IGF 2018- Response to Call for Input

Taking stock of the 2018 work program and 13th IGF and suggestions for the way forward

The following note is a response to the "Call for Input" by the IGF Secretariat to take stock of the IGF meeting held in November in Paris at UNESCO and forward looking to the future of the IGF.

These reflections do not represent an official position of the European Commission, but simply an informal input to the work carried out by the MAG and by the hosting country.

1. Introduction

The European Commission actively participated in the 13th IGF held in Paris (12-14 November 2018), as a sign of its continued commitment and support to the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance embodied by the IGF. The European Commission coordinated with Members of the European Parliament and EU Member States both before and during each IGF meeting.

A significant European presence at the 13th IGF was ensured by:

- The participation of Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society of the European Commission and a delegation of six Members of the European Parliament. At the end of the meeting they jointly issued a **Declaration**[1], stressing how "more than ever we now need to ensure that we are well equipped for good governance of the cyber sphere";

- An Open Forum on the Next-Generation Internet initiative[2], organised by the European Commission.

- A booth in the IGF village, co-organised with EuroDIG and the Government of The Netherlands (hosting country of EuroDIG 2019).

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[1]https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/internet-governance-forum-2018-joint-declaration-european-commissioner-mariya-gabriel-and

[2] https://www.ngi.eu/

2.   Taking Stock of 2018 programming, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the 13th annual IGF: What worked well? What worked not so well?

We would like to thank the French Government, organiser of the IGF 2018, UNESCO, the IGF Secretariat and the MAG for the work carried out for the organisation of the event.

The overarching theme of the IGF 2018 **"The Internet of Trust"** highlighted the need of rebuilding trust in the technology, but also among the different stakeholders in the Internet Governance community. Some of the most prominent technological trends have been discussed this year: from Artificial Intelligence and its impact on labour, to the role of social media in spreading fake news, to the need of a resilient cybersecurity strategy for public and private sector activities.

The **high-level presence** of President Emmanuel Macron, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and UNESCO Secretary General Audrey Azoulay considerably raised the visibility and the impact of the political messages conveyed.

The idea of organising the event in the wider context of the Paris Digital Week and at the same time with the Paris Peace Forum contributed to an increased presence of high-level political speakers, as well as participation of governments and private sector representatives. This also highlighted the fact that the IGF could benefit from being part of a wider context of events related to the digital transformation and / or international cooperation.

Compared to previous years, the hosting country has had undoubtedly a more hands-on approach. The community at large, and the MAG in particular, have not always welcomed this approach, however it is worth noticing that the level of political participation, as well as the level (in general) of the sessions were higher compared to previous years, and this is mainly due to the active involvement of the French Government.

The European Commission appreciated the initiative of the organisers to gather some of the most relevant outcomes of the discussions under the **"Paris messages"**, following up on the "Geneva messages" produced already by the Swiss organisers after the IGF 2017. It is worth mentioning here that two sets of "Paris messages" have been produced at the end of the event: one by the IGF Secretariat[3] and one by the French organisers[4]. While

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[3] http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2018-key-messages

[4] http://igf2018.fr/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/WIP-Paris-Messages-.pdf

the latter are concise and to the point, the ones produced by the IGF Secretariat are more high-level. This raises the old issue of finding the right balance between a participatory, bottom-up and multistakeholder process with the need for more curated outcome of the IGF.

An important outcome of the IGF and the Paris Peace Forum was the publication of "The Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace". When presenting it, the French President suggested entrusting the IGF with "monitoring the text's evolution, recording those who support it and identifying the cooperation initiatives and measures necessary to reach its goals".

As for the programme, the European Commission appreciated the attempt of having a more focused, **issues-driven agenda** and, in general, a shorter, more narrowed IGF. Following up on what many stakeholders, including the European Commission, suggested last year, the French organisers chose an "institutional venue" as the UNESCO HQ to host the event, which helped in reducing logistic and security costs.

3.   Suggestions for improvements in 2019 (and beyond)

A number of incremental improvements have been successfully introduced over the last decade, but now, looking ahead, the IGF community has to make a resolute effort to ensure that the IGF will still be relevant and useful over the next 7 years.

Considering the acceleration of the digital transformation, the unprecedented global challenges that we will witness in this timeframe and the deep impact this will have on society, the economy and policy-making, the IGF needs to become more strategic and have more meaningful and tangible output. This means more efficiency in using the knowledge and know-how collectively built and retained by the MAG members and the broader IGF community over the course of the years and the ability to turn it into authoritative guidance that will guide the development of the internet.

The IGF has the potentiality to become one of the main fora to shape the future of our digital society. In order to make the discussion more effective and deliver more to build the future Internet in the way we envision it, the IGF will have to undergo some changes.

Areas where we should focus our efforts are, in our view, the following:

- increase the role of the National and Regional Initiatives as fora to collect ideas coming from local communities and convey them on the global scene; and

conversely use them as an instrument to spread the IGF messages to the local communities;

- develop strategies to make the best use of the information and knowledge built at national and regional level;

- make the IGF a platform that provides also practical solutions to the different issues at stake, through the organisation of concrete projects such as hackatons and prizes;

- increase the level of participation of certain stakeholders, in particular governments and the private sector, including in terms of vertical sectors involved (e.g. energy, health, education), as well as start-up and SMEs; and ensure continuous renewal of the IGF community, to bring fresh ideas and perspectives;

- improve the operational processes to set-up the annual programme, giving the MAG a content curating role;

- strengthen the relations and interactions between the IGF and other bodies addressing Internet governance issues from different perspectives; and develop a shared long-term view of the role and activities of the IGF, aligning the discussion to the vision for the Internet of the future.

The European Commission believes that the renewed and extended mandate of the IGF offers the opportunity for **strategic multi-annual planning**. Each IGF meeting should not be seen in isolation, but rather be part of a broader reflection spanning inter-sessional work and cycles of 2-3 years. This will allow the definition of more challenging goals and processes which span over several meetings. A carefully designed multi-annual strategy can provide a broad framework into which topics and issues can be addressed, making the workshop selection process more transparent and less time-consuming.

This requires in turn consistent and predictable commitment by host countries and by donors (who ensure the existence of the IGF itself). The financial sustainability of the IGF is a challenge that needs to be properly addressed. As one of the most stable donor to the IGF, the European Commission invites others to join in this effort.

The IGF 2019 will be hosted by Germany (25-29 November 2019). The fact that the hosting country is already known will allow the IGF Secretariat and the MAG to fully concentrate on the program and on the outcomes.

While it is widely recognised that the IGF brings added value as a venue for all the relevant stakeholders to meet once a year, as well as a platform to scout new

technological trends and their impact, it is becoming questionable what is the added value in terms of outputs.

The last editions of the IGF, as well as the MAG preparatory meetings and different NRIs fora, have been characterised by endless discussions on how to improve the IGF and make it more relevant, but these discussions remained high-level and focused on process more than on content. It is now time to shift the focus from processes to actual outcomes, shaping decisions, **producing recommendations and shared principles** as it was envisaged in the WSIS mandate.

This will require changes in the way the IGF works. It is important to show that the change comes from within the IGF, that the IGF has the maturity to identify shortcomings and improve itself. The process should be launched without delay with a view to come with concrete proposals at the next IGF in Berlin.

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