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GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

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



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

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National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

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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>

ROMANIA

AN INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM IN ROMANIA: FROM PLANNING TO ACTION



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Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide a brief overview of progress made in Romania on the road to establishing a national internet governance forum (IGF). Although civil society organisations and internet freedom activists are present at major regional and international internet governance events, a national IGF has still not been established in Romania, in contrast with neighbouring countries like Serbia, Bulgaria or Ukraine. As a participant at the Internet Governance Cocktail organised in Bucharest on 18 November 2016,¹ my key question is: how can the Romanian IGF project be moved forward?

Policy and political background

Romania has made significant efforts to ensure fair access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) across the country, but has this been enough to reach the high standards of connectivity, inclusiveness and transparency set by the European Union (EU) Digital Agenda?² A monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of the Digital Agenda in Romania has summarised key tasks, indicators and responsible institutions for data collection in order to reach the 2020 targets for e-governance, digital literacy, innovation and next-generation infrastructure in the country.³ Ranked last among member states in the Digital Economy and Society Index,⁴ Romania has a long

way to go when it comes to human capital,⁵ use of the internet,⁶ integration of digital technology,⁷ and digital public services.⁸ The report states:

Romania ranks 28th out of the 28 EU Member States. [...] In recent years, Romania has not made much progress relative to other EU Member States. On the positive side, Romanians benefit from coverage of fast broadband connections in urban areas, which translates into the highest share of subscriptions in the EU. The take-up of mobile broadband is also accelerating. However, the rate of digitisation of the economy, including for public services, and digital skill levels are still low.⁹

According to the 2017 Freedom House report, Romania – with its 19.8 million inhabitants and a gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 8,973 per capita – is assessed as a free country, with a partly free press controlled by businessmen with political interests.¹⁰ Ten years after joining the EU, its civil society has strengthened, with a real potential to impact on development. Meanwhile, the regional and international context hinders pluralism and an open society in the region.¹¹ In a nutshell:

- Romania is relatively stable politically and economically, with the ICT sector accounting for a 6% share of the country's GDP in 2016, the fourth highest in the EU.¹² With a dynamic ICT sector and an agile business community, mainstream internet-related discourses are more concerned with e-commerce than internet governance.

1 An informal meeting aimed at educating civil society organisation representatives, technical community members and media representatives on IGF issues. igf.ro/2016/11/08/invitatie-intalnire-informala-internet-governance-18-noiembrie-2016-ora-1600

2 European Commission. (2014). *Digital Agenda for Europe*. www.europa.eu/european-union/file/1497

3 Ministerul Comunicatiilor si pentru Societatea Informatiionala. (2016). *Manualul de monitorizare si evaluare al strategiei nationale privind Agenda Digitala pentru Romania*. https://www.comunicatii.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Manual_Monitorizare_Evaluare_v2.0-BM.pdf

4 European Commission. (2017). *Digital Economy and Society Index 2017 – Romania*. www.ec.europa.eu/newsroom/document.cfm?doc_id=43038

5 Internet use, basic and advanced digital skills.

6 Use of content and online transactions.

7 Business digitisation and e-commerce.

8 E-government.

9 European Commission. (2017). Op. cit.

10 Freedom House. (2017). *Freedom in the World 2017. Romania Profile*. www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/romania

11 Kivu, M. (ed). *Romania 2017: Sectorul neguvernamental. Profil, tendinte, provocari*. Bucharest: Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile.

12 Bakó, R. (2016). Romania: Participatory culture and the internet. In A. Finlay (Ed.), *Global Information Society Watch 2016*. www.giswatch.org/en/country-report/economic-social-and-cultural-rights-esrcs/romania

TABLE 1.

Leading topics discussed at IGF events across Europe in 2015

Topic	No. of events
Participation in internet governance policy making	13
Privacy	11
Innovation and development	9
Security	8
Human rights	6
Media in the digital age	4
Domain names	3
Copyright	3
Accessibility and equality	2

Source: Table compiled based on data from EuroDIG 2015 held in Sofia.¹⁶

- Internet policy discussions are not transparent enough and inclusive of all relevant stakeholders: civil society organisations and stakeholders outside the capital Bucharest are often excluded from the discussion table, although the formal requirements set by the EU on posting legislative initiatives for public consultation are formally respected.
- The ICT sector and government offices have been shaken by corruption scandals related to Microsoft licence attribution,¹³ and the theft of EU funds meant for broadband expansion in rural areas.¹⁴ In 2016, the former minister of communications and information society, Gabriel Sandu, was jailed for three years.¹⁵

IGF topics across Europe

Table 1 summarises a topic analysis of the main issues discussed at the national, regional and sub-regional IGFs held across Europe in 2015. The topic analysis was done by the organisers of the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) meeting held in Sofia in 2015. It shows that a wide variety of issues were discussed at the 22 events. Participation in internet policy making was the leading topic in 2015 (13 events), followed by privacy (11 events), innovation and development (9 events), and security issues (8 events).

Setting up a local IGF

On 2 June 2016, a meeting of the Romanian IGF Coordinating Committee took place at the Ministry of Communications and Information Society,¹⁷ aimed at creating a national IGF in Romania. Participants declared that their intention was to create an annual national forum on internet governance, by involving governmental and non-governmental organisations, the ICT industry, academics and any individuals interested in internet issues as equal partners. The meeting also tackled the issue of funding and the need for a permanent national IGF secretariat. Representatives of the group agreed to meet on 30 June 2016 to consolidate their ideas on these matters.

The participants at the meeting were representatives of the government (Ministry of Communications and Information Society,¹⁸ National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania,¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Romania);²⁰ civil society (DiploFoundation,²¹ Internet Society Romania,²² Association for Technology and Internet – APTI);²³ the ICT industry (National Association of Internet Service Providers,²⁴ Association of ICT Equipment Producers and Distributors);²⁵ as well as research and development organisations (National Institute for Research and Development

¹⁴ www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/justitie/dosarul-microsoft-2-dan-nica-si-adriana-ticau-la-dna-630583

¹⁵ www.digi24.ro/stiri/economie/proiectul-internet-la-sate-blocat-total-745781

¹⁶ www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/evenimentie/gabriel-sandu-a-fost-adus-la-dna-709410

¹⁶ Details at www.eurodig.org/fileadmin/user_upload/eurodig_Sofia/IGF15_Open_Forum_Hot_topics_across_Europe.pdf

¹⁷ igf.ro/2016/06/02/intalnire-a-comitetului-de-coordonare-a-forumului-pentru-guvernanta-internetului-din-romania

¹⁸ www.comunicatii.gov.ro

¹⁹ www.ancom.org.ro/en

²⁰ www.mae.ro

²¹ www.diplomacy.edu

²² www.isoc.ro

²³ apti.ro/apti-english

²⁴ www.anisp.ro

²⁵ asociatiait.ro



Romanian IGF Coordinating Committee meeting in Bucharest on 2 June 2016. SOURCE: www.igf.ro

in Informatics,²⁶ National Foundation of Young Managers,²⁷ CyberInt,²⁸ and Romanian Open Source Education).²⁹

The next publicised IGF.ro event was the Internet Governance Cocktail held in November in 2016, organised by APTI. It was an opportunity for civil society representatives to get together and discuss what internet governance means, why it is important to have a policy perspective on internet-related issues, and why multistakeholderism is important for an IGF process.

As of September 2017, a Romanian IGF had not yet been held. According to an ICT policy expert interviewed for this overview, there is still a lack of awareness of the participatory approach among ICT stakeholders, especially governmental actors, who lack the experience and expertise needed for multistakeholder dialogue. Meanwhile, a newly formed community of ICT business and policy experts, called Digital Citizens of Romania, is actively promoting regional dialogue on ICT policy issues,

including internet governance dialogue-related actions. The group calls itself “the first Romanian think tank in the digital field”.³⁰

Regional reflection

Romanian ICT stakeholders are increasingly interested in participating in shaping the internet locally and globally. Civil society organisations – APTI and DiploFoundation – are the most engaged in moving the IGF agenda forward, supported by young entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, positive regional processes offer a good frame for such initiatives:

- South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance (SEEDIG) and EuroDIG are good learning spaces for creating a national IGF in Romania. APTI and DiploFoundation representatives have been present at all events since 2010.
- Since 2010, Romania has been present with a local remote hub set up by APTI at global IGFs, and Romanian participants engage actively in the discussions.
- A very vibrant community of experts and internet freedom activists, as well as monthly webinars and newsletters, have been set up by SEEDIG.

26 <https://www.ici.ro/?lang=en>

27 www.fntm.ro

28 <https://www.facebook.com/Cyberint>

29 www.rosedu.org

30 <https://www.digitalcitizens.ro>

Conclusions

In Romania the ICT sector is considered a success story, despite its ups and downs and corruption scandals. Based on this momentum, several positive processes have enabled an internet governance agenda in Romania:

- The EU regulatory framework acts as a driving force, with ambitious targets set by the Digital Agenda for Europe in terms of inclusion, transparency and participation.
- Positive regional developments such as SEEDIG and EuroDIG encourage individual and institutional actors to take steps towards a national IGF in Romania.

The first step has been taken by setting up an organising committee to prepare a national IGF in the country.

Action steps

In order for the IGF plans to translate into actions, some steps are needed:

- Government actors responsible for creating the IGF.ro as a national yearly forum should take action, especially the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, which should mainstream the event as part of its official discourse.
- Civil society organisations should act as catalysers and knowledge pools based on their experience with regional and global IGFs, to encourage the participation of other local actors.
- Last, but not least, internet governance initiatives should be mainstreamed by key media channels and academic forums to make them visible, relevant and open to the public.

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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