SEEDIG 2016 - Virtual planning meetings I and II

14 and 15 January 2016

Summary

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The aim of the planning meetings was to discuss the issues proposed for SEEDIG 2016 and to initiate work on the draft programme of the event.

1.   Overview of SEEDIG

The meeting started with an overview of SEEDIG and the planning process for the 2016 meeting. It was explained that SEEDIG is a sub-regional IGF initiative dedicated to open, inclusive and informal dialogue on Internet governance (IG) issues among interested stakeholders from South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area. SEEDIG's objectives include: awareness raising and capacity building on IG related matters (concept, issues, processes and organizations); facilitating multistakeholder discussion on IG issues that are of relevance for stakeholders in the region; and contributing to creating linkages between the IG realities in the region and the pan-European and global IG processes.

SEEDIG had its first meeting in June 2015, in Sofia, Bulgaria, in the context of the eighth EuroDIG meeting. It attracted around 150 participants who came from 38 countries and represented all stakeholder groups.

Following the 2015 meeting, the SEEDIG community held discussions on the future of the initiative and decided that SEEDIG should move forward as a sub-regional IGF process, with annual meetings to be held within the region. It was also decided that SEEDIG is to maintain close connections with EuroDIG, through identifying and implementing linkages between the two processes. A first step in this direction was the joint EuroDIG-SEEDIG call for issues, which run between October and December 2015. Further, results of the SEEDIG 2016 meeting are to be integrated into the EuroDIG session planning processes and become part of the EuroDIG programme. SEEDIG might also contribute to the preparation of a South Eastern European focused session for EuroDIG. Further discussions on the implementation of linkages between SEEDIG and EuroDIG are expected to be held during the EuroDIG planning meeting, to take place on 26 January, in Brussels.

SEEDIG 2016 will be held on 22 April, in Belgrade, Serbia. It will be hosted by the Serbian National Internet Domain Registry (RNIDS) and it is supported by the Council of Europe, DiploFoundation, the European Commission, the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the Internet Society (ISOC). The Serbian Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications will act as local institutional partner.

The programme for the annual meeting is built through a bottom-up, open and transparent process, by the SEEDIG community, under the coordination of the executive committee. The first step in this process was the call for issues. The virtual planning meetings constitute the second step, and they are to lead to the third step – the preparation of a draft programme, which will then be put for public comment.

2.   Submitted proposals: overview and discussions

An overview was given of the proposals submitted in response to the call for issues to be discussed at SEEDIG 2016:
- More than 70 proposals have been received.
- Proposals came from representatives of all stakeholder groups: governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia, private sector and technical community. Youth also submitted proposals.
- While most proposals were submitted by individuals living and/or working in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area, there were also proposals submitted from beyond the region.
- Most proposals were submitted under the human rights category, followed by: development of the IG ecosystem, innovation and economic development, security, access and literacy, media and content, technical and operational issues, and other.

The proposals have been published on SEEDIG's website[1]. It was explained that a decision had been made within the executive committee to publish the proposals only, without any information regarding the proponents. This was done mainly because of data protection considerations. When proposals were collected, proponents were not asked whether they agree with the publication of their personal data. Most legal frameworks prevent the publication of personal data (or identifiable information) without the consent of the data subject. SEEDIG, although not a legal entity at the moment, has to comply with applicable law. At the same time, not publishing the name and affiliation of the proponents could also have a positive consequence on the proposals review process, as consideration would be given only to the content of the proposals, and not the identity of the proponents.

An overview of the submitted proposals, prepared by the executive committee and distributed in advance of the meeting, was also presented at the meeting. It was noted that, in preparing the overview, the executive committee has tried to cluster proposed issues into

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[1] http://www.seedig.net/category/proposals/

more general topics (based on similarities and commonalities), hoping that this would facilitate the review process. These topics were:

- access, digital divide and capacity building;
- Internet governance: mechanisms, principles and the evolution of the ecosystem;
- Internet governance and jurisdiction;
- digital civil rights, safety and security;
- Internet economy in SEE;
- net neutrality and zero rating;
- freedom of media in SEE;
- promoting cybersecurity in SEE; and
- technical standardisation.

It was also mentioned that a couple of very specific proposals had been included in the overview; they have a capacity building focus and it was considered that there would be value in listing them separately. These were: 'IG mapping and observatory initiatives', and 'promoting digital rights with online media – good practices'.

With regard to the **overall format of the SEEDIG 2016 meeting**, it was mentioned that, considering financial constraints, as well as feedback received after the Sofia meeting, it is most likely that the programme will not include parallel sessions. The programme for the 2015 meeting only included four sessions (with no parallel events), and participants found this approach as valuable, as it kept the audience undivided, and allowed and encouraged more interactions and exchanges. Many of them expressed their desire for a similar approach to be followed for the 2016 meeting as well, considering that SEEDIG is still in its early phases, and participants would benefit from following the same track of discussions. It was further explained that a linear format of the programme still allows for some level of flexibility regarding both the duration of the sessions and the possibility of including segments dedicated to brief presentations on very specific issues.

In this context, and considering the large number of submitted proposals, it was underlined that it would, unfortunately, be impossible for the programme of SEEDIG 2016 to include all proposed issues. As such, decisions would have to be made as to what topics should be included in the programme, considering both the proposed issues, as well as the results of the planning meetings. However, it was explained that not including a certain proposal in the programme does not mean that the proponent would be excluded from further participating in building the programme. On the opposite, all proponents are encouraged to participate in the sessions planning process, irrespective of whether their proposed issues are or are not included into the programme. In order to better reflect this point, participants were reminded about the following **guidelines for the programme planning process**[2]:

- The sessions to be included in the SEEDIG programme would not be formed around individual proposals (i.e. one proposal would not become one session), but rather several proposals would be clustered together into one session, based on their relevance to the topic of the session.

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[2] A more detailed presentation of the guidelines is available at http://www.seedig.net/seedig-2016-programme/

- An initial clustering of proposals under specific sessions is made by the executive committee, considering the categories under which the proposals were submitted, as well as the content of the proposals. Changes could then be made to this initial clustering, based on input from proponents (re-assigning proposals to other sessions, including proposals that were not initially clustered, but which are found as relevant to a specific session, etc.).
- For each session, organizing teams (org teams) will be formed, and they will take over the responsibility for building the session (from deciding on the title and focus of the session, to choosing the format and the key participants).
- Proponents of the issues identified as pertaining to a particular session will be invited to join the org team for that session. Any other interested individuals will be welcome to join these teams.
- For each session, one or two focal points will be designated by the executive committee; their role is to lead the work of the org teams and to maintain communication with the executive committee.

After these explanations, participants in the meetings were invited to share their views regarding both the overview presented by the executive committee, and the possible identification of topics that could become sessions in the SEEDIG 2016 programme. The following points were made during the discussions:

General points

- Considering the expected format for the SEEDIG 2016 programme and the need to identify a limited number of topics to be included into the programme, a decision in this regard would have to be made while considering the following aspects, in a balanced manner:
  - **Regional specificity**: What are the topics that reflect the current and/or most pressing Internet-related problems in the region? Internationalised Domain Names were given as an example in this regard.
  - **Relevance for the region**: Looking at more general and global Internet-related issues, what are those issues that have an influence inside the region or that should be looked at more closely? IG as a multistakeholder process and IPv6 adoption were given as examples.
  - Such an approach would allow for the discussions to have a regional focus, thus making them of more interest and relevance for the community.

- **Capacity building** should continue to be part of the SEEDIG programme, in relation to issues that are considered not to be very well grasped within the region (again, the example of IG multistakeholder mechanisms was given). This will also be in line with one of the reasons that led to the creation of SEEDIG – the perceived need for more awareness raising and capacity building efforts on certain Internet governance related issues. It was explained, in this regard, that while the global IGF had its tenth meeting in 2016, and EuroDIG its eighth one, SEEDIG only had one meeting, and it is

felt that it is still appropriate for the initiative to keep a strong capacity building focus.

- With regard to the **format of the meeting**, it was said that, in order to try to allow for as many topics as possible to be covered during SEEDIG 2016, consideration is to be given to the following two aspects:
    - o Having 'short talks' included in the programme, in addition to the 'main sessions'. These would be very short presentations (up to 5 minutes each) on specific topics, and they could be seen as part of SEEDIG's capacity building dimension.
    - o Having a 'speakers' corner' integrated into the SEEDIG 2016 meeting, as an addition to the general programme. This would allow interested individuals to have short presentations on issues they are working on, projects they are involved with, etc.
    - o Support was expressed for the approach of gathering several proposals together into a broader topic, based on similarities and commonalities. This would contribute to increasing the number of proposals that could fit into the programme. It was explained that the clustering of proposals as presented in the overview is not final, and proposals can be re-allocated to other topics (and, later on, sessions), as seen appropriated at later stages.

Discussions on topics (as clustered in the overview of proposals)

- **Access, digital divide and capacity building.** Some participants mentioned that Internet access is a relevant topic for the region, given the still persistent digital divide, in its various dimensions (between urban and rural areas, between rich and poor, between young and older generation, etc.), and the need to develop and implement policies that could contribute to bridging this divide. Aspects related to the development of (local) content, affordability and accessibility and ICT-related education (digital literacy) were also mentioned as being relevant for the region and, as such, worthwhile discussing.

- **Internet governance – mechanisms, principles and the evolution of the ecosystem.** Support was expressed by several participants to have this topic included in the SEEDIG 2016 programme, with a focus on capacity building and on sharing of experiences and good practices from the region. It was mentioned that this would also be a good opportunity to continue the discussions that were held at the SEEDIG 2015 meeting on this topic, and to look at what has changed in the region over the past year.

- **Internet (governance) and jurisdiction.** It was mentioned that it could be useful for the region to have a discussion on this topic, especially considering the fact that countries are shaping Internet related policies which touch upon issues related to (international) mutual legal assistance and sovereignty. However, it was noted that the issue of jurisdiction is crosscutting, and it could be discussed in relation to other

specific topics, such as cybersecurity and human rights. It was also suggested that this topic, with a more specific focus, could be the subject of a 'short talk'.

- **Digital civil rights, safety and security.** Two possible approaches were discussed in relation to this topic. On one hand, considering that most proposals were submitted under the human rights category, as well as the relevance of the topic for the region, it would deserve a session on its own. It was suggested that the session could be framed generally, in order to encompass most of the specific issues that were proposed, while also allowing for a discussion on what the community sees as the most 'pressing' digital civil rights-related issues in the region at the moment. Such a session would also underline the fact that human rights are relevant for most other Internet-related issues, and that any IG discussions or policy-making related process should consider this aspect. On the other hand, some participants suggested that, for the very reason that human rights is a cross-cutting topic, pertaining to most of the issues proposed for SEEDIG, it is worthwhile exploring the idea of having a human rights dimension added to the other sessions to be included in the programme (rather than having a human rights session on its own).

- **Internet economy in SEE.** While there was not much discussion on this topic, it was said that, if it evolves into a session, it should, indeed, look at the situation in SEE, touching upon Internet economy-related issues that are most pressing in the region (such as the challenges related to the creation of an enabling environment to encourage the growth of the Internet economy).

- **Net neutrality and zero rating.** It was acknowledged that this continues to be an issue discussed in most Internet governance frameworks, both a global and regional level, and, in some instances, at a national level. At the same time, it was said that the topic does not seem to raise much interest or debate within the region. In response to this, it was noted that this could be the reason for having net neutrality as a topic on the SEEDIG programme – to encourage more discussions on it. Other participants suggested that net neutrality could be touched upon as part of broader discussions on access, economic issues and human rights, or presented as a general topic in a short talk.

- **Freedom of media in SEE.** It was said that a discussion on issues related to freedom of expression and online censorship in relation to media would be both timely and relevant for the region, given the challenges posed to the broader concept of 'freedom of media' in some countries. Other participants mentioned that the topic could well fit into a broader discussion on human rights in the digital environment, and, therefore, might not need a session on its own.

- **Promoting cybersecurity in SEE.** Many participants expressed support for including cybersecurity as a topic into the SEEDIG 2016 programme. They noted that countries in the region are still in the process of elaborating and deciding upon cybersecurity frameworks (legislation and/or strategies), and it would be timely to have a session at SEEDIG that could discuss about such frameworks (possibly with a view to

encourage the elaboration and adoption of such frameworks with human rights safeguards by design). Such a session could therefore be focused on discussions on regional challenges and vulnerabilities, while also having a capacity building dimension that would look into, for example, technical, legal, economical and human rights-related aspects of cybersecurity.

- With regard to the issue of child online safety, initially included under the cybersecurity topic, it was said that it is actual both globally and in the region, but that including it in a broad session on cybersecurity might not be the most suitable approach, as it has the potential of taking over the discussion, to the detriment of other cybersecurity related issues (such as technical aspects and legal issues). It was suggested that the issue could be clustered with others related to content policy, literacy and education.

- **Technical standardisation.** It was said that this cluster includes both issues that are specific to the region (such as Internationalised Domain Names - IDNs), as well as issues that have a global reach, but are also relevant at a regional level (such as IPv6 and DNSSEC). Comments were made with regard to the fact that a session on this topic could include a general overview of issues such as the afore-mentioned ones, as well as sharing of regional experiences and good practices, while also looking at challenges that are yet to be addressed.

3.   Overarching theme

As it is the case with most IG-related meetings and IGF initiatives, SEEDIG 2016 needs to have an overarching theme. This would be most useful when doing outreach and promoting the meeting, and, therefore, it should be framed in an attractive way, while reflecting the regional nature of SEEDIG and the focus of the discussions to be held at the meeting.

Participants were invited to make suggestions for such an overarching theme. One proposal was made during the meetings: 'Can you SEE Internet governance?'. Some support was expressed for this theme, which was seen as nicely reflecting the regional nature of SEEDIG. Further suggestions for an overarching theme are welcome, and they could be sent via the dedicated mailing list, email or social media.

4.   Next steps in building the programme for SEEDIG 2016

Following the two virtual meetings, the next steps[3] in building the programme for SEEDIG 2016 will include:
- preparation of a draft programme, on the basis of the discussions held at the virtual meetings.
- public comment on the draft programme – expected to run until the end of January;

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[3] The overall indicative timeline for the SEEDIG 2016 milestones is available at
http://www.seedig.net/milestones/

- finalisation of the programme. The indicative deadline for the final programme to be made available is 5 February.
- creation of org teams for the programme sessions;
- work on building the sessions: org teams would decide on the titles, focus, descriptions, format, key participants (if any), moderators/facilitators, remote moderators, rapporteurs, in an open and transparent manner, in line with the session principles[4], and in coordination with the executive committee.

Further details about these steps are to be communicated at later stages.

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[4] http://www.seedig.net/session-principles/