Geneva Internet Platform

SEEDIG

Internet Governance
in South Eastern Europe

An overview of developments and activities related to Internet governance and digital policy in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area.

INTERNET GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENTS IN SEPTEMBER

Human rights

In Romania, the Ministry of Communications and Information Society has published a draft law requiring the mandatory registration of prepaid SIM card users. Currently, users of electronic communication services in Romania are not required to provide identification data when acquiring prepaid cards. If the project becomes law, natural persons (residents or foreigners) wishing to buy prepaid cards would need to provide their names, unique identification numbers, national ID numbers, and e-mail addresses. According to the ministry, such a measure would ensure an 'un-discriminatory legal regime' for all users of electronic communication services, be they subscribers or users of prepaid cards, with regard to their rights and obligations as customers. Moreover, it is argued that law enforcement authorities face difficulties in identifying individuals who use prepaid cards for crime-related purposes, and that the law would provide a solution to such problems. Civil society organisations, on the other hand, are of the opinion that some of the draft law's provisions may have a negative impact on human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ask for a public debate on the subject.

Cybersecurity

On 13 September, the Serbian Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications held a public consultation on a draft law on electronic documents, e-identification and trusted services. The new legislation would allow e-documents to be treated equally as paper-based documents, and would ensure that a qualified electronic signature cannot be denied validity of probative force only because it is in electronic form. In addition, the draft law would also introduce a new service - cloud electronic signatures - allowing e-signatures to be issued from the cloud. The law is seen as a step towards a more comprehensive regulatory framework for e-commerce activities. The public can still comment on the draft law until the end of the month.

Digital divide

SEEDIG has responded to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) call for public input on Phase II of the inter-sessional project 'Policy Option for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion', by submitting a contribution that reflects the discussions held during the SEEDIG 2016's session on 'Bridging digital divide(s) with a #SEEchange in digital literacy'. The contribution outlines existing challenges in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area when it comes to bridging the digital divide, in its various dimensions, and it lists a series of areas where activities are being undertaken and/or further actions are needed. Examples include: deployment of physical infrastructures, especially in rural areas; supporting digital literacy programmes; the adoption of adequate legal frameworks to encourage market competition and create a playing level field for private actors; exploring technologies such as white spaces; speeding up the deployment of IPv6; and the promotion of multilingualism and the availability of content in local languages and scripts.

E-money and virtual currencies

Recent debates in Serbia over the use of PayPal and similar electronic payment services have determined the country's National Bank to issue a statement clarifying that, in order for such services to be legally used at a national level (i.e. in domestic transactions), their providers need to be licensed as electronic money institutions, in accordance with the Serbian law. As PayPal does not have such a license in Serbia (and has not applied for one), its services cannot be legally used by Serbian legal and natural persons in the context of the country's payment system. However, there is no obstacle for PayPal and similar services to be used by Serbian individuals and entities for cross-border payments and transactions with foreign entities.

Capacity development

Several countries in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area rank high in a top of best programmers worldwide. The ranking was put together by HackerRank - a platform that ranks engineers based on their coding skills (including accuracy and speed) - and covers 50 countries. Russia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Romania all appear among the top 20 countries with best programmers.

Sociocultural

A survey conducted in Croatia in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections shows that, despite the fact that many Internet users in the country tend to be very active in expressing their political views and opinions via social networks, this does not necessarily mean their views have an impact on others. According to the survey, only 17.4% of politically non-aligned voters are likely to change their political views on the basis of politically-oriented content they come across via social networks. Moreover, around 20% of the respondents indicated they are rather inclined to remove friends from their social networks if they post political content.

EVENTS IN SEPTEMBER

Georgian Internet Governance Forum

The second annual meeting of the Georgian Internet Governance Forum (GeoIGF), held on 5 September, in Tbilisi, brought together around 180 Georgian and foreign participants, for a full day of discussions on Internet-related issues. Topics addressed included: the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, the gap in Internet access and broadband connectivity, copyright in the digital age, privacy and personal data protection, domain names, child safety online, and media and the Internet. The meeting was attended by representatives of public institutions, civil society organisations, academia, private companies, and the technical community. SEEDIG was represented at the event, and shared its experience in promoting capacity building and awareness raising on Internet governance issue across the region.

Croatia 2.0: Digital Solutions for a Better Future

A debate on Croatia 2.0: Digital Solutions for a Better Future, organised by Uber Croatia and several other Internet and ICT companies, on 7 September, in Zagreb, gathered representatives of the private sector, the technical community and governmental authorities, for a discussion on modalities to support and encourage the further development of the digital society in Croatia. Discussions touched on issues such as: the need for continuous improvements in the provision of electronic public services, better regulations to enable the development of the digital economy, and support for innovation and start-ups, including in the context of the sharing economy. A call was also made for a reform of the educational curriculum, to better adapt it to the requirements of the digital economy.

TLDCON

On 7-8 September, Tbilisi was the host of the 9th TLDCON, the annual conference for country code top level domain (ccTLD) registries and registrars in the Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS), Central and Eastern Europe. The Coordination Center for TLD .RU/.РФ and the Technical Center of Internet were the main organisers of the event, which was attended by around 120 participants. Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs) represented the main topic of discussion, as the implementation of top level domains in local languages and scripts is an endeavour that many registries in the region have embarked on. Other issues addressed included: legislative and policy aspects of domain name registration, secondary domain market, and information security. The conference also engaged registries and registrars in discussions on modalities for enhancing collaboration at both regional and global level.

Freedom of Expression on the Internet and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism

The OSCE Transnational Threats Department, the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina held a workshop on freedom of expression on the Internet and the need to counter violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism (VERLT), on 7-8 September, in Sarajevo. The event brought together over 100 participants from the region and beyond. The key message, as highlighted in the communique issued by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, was that measures taken to prevent and counter VERLT should be based on the rule of law and democratic values, and be compliant with human rights (such as privacy and freedom of expression). Participants also looked at how the use of information and communication technologies could advance efforts to counter VERLT.

Gaining a Digital Edge: Freedom of Expression

The 4th edition of the 'Gaining a Digital Edge: Freedom of Expression' conference, organised by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, OSCE Mission to Serbia, Center for Media, Data and Society of the CEU School of Public Policy, and SHARE Foundation, was held on 14-15 September, in Vienna. With a focus on digital media and journalism, the event gathered journalists, lawyers, government officials, IT experts, academics, artists, and human rights defenders from 14 South Eastern and Central European countries. The discussions were focused on strategies for navigating the legal, regulatory, and technological challenges related to the protection of freedom of expression in the digital world. Participants also exchanged experiences regarding their activities in promoting Internet freedoms. SEEDIG was present at the event and held a short session to outline its past and upcoming activities.

Presentation of the 'Guide to information security in Serbia'

On 16 September, the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS) presented the 'Guide to information security in Serbia', a publication developed in collaboration with the OSCE Mission in Serbia, DiploFoundation, SHARE foundation, and various other experts. The guide provides an overview of the current information security landscape in Serbia, and offers some policy recommendations in the area. One key message is that information security needs to be addressed from a multistakeholder perspective, and that public-private cooperation is essential. The guide also looks at regional and international instruments in the field of information security, developed by organisations such as the Council of Europe, United Nations, European Union, and NATO. The event was attended by around 60 participants representing the public sector, academia, the private sector, as well as several embassies and international organisations.

AHEAD IN OCTOBER

SEPTEMBER

3-4 OCT
ENOG 12/RIPE NCC Regional Meeting (Yerevan)

11-12 OCT
Data Science Conference (Belgrade)

12-14 Oct
Belgrade Security Forum (Belgrade)

14 Oct
Ukraine IGF (Kiev)

21-23 Oct
Software Freedom Kosova Conference (Prishtina)

28-29 Oct
KosICT (Prishtina)

5 OCT
Armenian IGF (Yerevan)

12 OCT
ION Bucharest (Bucharest)

13-14 Oct
Retaining Control of the Digital Enterprise (Prague)

21 Oct
Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF (Sarajevo)

25 Oct
Smart @Government 2016 (Belgrade)

OCTOBER