

Internet Government Forum Vilnius; Impressions

The Internet Government Forum (IGF), where CECUA is an accredited member from the start in 2006, was held in Vilnius Lithuania September 14-17. One of the issues was IGF mandate which expires shortly. Should it be extended or not? I will come back to that issue later.

The formation of the Internet Governance Forum was first recommended in the report of the [Working Group on Internet Governance](#) following a series of open consultations. This report was one of the inputs to the second phase of the [World Summit on the Information Society](#) in Tunis in 2005, which formally called for the creation of the IGF and set out its mandate.

The IGF means different thing to different people. In my view the annual meetings are important to raise awareness of Internet Governance issues and get people involved. "Developing the future together" was a very appropriate theme of this years forum in Vilnius.

Her Excellency, Ms. Dalia Grybauskaite, President of the Republic of Lithuania, in her opening speech stressed that the Internet presented many challenges, including best-use of the Internet for personal and business alike but also to get mis-use of the Internet under control. The international community had no other choice but to work together. And closer and more open dialogue between the interested stakeholders was required.

The key words here are best-use and mis-use, working together and international community. CECUA has often pointed out that use and in particular mis-use of the internet is not a national issue any more, also it is also not a regional or continental issue either, it is a global issue. With about 1500 participants from all over the world the Forum certainly showed the international community working together. Furthermore, a Workshop flora of over 100 theme workshops showed the complexity of Internet Governance and diversity of the issues involved. www.intgovforum.org/cms/

But is this enough to get the Governments of this world to stop and listen? Too long Governments have treated Internet as a nice toy best left alone on its own. Governments by their very nature are not proactive, they are reactive. They react to bad happenings and institute measures to make sure this same bad happening will not happen again. It was not until news about attacks on countries Government Internet infrastructure and alleged foreign government involvement for political purposes appeared in the media that they started to wake up. They finally began to understand that the Internet was also fruitful ground for various criminal activities and it dawned upon them that they had to react, had to do something. They also started to realize that a crime is a crime regardless of if it is breaking and entering a house or breaking and entering an internet domain. And the perpetrators have to be brought to justice. Governments have a lot to catch up on. Also the judiciary responsible for investigating the crime and bringing the criminals to justice. The catching up will take a while, maybe too long? Too long because the perpetrators move fast having vast resources of money and using the latest in technology. Their newest targets seem to be public facilities like electrical power plants, electrical networks and other public infrastructures. This also includes nuclear power plants and the consequences could be another Chernobyl. Raising awareness among the public is a key issue because the public in the end is what Governments sooner or later have listen to. Therefore, the IGF is first and foremost a good venue to raise awareness and promote cooperation. However, IGF meetings once a year is not enough. Most people can not afford to travel across the globe to such meetings. The awareness raising has to be brought closer to home somehow. Setting up local or regional IGFs is one way of doing it. The role of the under UN umbrella operating IGF should be extended to promote and coordinate such local and regional IGFs and the communication between them. The Internet itself is there to help providing excellent platform for communication. This will at the same time help to bridge the digital divide existing between developed and developing countries. Europe has been looking toward the future and the EIF (European Internet Forum) Digital World in 2025 initiative is a good start.

<http://www.eifonline.org/en/articles/digital-world-in-2025/digital-world-in-2025.cfm>

Mr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development at UNDESA noted in his opening address that while Internet use was increasing; it was growing faster in the developed

world than in developing regions and that the digital divide was growing instead of shrinking. Certainly there is a relationship between use of the internet and the local involvement in internet governance. Strong user community is more likely to be interested in IGF issues than a weak one. This growth of the digital divide is alarming indeed and needs to be addressed because the global Internet governance is as strong as its weakest link. And international criminals will certainly make use of that and operate out of “weak” locations where it is easy to bypass or detour the justice. Local and regional IGFs could help there. A very suitable role for the UN IGF to support.

Also ICANN seems to have reinvented itself and is now accepting its role as the technical administrator of the Internet. In that role it may even survive as a private company registered in California although its close relationship with the USA government has to be made more transparent. The increased activity of the GAC, the Government Advisory Committee, has helped to bring about this change in ICANN. The use of national characters in domain names no longer is a “trumped up nationalism” but what is there to come or already has come. It gets away with the naive idea that English was the language of the Internet and the Latin alphabet the alphabet of the Internet. The growth potential of the Internet is exactly in non English speaking and non Latin alphabet countries. And ICANN finally seems to have understood this. GAC has managed to reach out to more and more countries using technology platform like the Internet. Some of those countries have no financial resources to send people to conferences, but they will be able to pay for the conference call. IGF could manage their outreach process in a similar way. With over 100 workshop themes there is a lot to talk about. And the talk has to include people from all corners of the world.

I would like to mention 2 promising initiatives from South America and Asia.

First the Brazilian one. Brazil has set up a Brazilian Internet Steering Committee and this committee has approved a resolution on the Principles for the Governance and Use of the internet. www.cgi.br

The Principles are listed in 10 paragraphs. I will only deal with principle 7, Unaccountability of the network

“All action taken against illicit activity on the network must be aimed at those directly responsible for such activities, and not at the means of access and transport, always upholding the fundamental principles of freedom, privacy and the respect for human rights.”

This is very good indeed but something very important is missing, a demand to bring those responsible for illicit activity to justice. It is sort of left up to chance or in case there is a prosecution, then Paragraph 7 applies.

The other initiative comes from South East Asia where an Asia-Pacific Regional IGF is working and has brought out several observations and a list of recommendations.

E-mail: right2net@gmail.com

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/right2net>

Facebook; <https://www.facebook.com/right2net>

One of the observations is on Cyber Security

“Definition of cyber security must include elements that address right to privacy and civil and political freedom.

Today’s information society connects personal IT devices directly to the outside world, no longer storing personal data on a single server. Given the involvement of the (especially state-owned enterprises) in running such technologies, surveillance and identity theft remain a constant threat against Internet users.

In this regard, any national security policy must not deviate from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all international human rights covenants to which states are parties.”

Here is nothing on crime protection and crime punishment.

Here the focus is different and for a reason, it is on freedom of expression and human rights. It shows us that different parts of the world have different priorities and also concerns and worries.

But there is a third initiative, this one coming from Europe: CECUA Bill of Rights published by CECUA in year 1998. www.cecua.org

It has 9 articles, Article 9 right for redress:

“The Citizen shall have access to protection and redress for acts of fraud, corruption of personal data, loss of privacy, and consequential

costs arising from errors, bugs or failures of internet services and facilities.”

This is somewhat broad indeed but conveys clearly the idea of law and order also on the Internet. And it seems to be valid more than ever now in 2010.

Although it is soon 12 years old the CECUA Bill of Rights clearly addresses the issue of punishment for Internet crimes, something the “younger” ones leave out. This may all have its explanations, CECUA Bill of Rights comes from one of the most developed part of the globe, the others from more developing parts of the globe?

Anyhow, it shows clearly that we need a coordinating organization like the IGF to bring about communication and coordination between and among the various parts of the globe for the benefit of all. CECUA certainly is ready and prepared to participate in that process.

Therefore, CECUA believes that IGF mandate should be extended for another 5 years. However, the mandate should be reviewed. The new mandate should focus on broadening the outreach and arranging and coordinating regional and local IGF forums to feed into the UN IGF. That will be the best way to move Internet Governance forward and in the right direction. We all have a lot to benefit from that so let us do it together.

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Dr. Jon Thorhallsson
CECUA President