

EuroDIG 2019: Highlights of messages

EuroDIG, the European Dialogue on Internet Governance, was established in 2008 as annual event that brings together Internet stakeholders from all over Europe (and beyond). Participants representing government, industry, civil society, academia and the technical community each year develop, in a bottom-up fashion, a dynamic agenda that explores the most topical issues related to the Internet.

This year Eurodig took place in The Hague and gathered together 600 participants, 75,2% of which Europeans and 10,8 % from non-European countries, divided by gender in 39,9% female to 57, 7% male. The general theme, “Co-operating in the Digital Age”, was explored in many sessions. Discussions stressed that improving universal acceptance and streamlining digital processes has the potential to greatly improve the cooperation between the private sector, civil society and the scientific community. It can also foster the collaboration between members of the technical community and policymakers on the fight against disinformation.

The European regulatory framework in the digital environment was, as usual, “the issue of issues”. First to be considered was the adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This was considered most encouraging and panelists underlined the success of the EC for drafting regulation that reflected the will of a group of states with common values. The discussions about more regulations and norms concerning Internet were much divided and opinions converged around the need for norms and frameworks regulating the development and application of new technologies. Identifying the scope of online abuse, as well as having a clear understanding of the terminology, is crucial in order to choose the best regulatory response. The latter includes regulatory measures (e.g. legal frameworks based on self-/co-regulation) and the fostering of digital literacy.

Debates on artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) emphasized the necessity to find new ways to govern them without hampering innovation. In the two sessions dedicated to the recently launched report of the High-Level Panel (HLP) on Digital Cooperation, participants highlighted that multistakeholderism and multilateralism should be viewed as complementary in order to take advantage of the benefits they both could bring.

The problems of disinformation were not missing in the Eurodig discussions. The challenges originating from mis/disinformation require a wide range of possible measures, such as making online platforms responsible for the management of online content, ensuring the financial and political independence of news outlets, applying privately-owned fact-checking tools or devising mechanisms for online platforms to finance the production of quality media content.

Similarly to ethics ‘by design’ protection instruments, digital literacy was recognized as one of the most effective ways to strengthen cybersecurity. Due to the asymmetry between those who develop the technologies, and those who are subject to them, users have to be constantly empowered by promoting digital literacy skills. Digital literacy should also enhance public awareness about the interference of emerging technologies with human rights.

Eurodig participants agreed that policymakers and other stakeholders should give a greater voice to children and listen to their opinion about Internet governance at all levels. One of the proposals was to make SAPA (Smart Active Participation Algorithm) a top priority theme in the multistakeholders’ environment. The purpose of this algorithm is to replace some of the ads we are exposed to, while browsing on the Internet, with information about the Council of Europe (CoE) initiatives. SAPA will suggest differentiated opportunities (by CoE) based on the age of the users, in order to navigate the engagement of people of all ages towards CoE initiatives through the Internet.

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