SEEDIG virtual meeting: Future of SEEDIG – making a decision
13 August 2015

Summary

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1.   Overview of the process for making a decision on SEEDIG 2016

An overview was given on the process put in place for making a decision on the approach for SEEDIG 2016.

Following discussions in Sofia and in Buenos Aires, in June 2015, on how SEEDIG could move forward as a sub-regional IGF initiative, a call for comments was launched on the dedicated mailing list in early July: http://mail-server.rnids.rs/pipermail/icann-see/2015-July/000232.html In short, building on the general support for a continuation of SEEDIG, members of the SEE mailing list were invited to share their views on how a SEEDIG 2016 meeting should look like, and two options were put on the table: organise SEEDIG 2016 in conjunction with EuroDIG 2016, in Brussels, or organise SEEDIG 2016 as a stand alone event, somewhere in the SEE region. It was explained that several important issues need to be considered when making a decision on the SEEDIG 2016 meeting, such as participation, partners, supported, funds, host, linkages between SEE and the wider Europe, etc. One possible approach was also outlined, together with some related implications, advantages and challenges: keeping the SEEDIG and EuroDIG preparatory processes together, but have the SEEDIG meeting organised somewhere in the region, at a time that precedes the EuroDIG meeting.

Members of the mailing list had almost a month (until 31 July) to provide their comments. Within this period, 16 members responded to the call. A compilation of the submitted comments, together with a brief summary of the main issues raised, was prepared by the executive committee and shared with the mailing list.

Generally speaking, large support has been expressed for SEEDIG to continue as a sub-regional IGF initiative, as well as for continuing to have strong connections between SEEDIG and EuroDIG. Regarding the options for a SEEDIG 2016 meeting, a statistical overview of the submitted comments shows the following:

- Number of members expressing support for a stand-alone SEEDIG 2016, held in the SEE region: 10
- Number of members expressing support for a SEEDIG 2016 meeting held in conjunction with EuroDIG 2016, in Brussels: 5

- Number of members expressing support for both options for SEEDIG 2016, depending on some circumstances: 1

The executive committee has reviewed the submitted comments and has carefully considered the following aspects: the substance of these comments (arguments, concerns, suggestions, etc.); the statistical data mentioned above; the discussions held at the 21 July virtual meeting; the views and support expressed by the EuroDIG Secretariat; and, given the diversity of views expressed, the need to move forward with a proposal that is consistent, at a minimum, with a majority of these views. Based on these considerations, the following approach was proposed with regards to SEEDIG 2016:

- organise the SEEDIG 2016 meeting as a stand-alone event, in the SEE region, at a time that precedes the EuroDIG 2016 meeting, and
- keep SEEDIG strongly connected with EuroDIG, through, inter alia:
  - having the call for proposals for topics for SEEDIG and EuroDIG 2016 as part of a single process (between October and December 2015);
  - continuing to host SEEDIG-related content on the EuroDIG website and wiki;
  - having SEEDIG as an integrated milestone in the EuroDIG preparatory process. Results should feed directly into the EuroDIG session planning process and become an inclusive part of the EuroDIG programme. SEEDIG could be the place to prepare, inter alia, a SEE-focused session at EuroDIG.
- with regards to the location for SEEDIG 2016, Belgrade, Serbia had been previously mentioned as a possibility and this has received support via the mailing list. Therefore, the proposal was to move forward with this option, and further discuss it at the following virtual meeting, as well as with the possible local host (RNIDS - the .rs registry).

This proposal was communicated on the mailing list on 5 August (http://mail-server.rnids.rs/pipermail/icann-see/2015-August/000269.html), and further input was invited until 12 August. It was noted that, consistent with previous practice, the aim was to make the final decision on SEEDIG 2016 based on consensus. Therefore, the absence of any formal objection (raised via the mailing list until the indicated deadline) was to be considered as general agreement with the proposed approach. It was also mentioned that: "Should reaching consensus not be possible, and as soon as a formal objection is raised, we will ask all of you to clearly indicate your agreement or disagreement with the proposed approach, and a decision will be made based on the simple majority (50%+1) of all preferences expressed."

Neither further comment, nor a formal objection to the proposed approach was raised via the mailing list until 12 July.

2.   Discussions

After the overview of the process and of the submitted comments, participants were reminded that the aim of the meeting was to make a final decision on the approach for SEEDIG 2016. It was mentioned that, given the previously taken commitment to make this decision by mid August, as well as the long period available for members of the mailing list to express their views, and the lack of any formal objection to the approach proposed in the 5 August email, it was time to close the discussion on SEEDIG 2016 and start the actual work on the preparatory process.

It was emphasised during the discussions that the proposed approach of having SEEDIG as a stand-alone event implies a number of challenges (related to, for example, attracting partners, sponsors, participation, etc.), and that its implementation would require more work (as compared to the work undertaken for SEEDIG 2015), and, therefore, more human resources to undertake this work. While there is awareness about these challenges, there also seems to be confidence that they can be addressed through a collaborative effort between the SEEDIG community and other supporting entities.

A number of issues related to the actual process for preparing the SEEDIG 2016 meeting have been raised during the virtual meeting:

a.   A question was raised as to whether an **action plan** has been prepared to outline the necessary steps and related timelines for planning the SEEDIG 2016 meeting, as well as the resources available for doing the necessary work. It was noted that, if the SEEDIG and EuroDIG preparatory process are to be closely linked, and SEEDIG content is to continue to be hosted on the EuroDIG website (as previously discussed), then the EuroDIG Secretariat would need to know well in advance what the requirements are in terms of hosted content and necessary tools (online forms, wiki, etc.)

In response, it was mentioned that the executive committee is currently preparing a work plan outlining the actions that need to be undertaken in the run up to the SEEDIG 2016 meeting. Additionally, work is also being done on drafting a set of operating principles to guide the SEEDIG process, and these could also include some details on the preparatory process for the annual meeting. With regards to the linkages between the SEEDIG and EuroDIG preparatory processes, participants were reminded that one issue previously discussed was related to having the call for proposals for session topics for both SEEDIG and EuroDIG launched at the same time, and as part of a unified process. It could be later discussed whether this would be done better through one single form or two separate forms; the SEEDIG executive committee and the EuroDIG Secretariat will coordinate on this and will plan separate meetings to discuss such and other technical aspects.

b.   **Location for SEEDIG 2016.** Belgrade, Serbia has been previously suggested (and received support) as a location for SEEDIG 2016, considering that the country has a working multistakeholder Internet governance model in place, and that the local Internet community

has experience in organising Internet governance related events. It was mentioned that these aspects would count as advantages when it comes to promoting SEEDIG and attracting both participants and potential sponsors. In addition to RNIDS - the entity willing to act as host for SEEDIG 2016, Diplo Foundation (which has offices in Serbia) was also mentioned as another possible partner for SEEDIG 2016.

c.   **Date for SEEDIG 2016.** Some comments were made with regards to exploring opportunities for having SEEDIG 2016 in conjunction with another Internet governance event held in the region. Considering Belgrade as the location for SEEDIG 2016, it was noted that, although an important event is held there on 10 March 2016 (DIDS – Serbian Internet Domain Days), having SEEDIG at around the same time might be too early and it might not give enough time for the related preparatory process. Therefore, another option was presented: considering that the 2016 RIPE SEE meeting is scheduled to take place on 19-20 April 2016, in Tirana, Albania, it might be wise to have the SEEDIG meeting around these dates, counting on the fact that RIPE attendees might thus be encouraged to also travel to Belgrade for SEEDIG (or the other way around). This option received support and it was agreed to have further discussions on the exact dates, pending a discussion and decision on the exact duration of SEEDIG 2016 (whether to continue as a one-day event or to be expanded to more days). On a related note, it was also said that, if SEEDIG 2016 is held in April next year, more consideration should be given to the timelines for building the programme for the meeting, in order to allow for enough time for the various stages of this process (collecting proposals for topics, building either a programme committee or organising teams for the various sessions, building the sessions themselves, with input from the wider community, etc.).

d.   **Funding for SEEDIG 2016**. One comment was made that securing the necessary funding for most IGF initiatives, at least in Europe, is a challenging issue, and that a number of issues need to be considered in this respect, such as: clarifying the fact that potential sponsors do not have more say in building the programme of the events as compared to other stakeholders, building memorandums of understanding with sponsors, getting support from local entities, transparency regarding the use of the money coming from sponsors, etc. It was acknowledged that all these are valid concerns also for SEEDIG, and that they will be carefully considered as part of the SEEDIG planning process. Additionally, it was also noted that a draft estimative budget would have to be prepared (outlining the expected expenses for SEEDIG 2016) before actually starting discussions with potential sponsors.

e.   **Legal issues (responsibility and liability for managing the finances).** Another issue raised was related to the responsibility and liability aspects connected to managing the finances for the SEEDIG 2016 meeting. It was noted that there would be two alternatives for how to deal with this issue: either build a new legal entity (a sort of a SEEDIG supporting organisation) that would assume responsibility for all financial aspects (contracts with sponsors, signing of invoices, etc.), or rely on the local host for assuming such responsibility. While the first option would be more difficult to put in place at this stage, the second option seems to be more suitable, at least for SEEDIG 2016. It was noted that this issue remains on the table and would be further discussed in order to better understand the various implications.

f.   **Institutional partners.** In addition to EuroDIG and ICANN, who have already expressed support for SEEDIG 2016, work will need to be done on attracting support from other entities. Such support would give more credibility to SEEDIG and would also help in the fundraising efforts. It was mentioned that the Council of Europe and the European Commission have specific programmes dedicated to the SEE region, and it would be worth exploring whether SEEDIG could benefit from such programmes. In response, it was said that discussions would continue to be held with these and other entities on their possible support for SEEDIG.

An announcement was also made with regards to the launch of the Bosnia and Herzegovina national IGF, which will have its first meeting on 1 October 2015. It was underlined that this event could be a very good opportunity for doing outreach about SEEDIG and raising awareness about this process.

It was underlined that all the aspects raised during the discussions would be explored in more detail as next steps in the planning process for SEEDIG 2016. More substantive work would therefore start being undertaken, and efforts will need to be done to strengthen the engagement of the overall community in the SEEDIG preparatory process, especially with regards to building the programme for the SEEDIG 2016 meeting and reaching out to potential participants, partners and sponsors. In terms of coordination of the preparatory process, it was noted that the current SEEDIG executive committee is willing and ready to continue to act in this role throughout the SEEDIG 2016 cycle, subject to endorsement from the community.

Building on all these debates, and considering the main aim of the virtual meeting, it was again emphasised that **the discussion on the approach and location for SEEDIG 2016 needs to be closed before actually starting working on any of the issues raised.** Therefore, considering the long public comment period, the comments submitted and the fact that the majority of comments were in favour of SEEDIG as a stand-alone event, the discussions held at the two virtual meetings, as well as in Sofia and Buenos Aires, and the lack of any formal objection with regards to the proposed approach, it was deemed as reasonable to move to a closure on this debate, with the following result:

SEEDIG 2016 will be organised as a stand-alone event, in the SEE region, and will be strongly connected with the EuroDIG process. The SEEDIG 2016 meeting will be held in Belgrade, Serbia, and will be hosted by the Serbian National Internet Domain Registry (RNIDS). With regards to the timing of the meeting, the dates explored are around middle/end April 2016 (around the dates of the RIPE SEE meeting scheduled for 19-20 April, in Tirana, Albania - as this could encourage RIPE attendees to also travel to Belgrade for SEEDIG).

Participants in the call agreed that this would be communicated to the mailing list, together with the summary of the discussions held during the meeting.

3.   Next steps

As discussed both before and during this meeting, some next steps in terms of planning the SEEDIG 2016 meeting include:

- confirming the dates for the SEEDIG 2016 meeting;
- building a work plan with action points and timelines for the various steps of the preparatory process (the call for proposals for the programme, a preparatory meeting, etc.);
- deciding on how the administrative and financial issues will be handled;
- deciding on the duration of the SEEDIG 2016 meeting and on the most suitable approach for how to build the programme;
- building an estimative budget and attracting sponsors;
- consolidating or building partnerships with various entities;
- defining modalities for implementing the linkages between SEEDIG and EuroDIG;
- drafting and agreeing upon a set of SEEDIG operating principles to guide the SEEDIG process, etc.

Substantive work will be required on those and other related issues, and it is expected that more frequent virtual meetings will be held.