

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2017

*Internet governance from the edges:
National and regional IGFs in their own words*



GISWatch 2017
SPECIAL EDITION

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Global Information Society Watch 2017 special edition:
Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words

Disclaimer: The views expressed in survey responses are not necessarily the views of APC or of its members.

This report is a special companion edition to Global Information Society Watch 2017: National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs), which can be downloaded from <https://www.giswatch.org/2017-local-and-regional-internet-governance-forums-igfs>

SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN DIALOGUE ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE (SEEDIG)

South Eastern Europe

SEEDIG Executive Committee • see@intgovforum.org •
Mailing list: <https://lists.rnids.rs/mailman/listinfo/icann-see> • www.seedig.net

A large part of this testimony, with the agreement of the SEEDIG executive committee, was excerpted from the SEEDIG 2017 annual report.¹⁰ The report was endorsed by the SEEDIG community, and, as such, reflects community views.

Additional answers on issues not covered in the report were provided by the SEEDIG Executive Committee.

NRI founding stories and development

What is the story of the founding of your NRI? What were its inspiration, its objectives?

The SEEDIG process was launched in a bottom-up manner, in 2014, as a response to a need, as perceived by the regional internet community, for a platform to facilitate discussions and collaboration on internet-related issues of relevance for the region.

SEEDIG has the following objectives:

- Raise awareness and promote a better understanding of internet governance issues among stakeholders from South Eastern Europe (SEE) and the neighbouring area.
- Build and strengthen the capacity of these stakeholders to actively participate in national, regional, and international internet governance processes.
- Facilitate multistakeholder discussions, exchanges and collaboration on internet-related issues that are of particular concern for stakeholders in the region.
- Contribute to creating linkages between the internet governance realities in the region and the pan-European and global internet governance processes.

SEEDIG aims to function as a process that includes an annual meeting and the related preparatory steps, as well as intersessional activities. This process is planned and run in a bottom-up, open, inclusive, and transparent manner, by the SEEDIG community.

How did it develop and what difficulties did you experience along the way?

SEEDIG has started as a bottom-up, community-based initiative, and it has developed in line with the following key principles: open, inclusive, transparent, and multistakeholder. What started in 2015 as a pre-event to EuroDIG [European Dialogue on Internet Governance] has subsequently evolved into a stand-alone initiative. It held two other annual meetings, in April 2016, in Belgrade, Serbia, and in May 2017, in Ohrid, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Each of these meetings brought together over 150 participants coming from more than 15 countries from SEE and the neighbouring area. In 2017, SEEDIG broadened its capacity development efforts, by launching a SEEDIG Youth School (supported by ICANN), a SEEDIG Meeting Fellowship Programme (supported by the Internet Society), and an Internship Programme. In addition to the annual meeting, SEEDIG has also developed intersessional activities, such as: monthly summaries of internet governance and digital policy developments across the region, monthly SEEhub meetings, surveys, and online meetings with national IGF initiatives in the region.

In terms of challenges, it depends on what we talk about. When it comes to the structure of the community, one challenge could be to get more private sector representatives on board. And to attract more institutional support within the region. But this is also common to many other IGF initiatives. When it comes to administrative issues, our main challenge comes from the fact that we do not have a legal structure that could take care of SEEDIG finances directly. When it comes to our overall process, the fact that SEEDIG has grown so fast over the past three years (from a simple annual meeting to a complex process with more and more activities) has also brought challenges in terms of workload. But the executive committee and the community have been working together on addressing these challenges.

¹⁰ seedig.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SEEDIG_Annual_report_2017_final.pdf

How do you imagine your NRI and its activities in the future?

It is our hope and commitment to keep SEEDIG growing on a continuous basis, at a pace that allows both the strengthening of current activities, and the development of new ones. All these activities are to be aligned with SEEDIG's mission and objective, and with the overall goal of developing SEEDIG into a space that does not only foster multistakeholder dialogue on internet governance issues, but also has and demonstrates the ability to shape policies for the evolution and use of the internet across our region.

NRI internal governance and initiatives

Who are the people involved in your NRI and how do they contribute to it?

The SEEDIG process is shaped by what we call the SEEDIG community. Membership in the SEEDIG community is determined by voluntary participation in a designated public and open mailing list, and/or by participation in SEEDIG activities. The community, which includes stakeholders from all groups (governments, intergovernmental organisations, private sector, technical community, civil society, academia) and from various countries in the region, is open-ended, and anyone interested is welcome to join at any time.

Coordination of SEEDIG activities is done by an executive committee, which is also multistakeholder and regionally diverse.

In addition to the hosts and local institutional partners for SEEDIG annual meetings, the initiative is also supported by a number of regional and global organisations. In 2017, these supporters included Afilias, the Council of Europe, DiploFoundation, the European Commission, EuroDIG, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the IGF Secretariat, the Internet Governance Forum Support Association (IGFSA), Internet Society (ISOC), RIPE Network Coordination Centre (RIPE NCC), Association for Technology and Internet (ApTI) Romania, ISOC Armenia, ISOC Serbia, Macedonian ICT Chamber of Commerce (MASIT), One World Platform and the Serbian National Internet Registry (RNIDS). Our host for 2017 was the Agency for Electronic Communications, and local institutional partners were the Ministry of Information Society

and Administration and the Macedonian Academic and Research Network.

Have you experienced difficulties in ensuring all stakeholder groups participate fully and more or less equally?

As at end July 2017, the dedicated mailing list comprises 137 members from a total of 25 countries: 17 countries that could be considered as part of South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area (90% of all members), and eight countries from beyond this region (10% of all members).

All stakeholder groups are represented:

- Civil society (47%)
- Government (18%)
- Technical community (18%)
- Academia (9%)
- Private sector (6%)
- Intergovernmental organisations (2%).

When it comes to participation in the annual meeting, the stats have varied from one year to another, with a significant shift in 2017, when we saw a significant increase in the participation of governments and private sector: government 33%, civil society 28%, private sector 22%, academia 10%, technical community 4%, media 2%, and IGOs 1%.

These stats show that some stakeholder groups are better represented than others. But having more stakeholders from certain groups does not mean that our activities only reflect the interests of these groups to the detriment of others. At our annual meetings, for example, we make sure that all stakeholder groups have a voice in all sessions. Of course there is more work to be done in diversifying our community, but this is a challenge that is common to most (if not all) IGF initiatives. And we constantly strive to attract new stakeholders into our processes, especially from those groups that have fewer representatives.

Do you measure gender balance in your NRI? Did you undertake measures to encourage gender balance?

Yes, we measure gender representation both within the mailing list, and at annual meetings. In terms of gender representation on the mailing list, as at end July 2017, 52% of all members were male, and 48% female. With regard to participation in the annual meeting, the stats for our 2017 meeting showed that 47% of all participants were women.

How was your last forum organised, what were the topics chosen and the outcomes of discussion? How was it financed?

The preparatory process for SEEDIG 2017, which ran between October 2016 and May 2017, was open to all interested stakeholders, and this was reflected in the growth of the SEEDIG community, in the large number of proposals submitted in response to the call for issues, and in the open-ended nature of the session organising teams. The process was also transparent, as relevant information was made available via the mailing list and published on the SEEDIG website.

The various milestones in this preparatory process are outlined below:

SEEDIG 2017 MILESTONES	
Oct. – Dec. 2016	Joint SEEDIG – EuroDIG call for issues Resulted in 74 proposals for issues to be discussed at the meeting.
14–15 Jan. 2017	Online planning meetings Discussions on the proposed issues and initial planning for SEEDIG 2017. Details in the summary report of the meetings.
28 Jan. 2017	Draft programme outline published Based on the submitted issues and the discussions held at the planning meetings.
Until 5 Feb. 2017	Public comment on the draft programme
Mid Feb. 2017	Final programme outline published
21 Feb. 2017	Briefing for Heads of Missions in Geneva: Digital policy in SEE Organised by the Permanent Mission of Macedonia to the United Nations in Geneva (host country for SEEDIG 2017) and the Geneva Internet Platform.
Feb. 2017	Forming organising teams for sessions
Feb. – May 2017	Organising teams built the sessions
April – May 2017	Survey on Internationalised Domain Names

Building the sessions:

When defining the sessions, organisation teams acted in line with the Programme guidelines and the Session principles. Each session was built by an open-ended organisation team, made up of interested stakeholders (including those who submitted proposals for SEEDIG). Each team was led by one or

two focal points, and had dedicated contact points within SEEDIG's executive committee.

Organisation teams worked via email exchanges and online meetings. Periodic online meetings, with all organisation teams, were held throughout the preparatory process, to take stock of the progress made and discuss the work ahead. Organisation teams had deadlines for their work. For each session, one online session template was created, containing the various elements that the org teams were to work on. Teams had three subsequent deadlines to complete work on these elements.

The main topics addressed at our 2017 annual meeting are reflected in the programme below:

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES ¹¹ 24 – 25 MAY OHRID	
Pre-event 24 May	
08.30 - 13.00	SEEDIG Youth School
09.00 - 11.30	SEEDIG Meeting Fellowship Programme
11.30 - 13.00	Meeting of IGF initiatives
13.00 - 14.00	Lunch
14.00 - 15.30	(S1) Internet governance: A puzzle or a Tower of Babel?
15.30 - 16.00	Coffee break
16.00 - 17.30	(S2) Need for speed: Broadband challenges, issues, and trends
17.30 - 18.30	SEEDIG Association: discussion
Main event 25 May	
09.00 - 09.30	Opening & Welcoming remarks
09.30 - 11.00	(S3) True or false? Guess! Fake news, misinformation and the role of media literacy
11.00 - 11.30	Speakers' corner & Coffee break
11.30 - 13.00	(S4) How can the Internet of Things develop and be implemented in the right way?
13.00 - 14.00	Lunch break
14.00 - 14.30	Open data: Overview of policies and initiatives in SEE
14.30 - 15.30	(S5) Internationalised domain names (IDNs): Status and perspectives in SEE
15.30 - 16.00	Speakers' corner & Coffee break
16.00 - 17.30	(S6) Cybersecurity: national and regional priorities and cooperation
17.30	Conclusions & Wrap-up

¹¹ SEEDIG's website contains details about each session, including descriptions, key participants, messages, etc.

Are there controversial topics that have been difficult in your NRI and if so, why?

Not really. The community has been rather open in suggesting topics to be addressed at the annual meeting, and since the programme is built by the community itself, there is usually agreement as to what topics to be addressed and from what perspective. We cannot say that there have been situations when a topic was controversial and has led to difficulties.

Perspectives on the role of NRIs in internet governance

What is your take about the role of your NRI in internet governance processes, at the level of your country, region and globally?

In the region, SEEDIG is constantly striving to inspire others. And we have seen national IGF initiatives being created after stakeholders saw the value of IGF processes at SEEDIG meetings. Our annual meetings serve as a space for exchanges of ideas, good practices, experiences, etc. when it comes to addressing internet governance challenges specific to our countries. It is our long term goal that SEEDIG becomes a space that actors from the region would turn to when in need of ideas (be they examples of good practices shared by other community members or simply joint brainstorming exercises) and support for their work on internet governance issues.

When it comes to the broader regional and global level, our work gets more and more visibility. Our supporting organisations have played a major role here, and so has our own community. Carrying on SEEDIG messages, and spreading the word about our work have helped to attract more attention within the European and global internet governance processes. But one thing is sure: SEE and the neighbouring area is a region whose presence is now more visible at least within the EuroDIG and the IGF processes, compared to three years ago. And we are extremely proud when our work is mentioned as an example of good practice.

How do you perceive your role and position towards other NRIs, the IGF and the IGF Secretariat?

SEEDIG has been inspired by the IGF and EuroDIG, and is maintaining close connections with them. In

doing so, SEEDIG is acting in line with its objective of creating synergies between local internet governance realities (concerns, challenges, etc.) and the pan-European and global processes. In addition to benefiting from support from both the IGF and EuroDIG, SEEDIG also feeds into these two processes. Within South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area, SEEDIG has created a channel of communication with national IGF initiatives, and is seeking to support these initiatives to the extent possible.

Global level

There are several ways in which SEEDIG contributes to the global IGF:

- Submission of annual meeting reports (including messages from SEEDIG sessions), as contributions from the SEE community.
- Participation in annual IGF meetings.
- In 2016, for example, SEEDIG held a side-event in the context of the 11th IGF meeting. It was also involved in the preparation of the main session dedicated to national and regional IGF initiatives (NRIs), and it participated in this session with messages from SEEDIG 2016. This year, SEEDIG is closely involved in the planning of NRIs presence at the 12th IGF meeting.
- Contribution to IGF intersessional activities.
- To the extent possible, SEEDIG responds to calls for contributions to IGF intersessional activities. In 2016, for example, it provided input into phase II of the intersessional project “Policy options for connecting and enabling the next billion(s)”.
- Participation in regular NRIs online meetings, organised by the IGF Secretariat.

European level

Since its creation, SEEDIG has been working together with EuroDIG on building and strengthening synergies between the two initiatives. These synergies have materialised in several ways:

Joint call for issues

Following the 2016 experience, a joint call for issues marked the start of the preparatory processes for the 2017 EuroDIG and SEEDIG annual meetings. For the second time in a row, this joint milestone created the framework for better understanding what internet governance issues are seen as relevant

both in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area, and in the wider Europe.

Participation in annual EuroDIG meetings

As is the case with the global IGF, SEEDIG messages from the annual meeting are presented at EuroDIG as well. In 2017, this was done in the framework of a flash session, which also featured discussions on how SEEDIG could improve moving forward. In addition, following the joint call for issues, it turned out that most of the topics tackled at SEEDIG also featured in the EuroDIG programme, and this further facilitated the inclusion of SEE views into the EuroDIG discussions. Members of the SEEDIG community actively participated in the planning and running of EuroDIG sessions. Moreover, several SEEDIG fellows and participants in the Youth School were also selected for the YOUthDIG programme, further contributing to strengthening the connections between the two initiatives.

National level

Many countries in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area have developed national IGF initiatives over the past years. There are also several countries which are on the way of launching such initiatives. SEEDIG has been working on fostering communication with and between these initiatives, and has offered to support them in their activities.

Online meetings

Starting December 2015, SEEDIG has been facilitating online meetings with interested national IGF initiatives from the region. These meetings represent an opportunity to discuss and exchange information on issues such as challenges and success stories from national IGFs, modalities in which SEEDIG could assist in building or strengthening

national IGFs, and ways in which national IGFs could contribute to the SEEDIG process.

Participation of national IGFs at the SEEDIG annual meeting

National IGF initiatives have been active contributors to the SEEDIG process. Starting 2016, a slot is reserved in the SEEDIG programme for a meeting with national IGFs (also attended by EuroDIG and the IGF Secretariat). In 2017, this meeting was held on Day 0, and it brought together representatives of existing and in-formation IGF initiatives from across the region. Discussions revolved mainly around challenges faced by these initiatives, as well as sharing of experiences on how some of these challenges have been addressed by some IGFs. It was agreed at this session to continue the series of online meetings, as they would serve as a good opportunity for IGF initiatives to stay in touch with each other, exchange experiences and good practices, and learn from each other.

Contribution of national IGFs to SEEDIG intersessional activities

Members of national IGF initiatives have been active contributors to SEEDIG intersessional activities, such as the monthly summaries of internet governance developments, the monthly SEE hub meetings, and the surveys run by SEEDIG.

SEEDIG at national IGF meetings

SEEDIG strives, to the extent possible, to participate in annual meetings of national IGF initiatives, as part of its outreach and communication efforts. Examples of IGF initiatives meetings attended by members of the SEEDIG executive committee include: Armenia IGF, Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF, Croatia IGF, Georgia IGF, and Slovenia IGF.

Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) emerged in response to the success of the first two global Internet Governance Forums (IGFs). The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, the outcome document of the final phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), alongside the call for the creation of the IGF, served as the foundations for the model of bottom-up, multistakeholder internet governance. The first NRIs were set up in 2007 and 2008, and there are now close to a hundred initiatives, comprising national, sub-national, regional and youth initiatives, which organise autonomously and cooperate with the global IGF Secretariat. The importance of NRIs has increased throughout the years, as they have grown in number and their work has expanded in scope. They have acquired such relevance within the IGF that an NRI session was included in the IGF 2016 and 2017 main sessions agendas.

This year, APC has taken the initiative to compile two editions of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) focused on the work of NRIs. While the main 2017 GISWatch annual report provides independent and analytical perspectives on the role of NRIs in internet governance broadly, the present companion edition, *Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words*, aims to give voice and visibility to the stories of each NRI, share their experiences and achievements, and highlight their perspectives on internet governance.

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