora, and that generally it would provide a valuable bridge between discussions at the IGF, which is non-decisional, and the policymakers in governments and intergovernmental organisations, and decision-takers in the private sector.

There were also expressions of support for the board having the ability to provide strate-

gic inputs but concern that the MAG should retain its essential authority and responsibility for developing the IGF programme.

Another key point made by stakeholders was that the high-level board should not be a separate entity wholly detached from the MAG so that there would be no risk of the board developing a duplicating or inconsistent role or mission. The MAG should be able to work closely with the board in a fully integrated approach. Stakeholders also sought assurances that the process for recruiting and appointing the members of the board would be fully transparent and their activities fully reported and accountable.



Get an inside view on how EuroDIG developed as an organisation and in its processes on pages 59 – 61

EuroDIG 2021 – 2030: The next decade of Internet governance

Expanding the role of EuroDIG in global Internet governance

Several important high-level political initiatives have contributed to the further evolution of the Internet governance ecosystem in recent years and provided essential context and backdrops for many EuroDIG sessions. These included the Global Commission on Stability in Cyberspace (GCSC), the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace, and industry-led initiatives such as the Tech Accord (Microsoft), the Charter of Trust (Siemens) and the Contract for the Web (W3C).

Meanwhile, Internet governance has continued to be recognised by the UN Secretary-

General as a critical area within the UN's widening focus on digital technologies. Furthermore, in a welcome move that recognised the pre-eminence of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, the First Committee's groups on norms and cybersecurity – the UN Group of Government Experts (UNGGE) and the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) – are opening up to wider non-government stakeholder participation and inputs.

EuroDIG's contribution to strengthening the IGF

The UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation is now gearing up for its next phase set out in the "Our Common Agenda" report published in September 2021. Building on implementation of the High-Level Panel's recommendations for enhancing the architecture of digital cooperation, the report addresses the following range of digital issues in its commitment No.7 Improve Digital Cooperation through a "Global Digital Compact" that will:

- connect all people to the Internet, including all schools
- avoid Internet fragmentation
- protect data
- apply human rights online
- introduce accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content
- promote regulation of artificial intelligence
- maintain the "digital commons" as a global public good

The Secretary General is appointing a High-Level Advisory Board, led by former Heads of State and Government, to identify aspects of global governance where reform is needed. This will culminate in a 'Summit of the Future', to take place alongside the High-Level Week of

the 78th UNGA, 2023. Leading up to the summit, the UN will host a series of preparatory events and consultations.

All these initiatives are broadly supportive of the multistakeholder model and fully recognise the critical importance of engaging non-governmental stakeholders. They have developed new forms of interaction among governments, business, civil society and the technical community. It will be important therefore for EuroDIG to identify and capitalise on an increasing range of opportunities to contribute European perspectives and principles so that these are properly taken into account and exert influence where necessary.

EuroDIG intends to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with the Office of the Envoy on Technology and UN DESA with regard in particular to the WSIS+20 review in 2025 and the strengthening of the global Internet governance eco-system of fully inclusive and diverse multistakeholder engagement. EuroDIG will build on the achievements of its first decade through actively contributing to the increasing number of UN initiatives and processes relating to Internet governance and digital transformation as drivers of sustainable development.

With regard to contributing to the reform and strengthening of the UN IGF, it will be important also for EuroDIG to establish linkages with the IGF's multi-year strategy, the new Leadership Panel, the MAG and its operational and strategy working groups, as well as with the intersessional programme of the IGF's Policy Networks, Best Practice Fora and Dynamic Coalitions.

Given the increased number and complexity of initiatives in the global Internet governance eco-system, it will also be important for EuroDIG to be the primary trusted channel for keeping European stakeholders informed of developments and opportunities to be consulted on proposals.

Increasing the role of YOUthDIG

Young people were actively engaged in sessions held during the hybrid EuroDIG event in 2021. While continuing to debate and develop proposals relating to online safety, digital literacy, disinformation, privacy and data protection, YOUthDIG had developed new areas of focus, including climate change and “the green Internet”, the growth of blockchain applications, the need for public-private cooperation in delivering universal access, and policymakers' support for community network initiatives.

The experience of recent years has shown how YOUthDIG participants have progressed to become active members in the broader

EuroDIG community representatives or “focal points” appointed on specific issues such as media and content. Valuable linkages have also developed with the global IGF through YOUthDIG's active cooperation with the IGF's Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YCIG), including the holding of joint workshops in addition to opportunities for YCIG to present the global coalition's activities at the annual EuroDIG event.

Furthermore, YOUthDIG has proved to be a model for the global stakeholder community on how to establish a pathway for new entrants into Internet governance policy debates and decision-taking. The resulting inter-gener-

ational linkages are especially important in the fast-evolving sphere of emerging digital technologies that are transforming economy activity and social interaction for the benefit of future generations.

At the global level in 2021, the UN Secretary-General published his programme of action entitled ‘Our Common Agenda’ which included a commitment “*to listen to and work with youth*”. With regard to the Roadmap on Digital Cooperation, EuroDIG’s record in recent years of strengthening the meaningful participation of young people in its events and consultations, has placed EuroDIG in an already strong leading position to demonstrate how the commitment to involve young people can be implemented in a meaningful and substantive way. In practical terms, this means government policymakers and decision-takers in the private sector taking into account YOUthDIG’s “messages” and proposals relating for example to digital skills, cybersecurity, data protection and privacy, child protection and combatting disinformation and harmful content.

As Europe embarks in 2022 on its “Year of Youth” programme of action with the aim of building a more inclusive, greener and digital future, the challenge for YOUthDIG is to communicate their targeted outcomes more effectively and widely, to monitor their impact – in

particular the responses of public sector policymakers and decision-takers in the tech community and business – and to press for the adoption of YOUthDIG’s specific policy recommendations. YOUthDIG’s coordination with the EuroDIG stakeholder community will be increasingly important therefore in order to amplify the voice of youth and achieve these concrete impacts.

In practical terms, this means that YOUthDIG participants are encouraged to propose their ideas for responding to EuroDIG’s call for issues in its preparatory process. YOUthDIG’s committee for developing its programme will follow the EuroDIG categories of issues (including access and literacy, media and content, security and human rights) in order to develop the capacity that will empower youth representatives to participate on an equal basis in the EuroDIG sessions and workshops. These will be important channels for presenting their generation’s vision for the future and their proposals for realising new social and economic opportunities, and solutions for the challenges, risks and threats. All these outcomes need to be presented and incorporated in EuroDIG’s messages that in turn will be delivered to the global Internet governance audience of decision-takers through the UN IGF.

The national IGFs in the European region could also play a greater role in the years

ahead in promoting more participation in YOUthDIG, in promoting awareness of its programmes of activity, and in disseminating its messages and recommendations to communities at the local level across Europe. Strengthening the network linkages across European multistakeholder processes in this way will also serve to greatly amplify the voices of young people in Internet governance.

As a partner in the strengthened global “IGF Plus”, EuroDIG has the opportunity through YOUthDIG to promote the meaningful engagement of young people in global Internet governance and digital cooperation policy in the decade ahead consistent with the “Our Common Agenda” commitment.

Parliamentary involvement in EuroDIG

EuroDIG has for several years provided opportunities for members of the European Parliament to participate in main sessions and workshops during its annual event. This enables lawmakers to engage directly with a diverse range of stakeholders from the technical community, civil society and academia while also fulfilling their remits to represent the interests of local communities in matters of Internet governance, cybersecurity, online privacy, child protection etc.

Consistent with the practice developed by EuroDIG and in response to the recommendations relating to enhancing the diversity of stakeholder participation in the IGF contained

in the report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, the UN IGF Secretariat with the support of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), has elevated the prominence of the parliamentary roundtables first introduced in the IGF programme in 2019, into a formal Parliamentary Track that provides parliamentarians with the opportunity for open interaction with stakeholders on digital policy issues.

Similarly, building on Europe’s experience with parliamentary engagement in recent years, it will be important for EuroDIG to extend its parliamentary engagement through wider outreach to national and sub-national

parliaments and assemblies in European countries with federal constitutional arrangements (e.g. Germany and Switzerland) and in countries with other forms of devolved constitutional arrangements (e.g. the United Kingdom with its four national parliaments and its crown dependency parliaments such as those of the Channel Islands). Furthermore, in the

era of “smart cities” with their administrations developing comprehensive multi-year digital plans, it will be important that urban administrations are also invited to contribute their experience and vision to EuroDIG proceedings and be involved in consultations that are of direct relevance to strategic objectives and benefits for their citizens.

EuroDIG’s new modalities for the next phase of the digital revolution

With the onset of the global pandemic in 2020, EuroDIG was hosted as a virtual event. In 2021 the global IGF in Katowice was widely regarded as a successful hybrid event and that has set a useful precedent for a hybrid EuroDIG in the future.

Similarly, the drive to increase the participation of governments and parliamentarians in the global IGF eco-system is a strategy which EuroDIG can actively support from the basis of its own experience in recent years.

Meanwhile the IGF’s year-round intersessional working modalities are also advancing and new capacity development activities are being introduced. EuroDIG can provide a valu-

able role in promoting awareness of these initiatives, and contribute to their success in delivering tangible outcomes and promoting the awareness and take-up amongst European policymakers and decision-takers of their recommendations, guidance, toolkits etc. This means EuroDIG will need to keep in step with IGF developments and processes and have the capacity to engage effectively throughout the year with less reliance on a single annual event as the primary focus for stakeholder engagement, interaction and consultation.

Consistent with the proposals set out in paragraph 93 of the UN Roadmap on Digital Cooperation for strengthening the global IGF and

its mutually beneficial interaction with national and regional IGFs as the 20th anniversary of the WSIS outcomes approaches in 2025, EuroDIG will need to keep in step with the reform of the global IGF (the so-called “IGF Plus”). EuroDIG can draw on its experience of the last decade and the expertise in its stakeholder constituencies to contribute to the refinement of the multistakeholder model of non-negotiating governance. In the post-pandemic era of hybrid events and stakeholder interaction, it will be necessary to evaluate its performance as an inclusive and issue-focussed forum that leads for the European continent in advancing new opportunities created by emerging Internet and digital technologies.

Implementing many of these changes in modalities so that EuroDIG maintains its regional influence in global digital cooperation as a champion of the WSIS principles and the bottom up, multistakeholder model of Internet governance, will require a review of its available resources. In particular it will be important to establish effective secretariat support for a wider range of interactive, issue-focussed

intersessional activities such as additional open stakeholder consultations and policy briefings.

The next decade for EuroDIG will be a crucial one. There are many new opportunities and challenges flowing from the evolution of the Internet and the expansion of digital and AI technologies in our daily social and economic lives. There are new global initiatives now entering the digital policy arena, many of which are driven by the UN membership and its Secretary-General. They all rely fundamentally on effective stakeholder cooperation to achieve their goals and only in this way can the global common good be protected and the global challenges be addressed of sustainable development, closing the north-south divide and responding to climate change.

Ensuring that the broad community of European stakeholders have open and equal access to a European platform that is inclusive, influential, agile and responsive to transformative digital technology and policy developments, should continue therefore to be a key objective for EuroDIG and its partners.



Get an inside view on the challenges for the next decade on pages 61 – 74

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Afterword

Inside EuroDIG – the journey from an idea to a trusted institution and perspectives for a future model for multistakeholder cooperation and governance



Thomas Schneider, President of the EuroDIG Support Association, Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM), Swiss Ambassador



Sandra Hoferichter, Secretary General of the EuroDIG Support Association

2008: How to set up a neutral and trustworthy multistakeholder-dialogue platform in a bottom-up way?

Establishing a platform not just multistakeholder in its participation, but also in its ownership

Unlike the global UN Internet Governance Forum which was a compromise result of a four year-long negotiation process in the framework of the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS Geneva and Tunis) from 2002 to 2005, the creation of EuroDIG in 2008 was not the result of an institutional process. In 2007 and 2008, there were discussions in different European institutions about the possibility of establishing a European equivalent to the global IGF as a regional platform for multistakeholder dialogue on Internet governance (IG). But no institution could claim to be the only legitimate one to set up a European IGF.

So, it was an initiative of a handful of individuals to take this idea forward. At the 32nd

ICANN meeting which was held in Paris in June 2008, a group of people¹ representing different European stakeholders in ICANN met for an after-work glass of wine in a bistro in Paris and realised that they shared the same vision of establishing a European IGF that would provide for a space for all European stakeholders to meet and discuss IG issues. It was clear to all that such a platform for dialogue would need to be inclusive and allow all pan-European voices to be heard. And it would need to be neutral and not have an agenda of its own. Whoever would organise the first European IGF would need to reach out to all stakeholder groups and all regions across the continent and earn the trust of all of them.

¹ Among these individuals were: Bertrand de la Chapelle (French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), Ayesha Hassan (ICC-BASIS), Lee Hibbard (Council of Europe), Wolfgang Kleinwächter (University of Aarhus), Wolf Ludwig (ICANN EURALO), Jan Malinowski (Council of Europe), Annette Mühlberg (German civil society), Thomas Schneider (Swiss Federal office of communications)

And the conference needed a name and a communication narrative for its promotion. The initiators group decided that they would not call this initiative the “European IGF” as they felt they – like everyone else at that time – had no legitimacy to use that name. Wolfgang Kleinwächter, who was a member of the group proposed to call it simply what it should be: the (Pan-)European Dialogue on Internet Governance or “EuroDIG” for short. The group readily agreed to adopt this name.

What was still needed was a process and a venue. As the individuals present in Paris that evening already covered a range of stakeholders and geographical regions of Europe, they decided to set up an informal “core team” to organise a first conference and reach out to get more stakeholders on board. As the group had a structure but no budget, someone was needed to take responsibility and provide the resources to hold the first EuroDIG conference. Soon after the meeting in Paris, the two

representatives of the initiating group that were working at the Council of Europe were able to confirm that the event could be hosted at its premises in **Strasbourg in October 2008**. A larger informal multistakeholder programme committee² was set up, in order to make sure that the programme was as relevant as possible and would not be perceived as biased towards the interests of particular stakeholders. This committee was led by Lee Hibbard and Thomas Schneider. Sandra Hoferichter, who had already been involved in organising ICANN Studienkreis meetings and the European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG), joined the group to provide administrative support. In this way, the first EuroDIG conference came to life without any formal structure or resources. In order to avoid any misunderstanding about the shared ownership of the meeting, the Council of Europe would act as “facilitator” and not as “host” of the event.

² Martin Boyle (NOMINET UK); Bertrand de la Chapelle (French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs); Ayesha Hassan, (ICC-BASIS); Lee Hibbard (Council of Europe); Wolfgang Kleinwächter (University of Aarhus); Yrjö Län-sipuro (Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs); Wolf Ludwig (European Regional At Large Organisation in ICANN – EURALO); Annette Mühlberg, United Services Union (German trade union: ver.di); Thomas Schneider (Swiss Federal Office of Communication -OFCOM); Rudi Vansnick (ISOC-ECC) (listed in alphabetical order).

A non-negotiated but still tangible outcome: the creation of the “Messages from EuroDIG”

Apart from the issue of ownership and the framing of such a dialogue platform, there was another quite controversial issue that had been discussed since the inception of the IGF. There was a strong push by many, in particular Western and European stakeholders, that such a multistakeholder platform should be focussed solely on facilitating dialogue – to get a better understanding of the issues and the respective roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved in IG. Many of these stakeholders were strongly opposed to proposals that there should be a formal outcome document from IGF meetings, because they were afraid that entering into negotiations about such a document might prevent the open and free dialogue which many felt was urgently needed. The global IGF’s held so far had for this reason produced long reports about what was discussed in a very descriptive and neutral way.

The EuroDIG core team discussed how a more tangible outcome could be produced without entering into negotiations and thus risking killing the dialogue. They agreed to capture the essence of every session in a short and bullet-type format highlighting the most

important “take-aways” and to call these “Messages” from EuroDIG. For instance, these messages would capture aspects that were considered most relevant by a majority of participants, elements that were most consensual or most controversially discussed, and new elements in the discussion – in short, the points that were considered to be essential.

In order to avoid criticism that these “Messages” were biased or selective, it was clear to all that the authors would need to refrain from pursuing their own preferences and try to be as neutral as possible. While drafting the “Messages” was a collaborative effort in the early days, a rapporteur was assigned from 2010 onwards to ensure transparency of who had written them. Despite initial concerns that this might result in ex-post negotiations, the reactions to the “Messages” were positive and it soon became clear that the carefully and responsibly drafted “Messages” were accepted by the participants and did not raise any controversy. This very positive experience was made possible by the efforts of the authors to write as neutrally as possible and by the trust of the participants in the authors’ sincerity and respect for the discussions.

Not just panels but more interactive discussions

Finally, there was a third issue that became clear to the initiators' group: if EuroDIG was supposed to be inclusive, the sessions would need to be as interactive as possible in order not just to have a handful of people sitting on a panel talking to each other, but to involve the audience to the greatest extent possible in the debate and thus allow for many voices to be heard. The aim was to create a dialogue that would not repeat the views of well-known experts, but to produce new ideas and insights, building on the experience of all people present.

Anybody who has been involved in organising conferences and panels is aware of the challenge of creating an interactive discussion by including high-level representatives and experts. Instead of giving just a few minutes for

questions from the audience at the end of a session, EuroDIG facilitated the opportunity for interaction among all participants, and this was probably one of the most important innovations at that time. This requires proper preparation of the panellists to understand the setting and, above all, the moderators need to be able to manage sessions not just among themselves and the panellists, but by involving as much of the audience as possible. EuroDIG has not been perfect in this but since its first conference it has endeavoured to be as interactive as possible.

So, the first EuroDIG conference with over 170 registrations was well received and seemed to have met the community's expectations for an open neutral dialogue platform.

2009 – 2011: Introducing new features and growing size, recognition and expectations

Expanding and perpetuating the experiment

The initiative for the second EuroDIG conference came again from a member of the initiators group. The Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) started looking for a partner to host the next meeting in Switzerland. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which had already been actively participating in the IGF and the first EuroDIG, joined the core team and so the second EuroDIG meeting was co-hosted by OFCOM and the EBU and was held at EBU's headquarters in **Geneva in September 2009**. The organising team for the second meeting built on the informal team and proceedings of the first conference: Sandra, with the support of the Council of Europe, OFCOM, and the EBU acted as the Secretariat and Lee, Thomas and Wolf led the informal multi-stakeholder programme committee.

Building on the experience of EuroDIG in Strasbourg in 2008, the meeting in Geneva in 2009 introduced a number of new features: while the first conference had solely comprised plenary sessions, in Geneva, three parallel workshops were organised in addition to

the plenary sessions; and with the support of the EBU, a first parliamentary roundtable was organised, including parliamentarians from the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and national parliaments of EU and non-EU-member states (one of whose parliamentarians connected remotely). In addition, the usage of captioning – the conversion of the live audio into text displayed on the screen and integrated in the remote participation platform – was introduced with the support of DiploFoundation and the IGF Remote Participation Working Group.

For the second EuroDIG conference, the number of registrations grew to over 200 and also the conference was generally well received by the European stakeholder community.

The third EuroDIG meeting was the first that was not hosted by a member of the initiators group. It was co-hosted by the Spanish national IGF, Telefonica, the lead organisation for the Digital Agenda for Spain Red.es and the Span-

ish government, with the support of the Council of Europe, OFCOM and other stakeholders. The meeting was held at Telefonica's headquarters in **Madrid in April 2010**.

The planning process again built on the previous meetings but some new elements were introduced. For the first time, a preparatory meeting was held on-site before the conference with two aims: firstly, to examine the venue and prepare the logistics; and secondly, to raise awareness among the national IG community and encourage their involvement in shaping the conference. Such on-site preparatory and planning meetings were held regularly from this time onwards.

Other innovations in 2010 included a special effort to involve the younger generation in EuroDIG through organising a youth roundtable and a dedicated EuroDIG website replacing the provisional one, the EuroDIG logo was further developed to be the logo which is still in use today. Finally, a group of rapporteurs was put together to formulate the "Messages" as a summary of the outcomes from each session.

The Madrid EuroDIG showed again a growth in the number of registrations to over 400 and there was generally wider recognition of the

growing importance of the EuroDIG forum. The European Parliament, for instance, in its resolution on Internet governance of 15 June 2010, stated for the first time its official support of EuroDIG as the regional IGF for Europe.³

The fourth EuroDIG was hosted by the Serbian Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society, with the support of the Council of Europe, OFCOM and DiploFoundation, and held in **Belgrade in May 2011**. Again, new features were introduced, such as having youth representatives present in all the sessions, in cooperation with the New Media Summer School which was held for the first time in Belgrade at the time of the EuroDIG meeting. As an experiment to maximise interaction among all participants, one plenary session focusing on social media was held without a panel and with only two moderators discussing the issue with the audience for the whole of the session. This turned out to be an extremely exciting and vivid session, but unfortunately, nobody has dared to organise such a session without panellists since then – at least so far.

With the growth of EuroDIG, the role of the local host and the host country government

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2010-0208_EN.html

also grew, in particular with regard to publicising the event and inviting the participation of high-level representatives from all stakeholder groups, including governments. The Belgrade EuroDIG was the first one for which a coordinated effort between the responsible

ministry and regulatory bodies, and the Council of Europe was made for communication and invitations. Also in 2011, EuroDIG had for the first time an official booth at the global UN IGF as the European regional IGF.

Growing need to develop a legal and institutional structure

From 2008 to 2011, EuroDIG developed from an event spontaneously organised by a handful of people to become the largest regional IGF with 400-500 participants with an increasingly complex preparatory process conducted throughout the year.

However, it still had no official or legal structure but relied on an informal “core team” that had grown to roughly 30 individuals from different European stakeholder communities. The programme development was still informally led by Lee and Thomas, with a growing role of Wolf, who had taken the lead in developing the principles for the conduct of sessions (stakeholder inclusion, interactivity etc.), based on the principles used by the global UN IGF. Wolf also assisted the organisation

teams for every session to make sure that the sessions adhered to these principles.

The initial Secretariat support provided by the Council of Europe and OFCOM was increasingly complemented by Sandra who became the person holding everything together, overseeing the co-operation with the host and the local community, the external communication through the website and from 2011 the issue of regular newsletters. Sandra also had a key role in managing the increased budget for EuroDIG and developing a fundraising and donor scheme. As EuroDIG was still not a legal entity and did not have an official structure, it did not have a bank account for financial transactions or the ability to sign a contract as EuroDIG.

2012: Developing an institutional set-up guaranteeing transparency and accountability

After the Belgrade EuroDIG, the core team decided that it was time for EuroDIG to establish a legal and institutional structure. This was needed on the one hand to professionalise its operational processes and on the other to make sure that the trust in the process earned by the informal core team would be consolidated through a framework of rules that would guarantee the neutrality, transparency and accountability of EuroDIG.

The simplest and least bureaucratic way of founding such a legal structure was to establish an association under Swiss law. Draft statutes were drawn up that defined the role of the “EuroDIG Support Association” and its organs whose role would be to guarantee the legality, transparency and accountability of all of EuroDIG’s operations. At the same time, a clear separation of the administrative matters of the association from its community-led process of programme planning was introduced. In order to further enhance the inclusivity and legitimacy of the programme and to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in the planning process, an official “call for proposals” based on a similar process imple-

mented by the UN IGF was initiated in 2011, in preparation for EuroDIG 2012 in Stockholm. In addition, the main functions of an official Secretariat were agreed with Sandra’s responsibilities focusing on management, administrative and financial issues, and Wolf’s focusing on facilitating the programme development and supporting the session organising teams.

At the 5th EuroDIG held in **Stockholm in June 2012**, the EuroDIG Support Association was officially launched and an assembly of 24 founding members was held which signed the statutes. Lee and Thomas were elected as co-presidents of the Association and Sandra and Wolf officially became the Secretariat – and a bank account was arranged for EuroDIG. For the first time, a host agreement was signed between EuroDIG and the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS), identifying the tasks and responsibilities of both parties.

Another innovation in Stockholm was the holding of an assembly of all the then current national IGFs in Europe, supported by the European Commission, as a forum to facilitate exchanges amongst the organisers of the increasing number of national and sub-regional

multistakeholder Internet fora and processes. The concept of “Institutional Partners” was introduced for national or European organisations that were willing to support EuroDIG’s institutional stability and legitimacy.⁴

For Stockholm, it was also decided for the first time to set an overarching theme for the annual EuroDIG conference: “*Who sets the rules for the Internet?*” which was agreed following a discussion at the planning meeting. A special effort was made to include government ministers and other high-level representatives in the conference. Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden provided the opening ad-

dress and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Vice-President of the European Commission, several ministers from the host and other countries also participated and interacted with the audience.

To enhance the participation of young people from the Scandinavian region, a Nordic Youth IGF conference was organised as a pre-event to EuroDIG, with young representatives presenting their recommendations into the main EuroDIG forum. In total, the number of registrations at EuroDIG exceeded 600 for the first time in 2012.

2013 – 2015: Growth in size and complexity

The host for the 6th EuroDIG held in **Lisbon in June 2013** was the Internet Society (ISOC) chapter of Portugal in cooperation with the Portuguese government. Building on the successful progress and achievements of the previous year’s meeting, a new session format of

30-minute “Flash”-sessions was introduced which allows individual stakeholders to introduce and raise awareness of new issues or activities without having to fulfil all the regular session principles. Overall, 6 plenaries, 8 workshops and 13 Flash sessions were organised.

⁴ In 2012 these were: Council of Europe, European Broadcasting Union (EBU), European Youth Forum (EYF), Federal Office of Communications of Switzerland (OFCOM)

With the addition of 4 pre-events and 2 side events, the total number of activities built around the main EuroDIG forum continued to increase. The number of registrations stabilised at around 600. In addition to offering remote participation for those that could not attend in person, remote hubs were organised in 6 countries (Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, France, Spain and Ukraine) and Twitter feeds were displayed during the meeting to enhance the interaction with the physical and remote audience. The Portuguese host also offered sign language and to date is the only EuroDIG host who made an effort to do so.

The 7th EuroDIG hosted in Berlin in June 2014 by the German Association of the Internet Industry (eco) in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and the Federal Foreign Office, heralded further developments in the EuroDIG process. A EuroDIG Wiki⁵ was established to enhance the substantive preparation of and follow-up to the sessions, mailing lists for the session organising teams were set up, and the cooperation with the New Media Summer School was expanded to feed more youth perspectives into EuroDIG. A new EuroDIG website with interactive elements was established.

EuroDIG also became this year a member of the European Internet Forum (EIF) which increased its potential for outreach and interaction in Europe, in particular to Members of the European Parliament. On a global level, EuroDIG took a leading role in organising the dialogue between the national and regional IGFs (NRIs) and the global IGF.

The 8th EuroDIG held in Sofia in June 2015 was hosted by the e-commerce organisation UNICART in partnership with the Bulgarian Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (MTITC). The creation of the South Eastern European Dialogue on IG (SEEDIG) as a pre-event for the Sofia meeting subsequently became a sub-regional IGF in its own right supported by EuroDIG.

In order to support the work and management of the session organising teams, the role of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) was created and the Secretariat took full responsibility for all event-related operations and the processing of all contracts and payments for the conference. For the first time, some intersessional multistakeholder activity was undertaken with the publication of a shared paper on the issue of net neutrality – an issue on which an agreement had not been possible at the global level

⁵ <https://eurodigwiki.org>

in the NETmundial meeting in São Paulo the year before. Seen as an experiment to test if there was common ground on this issue among stakeholders in Europe, it proved to be impossible in Europe also to reach a meaning-

ful agreement among all stakeholders on this issue. Nevertheless, this was considered by most participants to be a useful learning experience in multistakeholder consultations on Internet governance principles.

2016 – 2019: Further professionalisation and institutional development

After three years of experience with the institutional framework for EuroDIG created in 2012, it became clear that while the structure had been an important step in stabilising EuroDIG as a sustainable process, further refinement of the articles of the association was needed.

With the growth of the EuroDIG forum and the more tightly managed preparatory process on the one hand, and the responsibility towards Institutional Partners, donors, members and hosts on the other, the tasks of the Secretariat had also continued to grow. It had become necessary therefore to further professionalise the work and the structure of the Secretariat, which now involved as many as four people working part time. This included shifting to the double entry accounting system, annual audits, to demonstrate the Asso-

ciation was complying with the financial standards for an organisation of its size. To facilitate the Secretariat's ability to represent EuroDIG on an official basis in its external dealings and with EuroDIG partners (including high-level representatives of host countries) and other key stakeholder, it was decided to formalise the title of the head of the Secretariat as Secretary General.

It was also felt that the affairs of the governing bodies of the Association as created back in 2012, would need to be conducted more authoritatively and professionally. It was agreed that the Board of the Association should meet more regularly and that more importance should be given to the role of its annual General Assembly. It was also decided to attract new members of the Association to strengthen

the sustainability of EuroDIG. More Institutional Partners such as the European Commission, RIPE NCC, ICANN, ISOC, ETNO and GIP joined and the role of the hosts as both co-organisers and as drivers to involve more national communities had also become a fundamental element of EuroDIG's success.

The successful cooperation between the managers of the .eu registry EURid and the European Commission in hosting the 9th EuroDIG held in **Brussels in June 2016** not only resulted in a well-prepared and excellently managed conference but also a marvellous social event with a high number of attendees. This was the start of cooperation with these two institutions that would continue for several years and which not only contributed significantly to the stability of EuroDIG but also to its relevance internationally as a leading forum for Internet governance policy discussions and cooperation. The participation of a large number of Ministers, EU Commissioners and other high-level representatives also added to the success of the Brussels conference. In addition, for the first time Youth Messages were communicated in tandem with the EuroDIG Messages and thus received a much bigger audience.

The next EuroDIG, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia in cooperation with the Estonian Internet Foundation held in

Tallinn in June 2017 not only celebrated the 10th anniversary of EuroDIG with a great party and a music evening in the amazing Kultuurikatel venue, but this was also the first EuroDIG conference to be attended by three heads of state and government leaders. Another milestone was the youth track and pre-event becoming an official part of EuroDIG called the "YOUthDIG".

At a time when the UN IGF was in a moment of crisis without a host for their 2017 event until Switzerland stepped in with the offer to host it at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, the meeting of the European NRIs in Tallinn proved to be a significant opportunity for the European Internet governance community to have not only a stabilising influence but also to provide a boost to the relevance of the global IGF in the years ahead.

The EuroDIG meeting held in **Tbilisi in June 2018**, hosted by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia in cooperation with the Georgian National Communications Commission and the Telecom Operators Association, was another highlight in terms of the hospitality and social programme thanks to the generous and highly supportive cooperation of a large number of national stakeholders in Georgia. It was also an example of fruitful cooperation amongst various countries and leading players in the Caucasus

region. As a result, the Tbilisi conference, in addition to facilitating important exchanges on broad European issues such as the new European data protection regulations, put the spotlight on issues relevant to a region that had not previously received sufficient attention in European and global IG discussions.

The 12th EuroDIG held in **The Hague in June 2019**, hosted by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy in cooperation with the Platform for the Information Society (ECP), the City of The Hague and the Dutch top level domain .nl registry SIDN, provided further proof of the commitment of the hosts to providing a conducive atmosphere for intense substantive debates on highly topical issues such as AI, misinformation and cyber-risks, and threats, as well as for informal and social interaction. EuroDIG had already undertaken

discussions in the preparatory process, about developing the architecture for global digital cooperation and governance which had been triggered by the Multistakeholder High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (HLPDC) established by the UN Secretary-General in 2018. EuroDIG set up a stakeholder consultation process to collate the views of all interested European stakeholders on the issues raised by the work of the HLPDC and discussed the results of the consultation at EuroDIG in order to feed European stakeholders' views into the global debate at the UN IGF in Berlin in 2019. EuroDIG demonstrated its value once again in stimulating other national and regional IGFs to follow its example in engaging this UN process directly and examining the substantive issues it had raised, in consultation with their stakeholder communities.

2020 – 2021: The challenges for dialogue in times of a pandemic

For its conference in 2020, EuroDIG connected in a new way with the European scientific community and was intended to be hosted by the International Centre for Theoretical Physics

(ICTP) in **Trieste in June 2020** as a satellite event of the EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF) which was due to take place in Trieste in the following months. The overarching EuroDIG

theme for 2020 – ‘*Towards a sustainable governance of the Internet*’ – was accordingly aligned with ESOF’s focus areas.

However, the plan to hold the conference in Trieste was overturned by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Since the Internet governance community in Europe was already quite familiar with working online and the EuroDIG Secretariat had extensive experience in facilitating high quality remote participation, we were able to transfer our programme to the virtual world within a very short timeframe, with ICTP continuing as host for the virtual event. EuroDIG was the first NRI to organise an entirely virtual but still interactive meeting and it has become regarded as a model for other NRIs. Studios across the European continent were linked up with each of them being responsible for one of the programme’s tracks. The overall technical coordination and moderation was managed in Leipzig where the core of the EuroDIG Secretariat is based. While regretting that it was not possible to meet physically, participants appreciated the interactive “TV show”-style of the meeting which was positively received as a welcome diversion from the usual virtual meetings with everybody simply sitting in front of a bookshelf at home.

While hoping and planning for a physical – or hybrid – meeting in 2021 in Trieste, the development of the pandemic compelled us to

decide in spring 2021 to hold **another virtual EuroDIG in June 2021**. As in 2020, ICTP committed to act as host and helped EuroDIG to add new perspectives to the Internet governance debates. EuroDIG continued to be innovative with online formats in these challenging times, using the *gather.town* app as a virtual environment that simulated the setting of a conference venue. Participants could move across a virtual lobby with access to a reception, a booth village and areas for informal meetings. From this virtual conference venue stakeholders could enter three studios hosted across Europe where the sessions were held. YOUthDIG was held in the second year as a series of online webinars prior to the EuroDIG conference.

EuroDIG also launched its first intersessional programme in 2021 with a series of events called “EuroDIG Extra!” with the aim of discussing emerging hot topics throughout the year.

In the years of the pandemic, we learnt how important redundant resilient digital infrastructure is and how much technical and organisational capacity is required for a professionally-run and attractive virtual meeting that allows for inputs from parallel streams and feedback loops into multiple studios. With a lively moderation between the three studios, we endeavoured to meet the growing expecta-

tions of a stakeholder community that had understandably grown tired of virtual meetings after being locked in at their homes for more than a year.

Also in 2021, the 4th updated version of the EuroDIG website was launched and the archive on the EuroDIG Wiki, dating back to the first meeting in 2008, was completed.

The future of EuroDIG: perspectives for multistakeholder dialogue and cooperation in Europe and beyond

At the time of writing this “Inside EuroDIG” report we are – for the third time – preparing for a EuroDIG meeting in Trieste, now planned for June 2022. Thankfully ICTP is still on board as the host of the meeting and we are positive that we will actually be able this year to meet physically in Trieste – while bringing remote participation to the next level. In addition to the ongoing debate about how best to com-

bine the advantages of a physical conference with those of a virtual meeting for the post-pandemic times, there are a number of recurrent but also new opportunities and challenges for EuroDIG which we should analyse together and on which we all should develop a shared vision for the way forward. The following are a few key questions that we would like to raise in this context:

1. Is there still a need for conferences and processes like EuroDIG (and the global IGF and NRIs in general)?

When the UN IGF and EuroDIG were established over 15 years ago, dialogue about Internet governance was something new. There was a demand for a space to discuss digital issues in which politicians and journalists would

also participate. Open and transparent discussion, listening and learning from different stakeholders, meeting on an equal footing – all these aspects of multistakeholder dialogue were a novelty at that time. Today, however,

with the widespread proliferation of meetings and conferences about Internet and digital governance policies and issues, we have to ask ourselves whether there is still a need for platforms like the IGF and EuroDIG? Are the national and regional IGFs (the NRIs) as well as the global IGF different in a way that they still produce added value for the community?

In our view, the answer is clearly ‘yes’. Most other conferences are organised by one single institution or a small group of people deciding the agenda and the issues to be addressed as well as the speakers and invited participants

according to their views and interests. The NRIs, however, are an open and inclusive process where not only the organisers but all interested stakeholders can not only participate but also help to shape the programme and organise the sessions.

This openness, inclusivity and neutrality and the diversity in background of the participants provide EuroDIG with a unique legitimacy to be the European IGF. It is the platform in Europe where new and emerging issues pop up quite naturally.

2. How can EuroDIG’s potential be best realised?

Since the beginning of the IGF and EuroDIG, this question has been discussed in the context of what were perceived by some leading stakeholders as a series of inter-linked trade-offs. In order to realise EuroDIG’s full potential, we need to continue to experiment and innovate and dare to make necessary adjustments in our processes, programme-setting and formats. The pandemic has opened another door and forces us to be creative in the way we organise inclusive stakeholder dialogue throughout the year. All this comes with a cost and the challenges of establishing and maintaining a sustainable virtual conference

environment in terms of the necessary resources required are not to be underestimated. Many NRIs worldwide are organised on a voluntary basis and are therefore fragile in terms of their sustainability. Long-term planning and developing a multi-year strategy will only work when there is greater certainty and predictability about the available resources as key factors for achieving sustainability. This is certainly a major disadvantage that we have compared to other conferences that have a sufficient and secured multi-year budget.

The UN IGF in Berlin in 2019 for instance took a significant step in the direction of in-

volving parliamentarians from across the world but this was only possible because the host was able to allocate a part of the budget specifically for the outreach, travel support and preparation for a dedicated parliamentary track.

We also need to have more cooperation with experts in the media and the professional

marketing and public relations sectors. The multistakeholder process is complex and many policy-makers are not familiar with the bottom-up nature of conferences like EuroDIG. This needs to be explained to a broader audience ideally by being present in international media outlets.

3. Bottom-up process versus attraction to high-level decision-makers

While the openness and inclusivity based on its bottom-up processes are considered by many to be essential features of EuroDIG that contribute to its value and uniqueness, there are also voices that ask for the increased participation and involvement of high-level decision-takers. While they would probably increase media attention for EuroDIG as well as be channels themselves for direct impact on decision-takers, many stakeholders fear that an increased focus on making EuroDIG attractive for government ministers and industry leaders – so-called VIPs – EuroDIG may lose its main strength: its inclusive and bottom-up nature. Many also fear that giving more space in the programme to VIPs would reduce the opportunity for other voices be heard. Those who have experience in advising VIPs to attend meetings know that, given their tight agendas

and high opportunity costs of travelling to events, many of them participate in a conference only when they see it as an opportunity to promote their specific political and commercial interests or if they have an opportunity to meet other VIPs bilaterally.

Many conferences focus on being attractive for VIPs through offering them prominent spaces to address their audience and facilities to meet bilaterally, other participants become merely an audience and are basically listening only to speeches of VIPs but the open dialogue nature on an equal footing is lost.

If EuroDIG (and the IGF) wants to continue to be bottom-up and inclusive, and to allow as many voices as possible be heard while also being attractive to VIPs, it needs to be more creative than the usual form of a conference and find new solutions to achieve both objec-

tives. Like the IGF which has established a “Leadership Panel” with the intention that this bridges the gap between the experts’ discussions and the decision-makers, EuroDIG also needs to find better ways to bridge this gap. We should also identify and discuss options to relay the experts’ findings and the meeting’s outcomes and calls for action to decision-makers. Another option could be to create – in addition to the open dialogue of experts – an additional track for VIPs where they could

meet and discuss amongst themselves some of the key issues raised during the meeting.

One of the challenges which is not to be underestimated, is the comparatively high demand for organisational, security and financial resources for such a separate track. In this regard, it might be worth examining new ways to use virtual or hybrid modes for such a separate track within the EuroDIG process. Creative and innovative ideas for achieving this are very welcome therefore.

4. Creating more “tangible outcomes”, but not destroying the open dialogue by introducing negotiations

There is a similar ongoing debate about the outcomes and results that are produced at EuroDIG and the global IGF. It has been a constant issue of debate since the early days and reflects the dilemma that on the one hand most stakeholders agree that the key value of EuroDIG and the IGF is the open dialogue they facilitate which allows all participants from different stakeholder groups to engage in open and free discussions about their respective activities, roles and responsibilities. The absence of the pressure to agree a political outcome and the fact that participants do not have to “defend positions” but can engage in an honest and open exchange and as a re-

sult learn from each other, is for many stakeholders, one of the key modalities and benefits of both the IGF and EuroDIG.

On the other hand, there are stakeholders who criticise the IGF and EuroDIG as merely “talk-shops” and urge the organisers to deliver “more tangible outcomes”. Some of the same business and government representatives who insist on the IGF and EuroDIG exclusively focussing on only facilitating dialogue and nothing more, also explain that they are not able to obtain approval to attend and participate in EuroDIG or the IGF because these meetings were seen as only discussions with no negotiated decisional outcomes.

So, we have something of a “chicken and egg” problem and we need new ideas to try and overcome this. The “Messages” as non-negotiated takeaways introduced by EuroDIG and subsequently adopted by the global IGF and national and regional IGFs are a first step to address this but further innovation and experiments are needed.

Messages are by far not the only outcome of EuroDIG. We have to consider all the material collected by the organising teams during the session planning which is published in the wiki as a result itself. We have been told that the wiki and the archives of which go back to the first EuroDIG in 2008, is a very valuable source

of research and information. Academics who had never heard of EuroDIG found this resource rather by chance and reported that it was helpful for their research. Furthermore, the wiki underlines the transparency of the processes in EuroDIG and is a tool for collaboration between the organising teams as well as an entry point for new participants.

Last but not least, the individual insights of participants should also not be underestimated. Although these cannot be measured, they have an impact on their work in making better informed decisions because the perspectives of other stakeholders have been heard and taken into account.

5. Effective communication on the desired outcomes and our processes

EuroDIG, most NRIs, and the global IGF also lack professional communication and public relations functions, not only in terms of communicating outputs, but also in terms of the participatory processes involved in organising a conference. Our way of doing things without charging an entry fee, being open literally to everyone and with a high level of collaboration in developing the themes, is not common to many industries. There is a saying that “what costs nothing is good for nothing”, and many people who have never been exposed to the

world of Internet governance wonder why they should participate in such a forum.

This would require a department in our organisation that is solely responsible for effective communications and public relations (PR) producing influential texts, images, and video and audio material that are easy for outsiders to understand. Instead, our community has tended to produce lengthy reports, guidelines or toolkits that rarely fulfil the aim of communicating outcomes and achievements. However, communications

and PR cannot be had for free; they require the support of professional services and we do not have the resources for that. If additional funds were available, professionalising our communication and PR would be at the top of our list. We do our best to be very descriptive and straight to the point on the website, but this remains our most important communication tool and the secretariat does not have the necessary range of skills in this field to develop our communications and PR beyond this. What we can achieve through social media channels is often overstated be-

cause postings tend to remain in a bubble so their impact is limited.

To reach new communities we need to be visible in the international press and media. The work we do and the discussions we have are no less relevant than, for example, the World Mobile Congress, South by Southwest or the World Economic Forum. We need to look at how they reach and engage the public and learn from them so that we can connect with a greater diversity of Internet stakeholders, decision-takers and users to expand the diversity of our community.

6. How do we ensure diversification vs. renewal of our participants?

There is another discussion to be had about who our participants are. Some participants in EuroDIG complain that they meet the same people every year, while others say they are bored if we need to repeat the basic points of a discussion in order to engage new participants. Our annual breakdown shows that about half our attendees are first-time participants from the host country. This is a consequence of the host country changing each year which is done intentionally. One of our missions is to "... *constantly reach out to new communities*". But we should not forget that sometimes the expert discussions have reached a

level that only insiders can follow. Therefore, we must somehow reconcile the needs of both newcomers and regular or returning attendees. Newcomers should be encouraged to come back and regular attendees should be able to study a topic in depth without too much repetition of the previous year's points of discussion.

Internet governance is still something of a niche topic with a relatively small community of expert stakeholders and minimal media coverage, despite the fact that it has an impact on all areas of our digital lives. We are not an attractive forum for stakeholders who are

looking for an investment opportunity or start-ups who are in need of investment. We are also not attractive to companies that want to present their products and services at our meetings. Small and medium-sized enterprises do not have the means to engage in theoretical discussions and do not wish to because their main interest is to find the solutions that will help them achieve their business objectives and market opportunities.

Parliamentarians have been identified as important stakeholders in Internet gover-

nance and we have made progress in the last three years to attract more of them to our meetings and to be involved in our sessions. However, engaging them is very time-consuming and they are very selective about which conference they sign up for and because EuroDIG cannot provide them with wide media coverage, we tend not to be at the top of their list. This brings us back to the urgent need for professional communications and PR.

7. Broad substantive range of issues discussed vs. more a focussed agenda

This discussion is a recurring one. In principle, everybody supports EuroDIG's open and inclusive programme development process, which should allow the voices of stakeholders from all over Europe to be heard. At the same, many stakeholders think that the sessions at EuroDIG do not go deep enough into the substance and cover only the surface of issues. There are repeated requests therefore for EuroDIG to focus on a narrower range of issues and then dive deeper into them.

Some people propose that certain issues should be prioritised for one year's meeting and other priorities are identified for the following year's meeting. The problem with this

approach is that while it is usually easily agreed in principle that a specific issue should be prioritised, it is normally much more difficult to concretely agree on which issues should be deprioritised and not discussed at the upcoming conference.

Furthermore, it is argued that because EuroDIG like the IGF is covering a broad range of issues, it attracts a broader diversity in participation. When attendees from different backgrounds and with differing experiences come together it increases the opportunities to learn and widen the horizons, compared with meetings with a narrower focus where many participants already know each other

and have less variety in their backgrounds. Again, innovative solutions are needed to allow a broad range of issues to be discussed, while at the same time going deeper into some of the issues.

These are not easy decisions to take and we should either continue to experiment with looking at the EuroDIG sessions not as a one-off event, but as a peak in a longer work stream with a preparatory phase and a follow-up phase to take forward the conference outcomes. Lessons can be learned from the IGF

experience with its Policy Networks, Dynamic Coalitions and the Best Practice Forums which conduct their areas of tightly focussed inter-sessional work throughout the year. Closer co-operation could also be considered with other organisations and processes that would prepare for and follow up the discussions at EuroDIG. It should also be borne in mind that the size of the EuroDIG budget is a factor that limits the range of additional activities that it can facilitate.

8. Maximising interactivity for producing new and better ideas

Another challenging issue in the early days of the IGF and EuroDIG was how to organise a dialogue that was as interactive as possible. There were many debates about how to avoid sessions in which the same experts and VIPs were always talking to each other while other participants would be just sitting in the audience listening to “the chosen few”. One of the key objectives of an open and inclusive forum for dialogue was to include more opportunities for interaction than a short Q&A segment in the last remaining minutes of a session when people from the audience could ask questions which would then be responded to briefly by the panellists.

The aim was therefore to find new formats for dialogue which would allow as many participants as possible to share their ideas, views and experience. It was expected that interaction with the experts in the room would create a greater opportunity for new ideas and solutions to emerge. This led to some early experiments with having no panels at all but instead moderated discussions that involved all the participants in the room – and in fact these were found to produce some very inspiring debates and outcomes. However, it became evident that session organisers often stuck to traditional panel-based formats. Possible reasons for this were that it was easier to mod-

erate a discussion with a small number of participants on a panel than with the whole audience and that it was considered easier to communicate and raise awareness of a session with communication directed at a panel of experts. Nevertheless, we still believe in the po-

tential benefits of having fewer panels and more debates involving the whole audience. So, we are encouraging experiments to use this approach without formal panels again in future EuroDIG meetings.

9. Maintaining trust by increasing institutional and financial resiliency while growing in size and relevance

Another issue that has been the subject of ongoing discussions which will likely continue in the future, is how to ensure that EuroDIG becomes a more stable and resilient process and institution, while at the same time maintaining its trusted role as a neutral and open platform for dialogue that cannot be captured by any special interests.

Since its initiation by a handful of individuals, EuroDIG has been based on the vision of being a platform for dialogue that allows all stakeholders from across Europe to have equal access in order to be able to make their voices heard, to be listened to and to learn from others. EuroDIG in this way facilitates meaningful dialogue which should not be under the control of any single actor or institution. Instead, it needs to be inclusive in its ownership, be transparent about its proceedings and also be accountable to everybody. In

the early years in the absence of an institutional structure, this trust and stability was mainly earned by the prudent actions of the individuals that initiated EuroDIG and the institutions that supported it. With the growth in its size and the wider recognition of EuroDIG as the European IGF, an institutional architecture was developed to underpin and guarantee that EuroDIG remains a provider of an open and neutral platform for meaningful multi-stakeholder dialogue – independent of the people that are currently running the process. Over the years, repeated discussions about how to develop and make this institutional setting more secure were held and certain adjustments and improvements in its governance were made. The Board of the Association, the Secretariat and the Institutional Partners play a key role in this regard, but in the end the members of the Association and

the whole community need to continue engaging on these issues and keep driving the development of this important regional forum.

Another critical issue that remains a constant challenge is the financial stability of the institution. EuroDIG started with no dedicated budget and relied on in-kind contributions from the initial supporters. Over time, EuroDIG has developed a funding structure and has received voluntary donations from a range of organisations representing all stakeholder groups. It has also managed to increase the number of its donors from a handful in the beginning to around 20 today. EuroDIG's rules relating to donors allow them if they wish to obtain some visibility in EuroDIG's proceedings but they also ensure that they do not have a greater influence in the programme than other stakeholders.⁶

It should be noted in this context that EuroDIG has always operated on a very tight funding basis. The budget for all of EuroDIG's operations – including all its activities (except the local expenditure of hosting the annual conference) – has grown from 0 in 2008 to around 200.000 EUR before the pandemic in 2020. Taking into account all the operations

and travel of the Secretariat, facilitating the digital infrastructure for collaboration, the costs for conducting and assisting in the programme planning process, the preparatory meetings as well as the conference itself, the YOUthDIG events and activities, and in addition offering travel support for participants who need such financial support, this is a surprisingly low amount compared with other processes and institutions. Obviously, this is only possible because many people and institutions and individuals provide voluntary and in-kind contributions, in addition to the funding received by the donors. During the pandemic, funding contributions declined while the expenditure of the EuroDIG Association remained at the same level or even increased due to higher costs for technical equipment, a resilient and redundant virtual environment, and services to host virtual sessions.⁷

We recognise of course that EuroDIG has continued to produce amazing outcomes despite its small budget. We also acknowledge that there is a largely stable group of donors who have been contributing for many years, for which we would like to sincerely thank them. But we are also convinced that the po-

⁶ <https://www.eurodig.org/about/donations/>

⁷ https://www.eurodig.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EuroDIG-2020_Virtual-meeting_Report-secretariat.pdf

tential of EuroDIG to produce a meaningful and impactful dialogue in the European region and beyond could deliver even more results if more funding were available. There has always been consensus amongst EuroDIG's stakeholders that the funding should remain voluntary and that donors should not have a

privileged position of influence on EuroDIG and its programme. We therefore call on all actors that participate in, and benefit from, EuroDIG to think about contributing to its sustainability and to join us in finding new ways to secure a sustainable operating budget for EuroDIG.

A long-term vision: developing multistakeholder dialogue processes to facilitate multistakeholder decision-making processes

We are convinced that there is and will continue to be a need for open and inclusive multistakeholder dialogue at the national, European and global levels regarding the governance of the Internet and how digital cooperation can be built. The convening of such a forum for dialogue is a prerequisite for all citizens and stakeholders to understand the opportunities and risks associated with the continued evolution of the Internet and the digital environment. This in turn provides the necessary basis for an appropriate system of bottom-up governance and global cooperation that respects our fundamental values as

well as the needs of all people, by making sure that no one is left behind as digital technologies transform virtually every aspect of our lives.

In our view, open and interactive platforms for dialogue such as EuroDIG and the global IGF provide an essential foundation of experience of multistakeholder processes from which we can all learn and use as a basis to build inclusive and participatory governance models for the digital space of the future. In order to get there, we will need to continue to be innovative and dare to experiment with new governance models, built on principles of

transparency and accountability and in the conviction that these models should not be imposed in a top-down manner but will need to earn the trust of all the participating stakeholders to make them work. We encourage therefore everybody to use the global IGF and

EuroDIG as a safe, trusted and innovative basis for working together to develop a global architecture of digital cooperation and Internet governance that is fit for the 21st century.

Thank you all!

About the Author

Mark Carvell is an independent consultant on Internet governance policy based in the United Kingdom. He is a member of the EuroDIG Support Association and of the UN Internet Governance Forum's Working Group on Strategy (IGF WG-Strategy). He is also a senior policy adviser with the IGF's dynamic coalition on Internet Standards, Security and Safety (IS3C). From 2008 to 2019, Mark was Head of Internet Governance Policy in the UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). During this time, he represented the UK in international negotiations relat-

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