

Response to EuroDIG 2009 Questionnaire: Portuguese Multistakeholder Forum on the Internet and Related Issues

Context

The multistakeholders participation in a forum regarding Internet governance and related issues is done in Portugal in a broader setting, under the name “**Information Society Forum**”.

Portugal had an early start (in 1996-1997) in the creation of a multistakeholders forum regarding Information Society, the Internet and ICT, involving public administration, research and technical community, industry and services enterprises and associations, civil society organisations, and key individualities. In fact, in 1996-1997, a comprehensive plan for the development of the information society, quite unusual at the time and a precursor of eEurope and even of some of the i2010 measures, was published as the “Green Book for the Information Society in Portugal” (Portuguese version: [Livre Verde para a Sociedade da Informação em Portugal](#), May 1997) and it was prepared with the contribution of several meetings of a *multistakeholders* forum.

In July 2005, the action programme for the Information and Knowledge Society for 2005-2010 – [Connecting Portugal](#) – was approved and explicitly established the “**Information Society Forum**” for Information Society, Internet and ICT matters. In April 2007, through governmental legislation, this forum was incorporated as a consultative body for the development of public policies in the [Knowledge Society Agency \(UMIC\)](#), the Portuguese public agency with the mission of coordinating the policies for the Information Society and mobilizing it through dissemination, qualification and research activities, which operates within the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education.

The themes of the **Information Society Forum** vary from session to session and it can convene for specialized topics. It has had sessions on the situation and evolution perspectives of the information society in Portugal, training and qualification of human resources in and with ICT, promoting e-commerce, the modernization of the public administration with ICT, new horizons in ICT (sensor-based networks, distributed decision making and the role of connectivity; demographic challenges), public policies (ICT in regional development and creation of employment, ICT for social inclusion, new enterprise opportunities in ICT). For specialized topics, we had multistakeholders *fora* on themes such as the National Grid Initiative (INGRID), Next Generation Networks (NGN) and the corresponding advanced services over broadband, e-Science, Future Internet Technologies. The Knowledge Society Agency was also involved in the organisation of a seminar series on ICT Public Policy which also contributes to form opinion on public policy issues regarding the Internet.

The Portuguese **Information Society Forum** involves the participation of public administration, research and technical community, industry and services enterprises and associations, civil society organisations, and key individualities. The sessions are open to all interested parties and usually involve keynote speakers and invited panels followed by open debate.

Answers to the questions to foster the debate at EuroDIG 2009 Plenary 4 session:

1. **Effectiveness of national IGF structures?**

What is your experience with the effectiveness of your national IGFs discussions? How do you make sure that your national IGF discussions do have an impact on the policy discussion and on national legislation process? How do you make sure that the relevant stakeholders get together and have a constructive exchange? How do you make sure that your national IGF helps people to better understand the challenges related to Internet Governance?

The discussions in the Information Society Forum have contributed to raise an widen awareness on Internet and other Information Society issues among a very wide range of players, to identify concrete issues of concern, to develop common points of view and to inform decisions. They do not have a binding effect on the preparation of national legislation but they influence initiatives of government and parliament. For each session of the Information Society Forum a theme is identified, invitations of participation are issued to a wide set of stakeholders, a panel with some of the most relevant stakeholders is formed and moderators and keynote speakers are invited on the basis of known relevance to the theme. After keynote speeches and short communication of the panel members an open general debate develops.

2. **European approach on Internet Governance?**

What is "European" about the Internet Governance Discussion in Europe? What can Europe contribute to the global Internet Governance Discussion? What are European perspectives, best practices and how should they feed into the global IGF?

We believe there is not such a thing as a “European Internet” and therefore the Internet Governance Discussion and the discussion of other Information Society issues does not have “European” issues. What brings some European identity to these discussions is the cultural heritage, values, and stage in the social and economic development pathways. We think European perspectives on the Internet have been visible at the global IGF and other Internet and Information Society related global settings on aspects such as: openness, people-centricity, social networking, freedom of speech, privacy, inclusiveness, accessibility to disabled people, multilingualism and multiculturalism, neutrality, flexibility to foster new technologies and uses, contribution to intercontinental and interregional connectivity, contribution to human and social development, platform for unrestricted creativity and innovation, contribution to democracy, unrestricted access to information and knowledge, belief on the value of multistakeholder geographically balanced participation, defense of multipolar and dynamic forms of organisation and participation adapted to open network societies and different of traditional hierarchical bureaucracies and multilateral organisations.

3. European IGF: mandate and objectives?

Is there a need/desire for a European IGF? If yes, what should be its mandate and objectives? Which stakeholders should participate?

We believe it is useful to bring aligned but different European voices to the global IGF discussions, and we believe that the value of developing a European forum stands on its contribution for sharing opinions and clarify alignment on common ideas. We believe that European influence in the global IGF is higher if it participates in a plurality of voices, generally aligned and complementary, instead of only in “one voice”, but the desired alignment requires appropriate stages of wide European participation for debates and for sharing and discussing perspectives, concerns and best practices, and this is where we find the value of a European forum.

The mandate of the European forum should be to provide a setting for development of common perspectives, sharing of best practices, identification of different views and of new and unresolved issues regarding the Internet, thus providing an alignment on common European perspectives and a clarification on differences and complementarities. We believe that such a forum should not restrict itself to strictly “governance” issues, but should be open to consider all Internet related issues. As a matter of fact, we think that only if the scope of its activities is widened in such a way it can be sustainable with evolving agendas that will maintain and arise interest in continued multistakeholders participation. (We believe this observation also applies to the global IGF and that its recent evolution has attempted to widen its scope, but we also believe that it is necessary to make that orientation very clear and explicit since a perceived restriction to just “governance” issues may soon lead to exhaust interest on its operation due to the unavoidable repetition in different sessions that a narrow scope will involve). Maybe the European forum we are discussing should be called “European Internet Forum” instead of “European Internet Governance Forum”.

The participant stakeholders should include public administrations, research, university and technical community, industry and services enterprises and associations, civil society organisations, organisations related to Internet issues, and key individualities who appear to be opinion makers, experts or thought leaders on Internet related matters .

4. European IGF: structure and working methods?

How should such a regional forum work? How should it be organized and how should it be funded?

How should it link to national, global and other regional Internet governance initiatives?

How could it help to improved e-participation in internet governance in Europe?

A European forum should meet once a year (well in advance of meetings of the global IGF if they will continue to happen yearly). It should involve the leading organisations and individuals involved in national Internet related *fora* but there is no need of establishing general formal links with them. It should be open to participation and engage as many European stakeholders as possible. Its organisation should be light, without formal internal regulations or membership, following the example of open network organisations, relying on the voluntary involvement of nationally recognised thought leaders. The yearly sessions could be rotationally organized around entities involved in the organization of national Internet related *fora*, restrict costs to local logistics and obtain funding from the entities involved in the organization and other possible public or private sponsors.