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Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology

Directorate E: Future Networks

Unit E.3: Next Generation Internet

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## **IGF 2016 - Response to Call for Input**

### **Taking stock of the 2016 work program and 11th IGF and suggestions for 2017 and 12th IGF**

#### **Contribution by the European Commission**

The following note is a response to the "Call for Input" by the IGF Secretariat to take stock of the IGF meeting held in Mexico and looking forward to the next IGF meeting in Geneva on 2017.

These reflections should not be regarded as an official position of the European Commission but simply as an informal input to the work carried out by the MAG.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The European Commission actively participated in the 11<sup>th</sup> IGF held in Mexico, as a sign of its continued commitment and support to the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance embodied by the IGF.

The European Commission coordinates with Members of the European Parliament, EU Member States and other European civil society and industry representatives both before and during each IGF meeting.

A significant European presence at the 11<sup>th</sup> IGF was ensured by:

- Participation of twelve Members of the European Parliament, the biggest ever delegation sent to the IGF. At the end of the meeting they issued a Statement<sup>1</sup>, calling for "clear rules and respect for rights and liberties on the Internet".
- the European Commission held an Open Forum on the Global Internet Policy Observatory

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20161209IPR55471/the-future-of-internet-governance>

- A "European booth" was established in the IGF village co-organised by European Commission and EuroDIG

A follow-up exchange of views among MEPs, the European Commission and European business and civil society representatives took place in the European Parliament under the auspices of the European Internet Forum on 25 January<sup>2</sup>.

The European Commission was also pleased to see that the majority of session's organisers came from Europe (31,60%)<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. TAKING STOCK OF 2016 PROGRAMMING, PREPARATORY PROCESS, COMMUNITY INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND THE 11TH ANNUAL IGF: WHAT WORKED WELL? WHAT WORKED NOT SO WELL?

The European Commission wishes to wholeheartedly thank the Mexican host, the MAG, the IGF Secretariat and the wide community of participants who all contributed to making this IGF a success. The meeting run smoothly with a positive and constructive mood.

**Youth** participation was particularly strong and appreciated. New innovative **formats** have been introduced and received positive feedback. Specific tracks for **newcomers** helped them navigate through the more than 200 sessions and workshops.

The **focus of the event** was on "enabling inclusive and sustainable growth", which captured well ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide through ICTs and reflected global discussions around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Given the work of the EU in the area of "**Digital for Development**", this theme offered the opportunity to raise awareness of ongoing work and to engage with potential partners.

The European Commission welcomes the strong emphasis of this IGF meeting on **international cooperation and strategic partnerships** to bridge digital divides and address global internet governance challenges.

Other prominent themes were related to infrastructure, security, human rights, socio-cultural, economic and legal issues, thereby encompassing a very rich and broad agenda. For the first time a main session was held on trade policy and the internet, reflecting the growing importance of this area.

In line with the recommendations of the CSTD Working group on Improvements to the IGF, a variety of significant **outputs** have been generated through session reporting, the documents of the Best Practice Fora and Dynamic Coalitions, the second phase of the "Policy Options for Connecting the Next Billion" Initiative and the comprehensive MAG Chair Summary Report. However, it remains a challenge to adequately convey these outcomes to relevant bodies, institutions and organisations, with a view to produce meaningful impact. If in the past there were no (or very few) "tangible outputs", it now seems that the IGF is producing every year a high-quantity of documents and reports that are not so easy to absorb. Ways of fully exploiting such wealth of documents and couple them with an effective outreach strategy should be considered.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eifonline.org/events/723-internet-governance-forum-2016---follow-up.html>

Video interview: [goo.gl/ipgqEF](https://goo.gl/ipgqEF)

<sup>3</sup> [https://digitalwatch.giplatform.org/sites/default/files/IGF2016\\_Daily1.pdf](https://digitalwatch.giplatform.org/sites/default/files/IGF2016_Daily1.pdf)

The European Commission welcomes that the work and input of **National and Regional Initiatives** was more visible and interconnected.

While the presence of civil society was, as it has been the case so far, quite strong, the presence and involvement of the **private sector** seems to be a recurring issue. New ways to involve business should be encouraged, highlighting the economic implications of internet governance.

The meeting confirmed once more IGF's unique role as an open, multistakeholder forum, convened by the UN Secretary General as a neutral space for discussion. Many participants find value in the international, intersectoral and interpersonal cooperation cultivated through the IGF. However, we have to be mindful of the fact that over the last decade there has been a growth in the number and quality of meetings dealing with various aspects of internet governance. Despite the unique features that the IGF can bolster, many other fora and platforms are now "competing" for attention.

### 3. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN 2017 (AND BEYOND)

A number of incremental improvements have been successfully introduced over the last decade, but now, looking ahead, the IGF community has to ensure that the IGF will still be relevant and useful over the next 9 years.

Considering the acceleration of the digital transformation, the unprecedented global challenges that we will witness in this timeframe and the deep impact this will have on society, the economy and policy-making, the IGF needs to become more flexible and agile. This means more efficiency in using the knowledge and know-how collectively retained by the MAG members and the broader IGF community.

**Areas where we should focus our efforts** are, in our view, the following:

- raise the visibility of IGF discussions and outcomes
- strengthen the relations and interactions between the IGF and other bodies addressing Internet governance issues from different perspectives,
- improve the operational processes to set-up the annual programme,
- sustain inter-sessional activities taking place between one annual event and the next,
- increase the diversity of participants, both in geographical terms but also in terms of sectors involved (finance, energy, health),
- develop a shared long-term view of the role and activities of the IGF, aligned to a vision of how the Internet of the future will be.

The European Commission believes that the renewed and extended mandate of the IGF offers the opportunity for **strategic multi-annual planning**. Each IGF meeting should not be seen in isolation, but should be part of a broader reflection spanning inter-sessional work and cycles of 3-4 years. This will allow to define more challenging goals and processes which span over several meetings. A carefully designed multi-annual strategy can provide a broad framework into which topics and issues can be addressed, making the workshop selection process more transparent and less time-consuming.

This requires in turn **consistent and predictable commitment** by host countries and by donors (who ensure the existence of the IGF itself). The **financial sustainability** of the IGF is a challenge that needs to be properly addressed. As one of the most stable donor to the IGF, the European Commission invites others to join in this effort.

The nomination of a **Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General** could also be very important in advancing in a number of areas mentioned above, in particular to raise IGF visibility and to strengthen the relations and interactions with other organisations.

The European Commission is glad that Switzerland has volunteered to host the next edition of the IGF in **Geneva**. As an international hub enjoying the presence of many IGOs and NGOs having a direct interest in internet policy issues, this city undoubtedly offers many advantages. However, we should not underestimate the fact that it is an expensive city and very cold in December. This might be a challenge for participants from the Global South. The proposed dates are also very close to the Christmas season and this might be problematic in terms of ensuring a high turnout of participants.

Finally, the European Commission would like to offer the **Global Internet Policy Observatory (GIPO)** to the IGF multistakeholder community. GIPO is a tool to help stakeholders, in particular those with limited resources, to understand and engage in internet related issues.

With its capacity to perform real-time monitoring, analysis and information-sharing functions, GIPO can concretely support the IGF in the following areas:

- **capacity-building** – by increasing knowledge and understanding of new stakeholders and those with fewer resources at hand;
- **ensuring more informed discussions** – that will help the global multistakeholder community advance in finding solutions to the issues facing Internet governance;
- **break-silos and create cooperation opportunities** – by facilitating integration of other tools and sources of information.