



Reflections on EuroSSIG 2021:

Fifteen years of empowering the internet governance leaders of tomorrow

ISOC Fellow Report by Yoana Kanchev

When the times are tempestuous we often start appreciating better the progress of humanity while realizing that our rights should be defended every day and not taken for granted. The internet has become obviously crucial for everybody, however, with its growing importance the conflicts *in* and *for* the online space have grown bigger. The Fifteenth European School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG) allowed us to encounter different viewpoints on this debate and some of the most challenging issues while discussing the basic *modus operandi* of the internet from technical and business perspectives presented by renowned leaders in the sector. The excellent choice of faculty, fellows, and agenda proved that the summer school aims not only at bringing together stakeholders from all over the world to discuss internet governance (IG) but at empowering them to stay engaged and bring about more trustworthy and innovative virtual space.

The fifteenth edition of EuroSSIG offered a multidisciplinary programme bridging different aspects of IG. The main acting organizations and parties engaged were introduced at the very beginning of the summer school together with the notable example of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and its future. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Numbers and Names (ICANN) brought the focus of the discussion closer to the technical infrastructure underlying the functioning of the internet which created a great opportunity for the fellows with a humanitarian backgrounds to expand their knowledge. Management of IP addresses, root servers, and domain names were definitely among the most discussed topics accompanied by many follow-up questions both in the lecture hall as well as in the informal environment. Many fellows shared their will to learn more about the topic and suggested the organizers provide more (mandatory) technical preparatory reading material for future EuroSSIGs.

Among the topics I felt more familiar with was the relationship between the internet and the human rights perspective. After discussing the principles set by the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society and NETmundial, we had the opportunity to hear input from our fellow colleagues in the room who focused on the pressure on freedom of expression and privacy online. This fellow input blurred the boundaries with the faculty even more. Cyber-security and safety were also an integral part of the programme when we had the chance to discuss the UN Norms for Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace. These faces of IG will remain among the ones that I would love to research in greater detail in the future.



The business perspective proved to be extremely beneficial for the quality of the programme. Having in mind that the private sector accounts for a decent amount of the decisions affecting the structure and the underlying logic of the internet we continued the discussion on human rights juxtaposed against the emergence of new business models and the mechanisms to promote innovation and competition. Moreover, the insights on the power play dynamics in the private sector offered by the faculty proved once again that the issues concerning IG should be considered from different angles and every player should take the responsibility for their actions. As the famous saying puts it, this responsibility should be proportional to the power each player has.

All these conversations truly came together on the last day of summer school when the future of IG was widely discussed. At that point the growing complexity of the IG debate required the diverse input of all fellows and the whole faculty to avoid oversimplifying, yet, many answers were left inconclusive. What became surely obvious was the need for different perspectives representing the variety of geopolitical, economic, technical, and humanitarian struggles present at the IG debate.

The old building of St. Afra Monastery in Meissen emerged as the perfect scenic backdrop for discussing future issues of IG. The historical venue provided silent, solid foundation for heated debates while the small town of Meissen was enchanting its guests with spectacular traditions, culture, and hospitality. The connection with the past and the gaze to the future of the organizers, the faculty, and the fellows appeared as substantial proof that for fifteen years EuroSSIG has been and will remain an academy where future leaders of IG will be empowered and equipped with the tools to make an impact that matters.