



Multilingual Internet: Local scripts by default

Side-event at SEEDIG 5 (7 May 2019, Bucharest)

Co-organised by SEEDIG and DC DNSI

On 7–8 May 2019, the South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance (SEEDIG) held its [fifth annual meeting](#), in Bucharest, Romania. In line with what is already a tradition at SEEDIG, Internet multilingualism and IDNs featured in the [meeting programme](#), with a flash-session and a side-event.

Side-event description

Co-organised with the Internet Governance Forum Dynamic Coalition on DNS Issues, this dialogue will bring together government representatives and country code top-level domain (ccTLD) operators, to discuss ways and means to advance multilingualism on the Internet in South Eastern Europe and the neighbouring area (SEE+). Given the diversity of languages and scripts in the region, Internet multilingualism is a topic that deserves more attention, as policies and initiatives in this area could significantly contribute to a more inclusive Internet. The session will feature discussions on the state of play of Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs) and Universal Acceptance (UA) readiness in the region. Universal Acceptance is the concept that all domain names and e-mail addresses should be recognised by Internet applications and systems. Governments in the SEE+ region can play a leading role in helping to raise the number of IDN domain names and to ensure that IDN-based e-mail addresses are more widely used, through, for example, ensuring that they are recognised by government services. Operators of ccTLDs can share experiences and showcase their success stories in devising and implementing IDN and broader multilingualism policies. Join us for this roundtable, to exchange information with counterpart officials, and to hear from subject matter experts on how to advance multilingualism and UA-readiness at a national and regional level.

Summary of discussions

The side-event brought together around 20+ participants from SEE+, including governmental representatives (Bulgaria, Moldova and Serbia), ccTLD registries (Armenia (.հայ), Georgia (.გე), Moldova (.md), Russia (.ru, .дети, .рф), Serbia (.rs and .срб), Slovenia (.si)), PIR, as well as other guests from Georgia, Serbia, Ukraine, Council of Europe, and others.

The session started with an introduction about IDNs and Universal Acceptance, and the work of DC DNSI and UASG. A presentation was then delivered by the **Serbian National Internet Domain Registry (RNIDS)**, whose representative spoke about the registry's work in promoting the use of IDNs at the national level. For example, a policy has been recently implemented



allowing the registration of domain names in the languages and scripts of the recognised national minorities in Serbia. The **Serbian Ministry of Culture** was also present at the session and spoke about a proposal that the ministry had made for all public entities in Serbia to use Cyrillic domain names. Unfortunately, the proposal did not gain much traction within public entities.

The **Russian ccTLD** shared their positive experience in working together with the government to encourage the use of IDNs. They also spoke about current and planned work within national and regional working groups focused on email address internationalisation.

The situation in **Bulgaria** was briefly presented, where difficulties seem to be determined by the fact that there are two separate entities running .bg and .бг, which are not very willing to fully cooperate with the government. The government itself seems to be experiencing some challenges, as a steering group which was formed to cooperate with the two ccTLDs registries only managed to have a couple of meetings, the most recent one being two years ago.

In **Slovenia**, which uses the Latin script with diacritical marks, there is not much interest in using domain names with diacritics. At the moment, there are only around 1300 such domain names registered, and they are not very much promoted.

In **Moldova**, the ccTLD is run by a governmental IDN. Moldova also uses the Latin script with diacritical marks, and the ccTLD is now considering the introduction of IDNs.

Following this round of exchanges, a discussion was held on measures that governments could take to support and encourage Internet multilingualism. One explored option was for governments to issue policies and rules on the mandatory use of national scripts online (by public entities at least).

Georgian participants talked about their experience with a national law which demands importers to translate the names of their products and brands into Georgian language and script and make sure these translations are visible on the products' packaging. By analogy, it was said, a similar policy could be adopted with regard to the use of domain names, making it mandatory for any organisation to have a domain name in the national script.

The **Armenian ccTLD** outlined some of their projects run in cooperation with the Armenian government and spoke about their desire to reach the large Armenian diaspora with IDN ccTLD domain names. One of the projects run by the registry involve cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sciences and all public schools, offering them a domain name in the national script for free. The idea behind this project is to educate the next generation to use IDN domain names as a default option.



The session wrapped up with a few conclusions:

- It is easier for people to express themselves in their own languages.
- IDNs/UA are enablers of culture, society and economics.
- UA results in better User eXperience (UX). And SEO is better with IDNs.
- There is a responsibility to comply with standards.
- Governments have (or should have) a crucial role in promoting IDNs. For this, more awareness raising and more dialogue with governments is needed.