

The German Federal Government hosted an Open Forum entitled “Strengthening the IGF – the German Community Invites to a Discussion” on Wednesday 20. December. The Open Forum session was hosted by the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, but originated in discussions in the German IGF Steering Committee. It was conceived as an opportunity for all German stakeholders to gather, discuss and seek feedback from the global IGF community with a view to the German application to host the IGF in 2019.

The Open Forum was chaired by Ambassador Dr. Thomas Fitschen, Director for the United Nations, International Cyber Policy and Counterterrorism at the German Federal Foreign Office, jointly with Dr. Rudolf Gridl, Head of Division for Internet Governance at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. Participants included members of civil society, business and government. The discussion was launched by contributions of experienced IGF stakeholders who followed our invitation including Lynn St. Amour, Chair of the MAG, Ambassador Thomas Schneider, Vice-Director and Head of International Relations Service of the Swiss Federal Office of Communication (OFCOM), Ambassador Benedicto Fonseca Filho, Director of the Department of Scientific and Technological Themes at the Brazilian Ministry of External Affairs, Markus Kummer, former head of the IGF Secretariat and Prof. Michael Rotert, Honorary President of eco Association of the Internet Industry. After these introductory remarks a lively debate ensued. Various stakeholders including many of the German IGF community raised their voice and shared their views and observations. In January, as a follow-up to the Open Forum, the German IGF Steering Committee alongside with other stakeholders met in the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and discussed their impressions.

It is our pleasure to submit the results of the discussion as a contribution to the IGF’s annual stocktaking process. While some remarks were specifically geared at Germany as prospective host country in 2019, many of the contributions are of general value to the IGF. Therefore, we take up this opportunity to share them with MAG and the global IGF community.

The following main observations and recommendations to both MAG and host country can be derived from the discussions:

- The IGF is as the only global forum for multistakeholder dialogue with UN mandate of unique value to global Internet Governance. While the results of the IGF are often-times not immediately visible, they do have impacts on national Internet Governance debates. Many improvements have been achieved including the increased visibility of the many national and regional IGF initiatives resulting from the global IGF.
- The IGF should both produce concrete results and be as inclusive as possible. These sometimes conflicting goals were addressed in a very promising manner by the Swiss hosts. Improvements included an interactive high level opening session and the Geneva messages. All future organizers should feel encouraged to build on these steps and to further adapt them, where appropriate.
- The structure of the program could be streamlined to improve the overview. The schedule could be arranged in a way to enable participants to follow issue-specific tracks. Sessions on related topics should not be scheduled at the same time and readability of the schedule should be adjusted to this end.
- Since not all participants of the IGF have the same educational background (technically and concerning the history and tasks of the IGF), it is suggested to include explanation sessions on day 0. (e. g. "What is the IGF?" or "What is Blockchain?")

- Government and business representatives in the IGF should be given more incentives to participate including high level participation.
- Participation of representatives from the global south should be improved including by facilitating visa-applications and by providing funding for civil society.
- The host country's internet governance community should be included. The coordination within and across national stakeholder groups is important to exploit local synergies.

Finally, we would like to use this opportunity to applaud the Swiss hosts and the IGF secretariat for their outstanding performance and for organizing an excellent Internet Governance Forum in spite of sometimes adverse conditions.

Thomas Fitschen and Rudolf Gridl