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Clear Goals Needed

New Institutional Models Said Needed With Rise in Internet Governance Talks

GENEVA -- New institutions may be needed to manage national and regional Internet Governance Forum-type events cropping up around the world, participants said at a European discussion that runs through Tuesday. Council of Europe countries may provide resources to further pan-European Internet governance discussions, an official said.

The spread of national and regional governance meetings is significant, said Marcus Kummer, executive coordinator of the U.N. Internet Governance Forum. Five meetings and consultations were held in the Caribbean in the last two years, two in Latin America, and two in Africa, and one is scheduled for October in West Africa, he said. National Internet governance meetings are happening in the U.K., Italy, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and the U.S., Kummer said.

Governments, civil groups and the private sector won't be able to meet all the Internet challenges, said Veronique Gigon, a deputy director at Swiss Ofcom. The goal of governance must be clear, speakers said. The governance model has so far succeeded, said Ruedi Noser, a Swiss member of parliament, and a new governance model should build on the success.

Discussions must "concentrate on the fact that the law offline applies online and don't reinvent the wheel," said Alun Michael, a U.K. member of parliament. "To bring now a global Internet back to national law is a very difficult thing," Noser said. A different kind of regulation is needed to deal with crime and human rights problems with the Internet, Noser said.

"We need a democratic planning system for the information society," said Frank Bsirske, head of the United Service Union, a trade union with 2.3 million members. "Employers are increasingly treating their employees like feudal serfs," Bsirske said. "Snooping and general surveillance of employees and private citizens without due suspicion must end," he said.

Possible changes are in the shadows of governance debates about network neutrality, the digital dividend, universal service and social cohesion, said Jean-Paul Philippot, president of the European Broadcasting Union. Authorities intervene when one broadcasting organization receives more than one-third of advertising revenue in a country, but not in the Internet space, he said. Also, few online guarantees address the "reliability and quality of the information," Philippot said.

The architecture of the Internet, how it is organized and the legal framework must be debated at the European level, Bsirske said. "We all have a responsibility to create [a] political and organizational structure that can never be misused," Bsirske said.

The Council of Europe's 47 countries could provide secretariat support to develop pan-European Internet governance dialogue, said Philippe Boillat, director general of human rights and legal affairs at the Council of Europe. The EuroDig Internet governance discussions don't have a formal mandate, structure or financing, participants said.

"The starting point of the Council of Europe's (CoE) position on Internet governance is one of human rights," said Andrew McIntosh, chairman of the media sub-committee at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. CoE conventions cover all 47 countries on nearly all the issues under discussion at EuroDig, said McIntosh. International Internet governance has to be done on exceptional basis, not a subset of international regulation, McIntosh said.

Further internationalization of ICANN is probably better than "producing a completely new international organization even under the auspices of the United Nations because that would tend to revert to regulation rather than to governance by exception," McIntosh said. The bureaucracy of an international agency or pretending the Internet is just pipes are unworkable and unrealistic, Michael said: "Nations take decisions, whether it's China on restricting access to Western news sites or the U.K. tackling and preventing access to child-abuse sites or the Americans having a problem [with] offshore, online gambling sites."

A pan-European dialogue will spur development of regional principles and solutions, Gigon said. The need for central and southeastern European country voices in the governance debate prompted the Swiss government to sponsor a DiploFoundation capacity building program on Internet governance, Gigon said.

An AT&T-funded survey aims to identify the impact of the Internet Governance Forum, participants said at the EuroDig discussion. An online survey will be coupled with interviews with forum participants from government, civil groups, academia and business, said DiploFoundation, the group that's organizing it. Recommendations for future enhancements will also be collected through October. -- *Scott Billquist*