

## Internet Governance in South Eastern Europe

### INTERNET GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENTS

#### Telecommunications infrastructure



#### Romanian NRA launches public consultation on white areas

In **Romania**, the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications has launched a public consultation with the view to update the list of localities identified as 'white areas' (i.e. not covered by high speed broadband electronic communications networks).[\[1\]](#) The current list includes 4117 localities: 1997 of them have been identified as being served by a network that can provide connections with 'best effort' download speeds between 2 and 30 Mbps, while 1075 localities are reportedly being served by at least one 4G mobile access network. The Ministry of Communications and Information Society intends to use the updated list for the development of a state aid scheme concerning the building of public electronic communications networks.

#### Croatia and Greece join EuroHPC

**Croatia** and **Greece** have signed EuroHPC, the European declaration on high-performance computing, thus joining the European effort to build the next generation of computing and data infrastructure. Croatian Minister of Science and Education, Blaženka Divjak, said that Croatia recognises the need for an EU integrated world-class high performance computing infrastructure which would upraise scientific capabilities and industrial competitiveness.[\[2\]](#) Greek Alternate Minister for Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Costas Fotakis, added that Greece is ready to contribute to this initiative both in terms of technology development and operation of HPC infrastructures.[\[3\]](#)

#### Greece regulator launches public consultation on .gr and .ελ

**Greece's** National Telecommunications and Post Commission has launched a public consultation[\[4\]](#) on a proposal to amend the current regulation on the management and assignment of the .gr and .ελ domain names.[\[5\]](#) Stakeholders were invited to submit their contributions throughout the month of November.

#### Access



#### Eastern Europe among the regions with cheapest broadband

A new global ranking of broadband pricing has been recently published by UK company Cable.co.uk, which compiled and analysed data from 3351 individual broadband packages.[\[6\]](#) The study, conducted between August and October 2017, covered 196 countries. The results reveal considerable gaps in the prices of monthly bills for broadband services, ranging from \$5.37 in Iran and \$961.22 in Burkina Faso. Five of the top ten countries where broadband is the cheapest belong to the SEE region, including **Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Romania, and Georgia**.[\[7\]](#)

#### SEE in Freedom House's Freedom on the Net report

*Freedom on the Net 2017*,[\[8\]](#) published by Freedom House, measures the level of Internet and digital media freedom in 65 countries, including **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine**. Each country receives a numerical score which serves as the basis for an Internet freedom status designation as 'free' (0-30 points), 'partly free' (31-60 points), or 'not free' (61-100 points). The ratings are determined through an examination of three categories: obstacles to access, limits on online content, and violations of user rights. The only SEE country whose score qualifies it as 'free' is Georgia (24). 'Partly free' scores are allocated to Armenia (32), Ukraine (45), and Azerbaijan (58). Belarus (64) and Turkey (66) qualify as 'not free'. The report finds that Internet freedom has declined in Armenia (which was designated 'free' in 2016), Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkey, and Ukraine. However, Georgia earned an improvement in its Internet freedom score. The report also maps out manipulation tactics used to undermine democracy, censored Internet topics, key Internet controls used in each country, and the status of press freedom.

#### Journalists call for enhanced (online) media monitoring ahead of general elections

The Association BH Journalists, the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections Pod Lupom, and the marketing agency Boram are urging lawmakers in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** to tighten the regulation around media monitoring during elections.[\[9\]](#) With a view to address the problem of biased reporting in online media, the organisations suggest that the Press Council extends its authority over online media, to be able to monitor and impose fines, as it does in the case of traditional media. Bosnian national law imposes a moratorium (election silence) starting 24 hours before election polls open and until after results are out. Online media often breaks this silence, as no regulatory frameworks are in place, and this is another issue the journalist unions plan to solve with this initiative.

#### Content policy



Development



**UN Agencies in Albania and Telekom Albania partner on SDGs implementation**

United Nations agencies in Albania and Telekom Albania announced a partnership aimed to raise awareness and drive action on and support for the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).[\[1\]](#) The two parties will work together to involve students, teachers, businesses, the academia, and broader communities in the promotion and implementation of various SDGs at national level, in areas such as gender equality, social inclusion, and promotion of human rights.

**Greece to invest in smart farming and expand broadband coverage**

Greece plans to use Copernicus, Europe's earth-monitoring system, to maximise the potential of smart farming, as a way to support the country's post-crisis efforts.[\[2\]](#) To support digital farming and bridge the digital divide within the country, the Greek government will also be implementing a 'Rural broadband Internet' project, co-funded by the EU. Through this project, remote areas are to benefit from electronic communications infrastructures allowing 50Mbps Internet speeds.

**New ICT Development Index 2017 released**

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has released the ninth edition of the annual *Measuring the Information Society Report*, which is featuring, inter alia, the ICT Development Index (IDI) 2017.[\[3\]](#) European countries have an IDI value above the global average, with only **Albania** falling outside the top half of the distribution. The highest improvement rates in mobile broadband subscriptions occurred in **Turkey, Albania**, and **Cyprus**. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is the most homogeneous region in ICT development. Only **Belarus** is in the top quartile of the IDI 2017 ranking, while **Ukraine** is one of the most dynamic countries in terms of IDI in the region. **Croatia** rose by more than five places in the 2017 ranking, compared to 2016, while **Azerbaijan** showed a decline in its overall IDI value.

**Armenia to open data gathering and processing centre**

The **Armenian** government has adopted a plan for the creation of a data gathering and processing centre, in compliance with international technical security standards.[\[4\]](#) This is seen as the next step in the promotion of e-government in Armenia. The centre will be established through a private-public partnership model, and it is expected to significantly contribute to the creation of unified standards and criteria for digital services provision, as well as introduce the most recent instruments for information systems protection.

**Romania's team is European vice-champion in cybersecurity for the second year in a row**

A team of ten **Romanian** young cybersecurity experts have secured the second place in the 2017 edition of the European Cyber Security Challenge, an initiative of ENISA (European Union Agency for Network and Information Security), which took place in Spain, on 30 October – 3 November.[\[5\]](#) The purpose of the event is to develop young people's abilities in cybersecurity, as well as to enable contact with private organisations operating in this field. In order to prepare for the challenge, the Romanian contestants trained in web applications security, cyber attack and defence, cryptography, analysis of network traffic, reverse engineering, but also public presentation.

**National Police and Microsoft Ukraine to cooperate on cybersecurity**

The National Police of **Ukraine** and Microsoft Ukraine have signed a memorandum of cooperation in the fields of information technology (IT), information security, and cybersecurity.[\[6\]](#) The two parties have agreed to work together on the modernisation of information infrastructures within the Police, with a view to optimise the administrative processes. The agreement also covers the creation and training of a team to be in charge of ensuring information security and cybersecurity within the institution.

**Digital policy on the agenda of the Eastern Partnership Summit**

Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Summit, held on 24 November in Brussels,[\[7\]](#) EU leaders met their six Eastern partners – **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine** – to discuss future priorities for their cooperation, including in the digital economy field. A joint declaration[\[8\]](#) was released emphasising the need for further harmonisation of digital markets between EU and the partner countries, and for strengthened cooperation and EU support in cybersecurity and fighting cybercrime. Parties also endorsed 20 deliverables to be achieved by 2020, which include, inter alia, the harmonisation of roaming pricing and reducing roaming tariffs among the partner countries, facilitating access to Internet through the roll out of national broadband strategies, and support for job creation in digital industries.

**20 IT startups to enjoy tax privileges in Armenia**

**Armenian** authorities have granted certificates for tax privileges to 20 IT startups.[\[9\]](#) The companies will be exempted from profit tax and will use an income tax rate of 10% (lower than for other companies). According to the Armenian law, IT startup companies having no more than 30 employees can apply for tax privileges. The law has been operating since 2015, and, so far 295 companies have received certificates.

**Uber and Yandex Taxi to complete merger in January 2018**

The merger of two big companies in the sharing economy – Uber and Yandex – which was announced in July 2017 and is expected to connect 127 cities in **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation**, is said to be completed in January 2018. Recently, the antimonopoly authorities of Belarus and the Russian Federation have approved the deal, while a similar decisions is expected from Kazakhstan.[\[10\]](#) Both Yandex.Taxi and Uber app will operate as before, while driver apps will be transitioned to a unified platform.

Cybersecurity and  
cybercrime



Economic



E-money and virtual currency



**Cryptocurrencies could contribute to financial stability**

The Central Bank of **Turkey** has established a cryptocurrency research group, including policymakers, regulators, and digital asset market participants. Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin – which is already a reality in Turkey (it can be used to purchase real estate and can be withdrawn from an ATM at the Ataturk International Airport, for example) – are not regulated in the country, but bank regulators are of the view that their use will be prudential. According to Murat Cetinkaya, the President of the Central Bank, such currencies could also 'help Turkey gain financial stability'.[\[Link\]](#)

**Croatian city to allow cryptocurrency payments**

The city of Osijek in Eastern **Croatia** is considering allowing its citizens to pay communal fees with cryptocurrencies.[\[Link\]](#) As part of a pilot project, a local IT company is to develop and implement a payment model for cryptocurrency payments services. More specifically, a mobile application will allow payments and conversions from cryptocurrency to Croatian currency kuna. Thus, payments to the City of Osijek's bank accounts will be collected in kuna, although citizens can choose to use cryptocurrencies when making the payments.

**Belarus to host first crypto exchange within the Customs Union**

Belarus will host the first centralised crypto exchange covering the territory of the Customs Union (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation).[\[Link\]](#) The exchange is expected to be opened in March 2018[\[Link\]](#) and it will allow legal input and output of fiat funds, with an additional possibility of exchanging Belarusian rubles. A draft decree on the Belarusian High-Tech Park, which would legalise cryptocurrencies in Belarus, is awaiting the signature of the country's president to become law.

**Instant payment system to be launched in Serbia**

The National Bank of **Serbia** is developing an infrastructure for an instant payment system, that could be launched in 2018.[\[Link\]](#) Deposited money will immediately appear on the target account and it could instantly be accessible to the receiver. Such transactions would only require the possession of a mobile phone or computer, that could be used for sending money through services such as e-banking or m-banking. This concept, also often referred to as 'cashless cash', has already proven to be an effective and easier payment method for many developed countries.

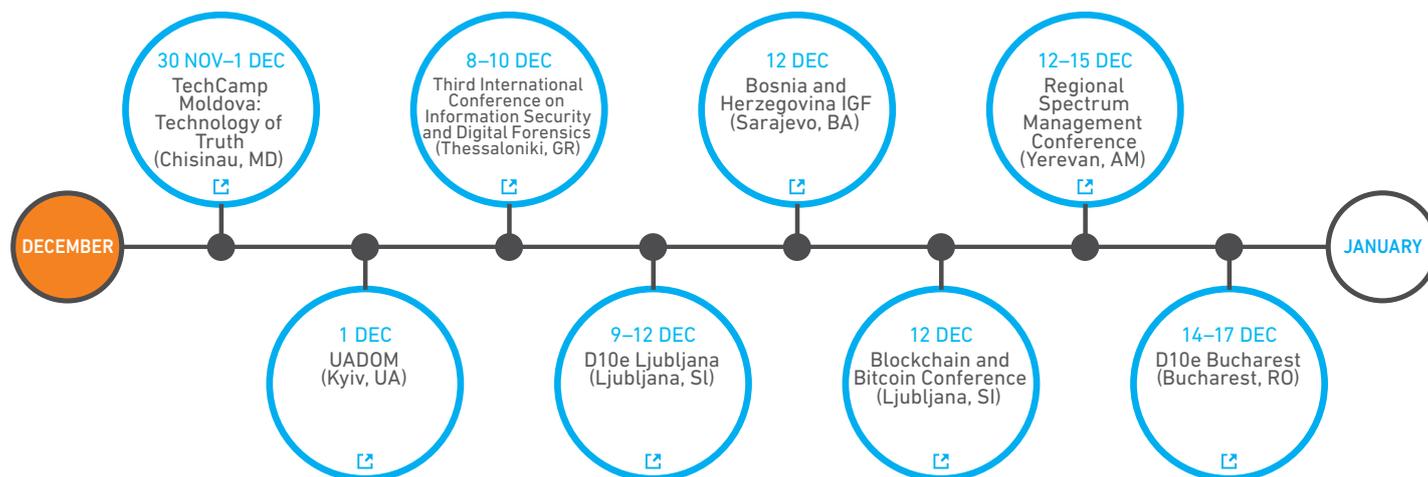
Child safety



**Bulgaria and UNICEF discuss digitisation and child safety online**

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev met with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Bulgaria, Maria Jesus Conde, to discuss the prospects of **Bulgaria** becoming a UNICEF regional centre.[\[Link\]](#) The action plan for a partnership programme between UNICEF and the Bulgarian government is expected to be approved in January. The two officials also discussed about the use of ICTs, Internet, and social media by children, noting that adequate laws and efficient criminal prosecution of people who use the Internet to commit crimes against children and young people are needed. Digitisation will be the focus of Bulgaria's cooperation with UNICEF.

AHEAD IN DECEMBER



EVENTS ACROSS THE REGION



Economic [↗](#)

**GPeC Summit | 14–15 November | Bucharest, Romania** [↗](#)

The summit gathered over 800 participants from Central and Eastern Europe and beyond to discuss the most recent developments, challenges, and opportunities in the field of e-commerce and digital marketing. It provided an overview of the status of e-commerce markets across the region, and featured discussions on bitcoin, data-driven design, and trust and safety in online commerce. Two side-events – the E-Commerce Gala Awards and the E-Commerce Expo – brought additional value to the summit.

**Tbilisi Belt & Road Forum | 28–29 November | Tbilisi, Georgia** [↗](#)

Organised by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the Forum served as a platform for high-level dialogue on trade related issues, bringing together representatives of governments, international organisations, and private sector from around 50 countries. Addressed digital policy issues included challenges and opportunities for e-commerce in the region, digital connectivity and digital infrastructures as steps towards bridging digital divides and sustaining the digital economy, as well as the need for an open, safe, and secure cyberspace.



Cybersecurity and cybercrime [↗](#)

**DefCamp8 | 9–10 November | Bucharest, Romania** [↗](#)

The eighth edition of this international hacking and information security conference brought together more than 1300 participants from Romania and neighbouring countries. Debates focused on a wide range of cybersecurity issues, including infrastructure security, cyber warfare, ransomware and malware, offensive and defensive security measures, and privacy and data protection. A Hacking Village allowed participants to practice their skills in contents focused on the Internet of Things (IoT), critical infrastructures, and banking services.

**GITI 2017 | 16–17 November | Tbilisi, Georgia** [↗](#)

The conference focused on ICT innovation and cybersecurity, and was dedicated to promoting public-private partnerships 'for competitiveness, innovation, and security' in Central and Eastern Europe, Baltic, Caucasus, and Middle East Asia. Sessions covered a wide range of technology and policy issues: connectivity, telecommunications markets, e-government, cybersecurity, capacity development, and socioeconomic implications of ICTs.



Development [↗](#)

**BIZIT Conference | 1–2 November | Belgrade, Serbia** [↗](#)

Seen as one of the biggest regional IT and business events of the year, the conference gathered various experts to discuss issues related to the fourth industrial revolution. Data security, IoT, education and employment in the digital era, and e-commerce, were among the key topics of debate. Organised with the support of the Serbian Ministry of Trade and Telecommunications, the conference emphasised the importance of digital development within both public and private sectors.

**EU – Western Balkans Media Days | 9–10 November | Tirana, Albania** [↗](#)

More than 250 participants from Western Balkans and the EU gathered in Tirana to discuss the role of media in the accession process of the region. Two panels and six workshops featured debates on media freedom, the economic sustainability of the media sector, new business models, and distortion of competition. The opportunities and disruptions brought by digital technologies, and the convergence between traditional and new/digital media stood out as important topics of discussion.

**Sarajevo Unlimited | 2–4 November | Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina** [↗](#)

This regional innovation forum, with participants from over 20 countries, showcased successful stories of Balkan startups, outlined the importance of an efficient implementation of digital trends and innovations, and stressed the need to better recognise and promote the development potential of the ICT industry in the region. It was emphasised during the event that training and education are needed for driving digital innovation and development.

**Data Science Conference 3.0 | 21–22 November | Belgrade, Serbia** [↗](#)

Held under the theme 'Changing the world through data', the conference focused on big data, data science, data visualisation, blockchain, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI). Representatives of private companies, public institutions, and academia from across SEE exchanged views and experiences in the areas of data science startups, blockchain initiatives, formal and non formal education in the field of data science, as well as current and possible impact of AI on society at large.



IGF initiatives [↗](#)

**Youth IGF Turkey | 26 November | Istanbul, Turkey** [↗](#)

The third meeting of the Youth IGF Turkey, held under the theme 'Internet's Social Impact on Youth', focused on four main topics: introduction to Internet governance, access, security, and media. The forum, which this year introduced a travel support programme, welcomed 30 (out of 100) selected participants from around Turkey. Short talks by experts were followed by extensive discussions among participants. Key messages from the event will be presented at this year's IGF in Geneva.

**IGF Macedonia | 28 November | Skopje, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** [↗](#)

The first annual meeting of the Macedonian IGF (IGF MKD) featured discussions on a number of digital policy issues relevant to the local Internet community: Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs), e-government services, cybersecurity, digital media and the protection of intellectual property rights, as well as fake news and media literacy. The forum brought together local and international participants, in situ and online, to share knowledge and experiences on the aforementioned topics.



Join us in preparing the next issue. Send us [↗](#) updates about Internet governance developments and/or events in your countries. Comments on this issue are also welcome.