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10th anniversary

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

*National and Regional Internet
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

REUNITING A DIVIDED SOCIETY



One World Platform

Liora¹

<https://oneworldplatform.net>

Introduction

This report focuses on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the primary platform for internet governance discussions in the country. It suggests how the IGF offers a vital platform for consensus building in a country troubled by political and ethnic divisions.

Policy, economic and political background

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country located in South East Europe. It gained independence in 1992, and shortly after that the country entered into a period of armed conflict (1992-1995). The armed conflict ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace agreement in December 1995, which forms part of the current Constitution. Bosnia and Herzegovina is described as a post-conflict, transitional country where society and state are divided along ethnic lines into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republica Srpska and Brčko District. However, the reconciliation and recovery process in the country is ongoing and new perspectives are becoming more and more important.

In this context, the Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF² is a fresh new start. As a multistakeholder event, it is based on listening to what diverse stakeholders have to say, including government, business, civil society, the technical community, academia and the media. Every opinion is important, and in this sense we consider the IGF a “real democracy”, a space which Bosnia and Herzegovina needs.

At the beginning of our collaboration...

The Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF was started two years ago with the intention of promoting cooperation and collaboration between different stakeholders, and to have an impact on internet governance at a policy-making level. This is an

important aim in a country where political instability can work against stakeholder cooperation and collaboration, especially when it comes to the active participation of governmental stakeholders in a multistakeholder environment – frequently, government representatives need permission from superiors to participate, a level of bureaucratic red tape that stifles productive engagement.

The national IGF is, however, slightly different: it offers a forum that is necessary in the country, and stakeholders from all parts of the country feel the need to participate in collective discussions.

An open and inclusive space such as the IGF provides an opportunity for all interested sides to be more visible and accepted as relevant stakeholders by other stakeholders. Stakeholders’ voices are amplified through the publication of a report after the event, which also increases the transparency of proceedings.³

The topic of internet governance is still only a concern of a small group of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 109 participants attended the first event in 2015. However, interest in participating in the event is growing: the internet is impacting on everyone in a dynamic way, and individuals and organisations are looking for a space where everyone has the right to speak, and to seek and demand solutions to governance issues that impact on the internet society and on their lives.

During its two years of existence, the Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF has shown that it serves as a useful forum in different ways. Civil society holds the balance between government, academia and the business sector – it tends to see the bigger picture, and is able to offer solutions to the challenges identified. Civil society also encourages consensus among all stakeholders in an effort to find a permanent solution.

A rights-based approach to regulation of the internet and digital spaces in Bosnia and Herzegovina is mostly advocated for by civil society. The perfect example of this was found in the 2016 IGF⁴ during

1 Cyber girl with a passion for numbers. Loud cryptoanarchist, but silent cryptographer. In crypto I trust.

2 <https://oneworldplatform.net/en/bh-igf-en>

3 Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF 2015 Report*. <https://oneworldplatform.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/BHIGF-Report-2015.pdf>

4 <https://oneworldplatform.net/poziv-na-2-bosanskohercegovacki-forum-o-upravljanju-internetom-otvoren>

a panel discussion on counter-terrorism, human rights and business, which asked the question: “Are we all equal?”

“Are we all equal?” was a panel aimed at encouraging stakeholder responsibility in ensuring an open and accessible internet. Each stakeholder had their place in discussion, reflecting on the challenges faced in the region and the world from a country perspective. Both the subjective and objective opinions of stakeholders from different sectors with regards to security, surveillance, terrorism and the state of media coverage of these topics were heard.

However, civil society stressed the importance of equality and free access to technology and information as a basic need of humankind in the digital era. If we have communications laws that can restrict your freedoms to the extent that you end up on the same list as potentially dangerous people, are we really free to have our own state of mind and personal opinion?

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a lot of awareness raising still needs to be done to impact on the public’s understanding of the value of internet governance. Although relatively young and small, the national IGF has already had an impact on the thinking and states of mind of stakeholders who have actively participated in discussions with passion and a willingness to learn.

Although we are only at the beginning of our collaboration on internet governance, we need to build the foundations firmly, especially when it comes to marginalised and vulnerable groups, and also gender equality. On these two issues, the organisers of the Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF have shown sensitivity. For example, a sign language interpreter has been employed for participants who need it. The 2015 forum’s reports also show us that a gender balance amongst participants is evident, with 48% male and 52% female participants (45% of the panellists were female). For 2016, 55% of the participants were female (39% of the panellists were female).

Feđa Kulenović, an assistant professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo whom we interviewed for this report, mentioned that the best approach to securing a gender balance among participants is to find a way to create a space where women will be recognised as equal participants and as leaders in a place safe from harm and violence. Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces a problem with gender-based violence and deep gender inequality. The Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF is a physical space where safety and equality for women can be achieved.

While this kind of multistakeholder approach to internet governance helps to create a sense of cooperation, and to reunite a divided society by demanding solutions to difficult issues faced in the digital governance space, some stakeholders are not aware of these benefits. For example, the academic community needs to be encouraged to see why this kind of event matters. In a politically turbulent country like Bosnia and Herzegovina, the academic community is often excluded from practical discussions, but they should be encouraged to see that they have a real stake in internet governance, and that in democratic states academia plays an important leadership function.

The multistakeholder approach is also a feature of the organisation of the forum. One World Platform is the main participant from civil society, working in partnership with governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁵ and the Communications Regulatory Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁶ as well as the the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), an intergovernmental regional security body.

The forum is also supported by different global organisations and others from the South East Europe region and Balkan Peninsula, including DiploFoundation,⁷ the Council of Europe, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN),⁸ the regional internet registry RIPE NCC⁹ and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).¹⁰

Conclusion

In the context of all the differences and instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the challenges in finding agreement in decision-making processes, the Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF offers a beacon of hope. The forum has the potential to bring fresh reflection to the process of reconciliation in the country. The main importance of the IGF is that it is an inclusive space where diverse stakeholders have a voice. The next step will be the practical implementation of technical solutions that reflect the internet governance deliberations.

Networking between different stakeholders, which is at the core of the IGF, is not only important for internet governance but for society generally

5 mfa.gov.ba/default.aspx?pageIndex=1

6 rak.ba/eng

7 <https://www.diplomacy.edu>

8 <https://www.icann.org>

9 <https://www.ripe.net>

10 <https://www.apc.org>

– it needs to see that collaboration between different perspectives can occur. Over the next few years we will see the real impact of the Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF, including how it impacts on the collaboration between different stakeholders in facing the challenges of internet policy processes and dynamics that lie ahead.

Action steps

A key issue the IGF needs to deal with is digital literacy. According to the latest data from the 2013 census,¹¹ more than 60% of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is digitally illiterate, according to the Agency of Statistics' definition used for digital literacy:

Computer literacy shall be defined as one's ability to process a text, create a table, use e-mail and the Internet. A person who is capable of performing at least one of the stated activities shall be considered to be a partly computer literate person. A person who is not capable of performing any of the stated activities shall be considered to be a computer illiterate person.¹²

The country has 23.86% partly computer illiterate persons (12.43% of males and 11.43% of females) and 38.68% computer illiterate persons (17.14% of males and 21.54% of females).¹³

At the same time, regional best practices and policies need to be analysed and modified for the Bosnia and Herzegovina environment. For the next IGF, the themes of blockchain technologies and the Internet of Things will be important issues.

Other key issues that need to be addressed are new proposals and directives for establishing a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) to deal with security incidents that occur on several levels, including in the corporate, academic and civil society sectors, and at the state level. It is necessary to promote safety and good security governance in the non-governmental sector, including by drawing on good practices from the region. The issue of information security in Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to move beyond being a national security issue only, and include a human-centric approach to make sure that every citizen and civil society organisation is included in the process of policy-making decisions on this important topic.

¹¹ www.popis.gov.ba

¹² www.popis.gov.ba/popis2013/doc/RezultatiPopisa_BS.pdf

¹³ The status of 1.23% of persons in the country is "unknown" (0.58% of males and 0.65% of females).

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

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