

Brussels, 24 February 2012

Mr Frédéric Donck
Director
European Bureau
Internet Society, Brussels

Dear Frédéric:

Subject: The Chapters' relationship with the Internet Society in Europe.

During the past five years that I have been elected Chairman of the European Chapters Coordinating Council (ISOC-ECC.org) I have had several conversations and e-mail exchanges with ISOC Trustees and staff, generally about the relationship between the Chapters and the Internet Society as a whole. Now that we are approaching the forthcoming INET and Chapter meetings in Geneva in April, it is an appropriate moment to review and consolidate these matters, most of which are still outstanding. As I am sure you will recall, my concerns relate principally to the membership of Chapters, the structure and priorities of the ISOC budget, staff and financial support from ISOC to our Chapters, and the role and responsibilities of the European Bureau, and its support for ISOC-ECC.

In all that follows, I ask you and your colleagues to take full account of the fact that nearly all the work devoted to the organisation, management and outreach of the Chapters is unremunerated and voluntary. The paid staff are there to support and sometimes guide that effort. They should not try to take over, dictate, obligate or otherwise control our Chapters, particularly in their relations with their local Internet community and their national and regional public authorities.

Chapter membership

Some time ago – prior to the London INET (September 2010) – I raised the question of the standing of Chapters within ISOC. At present, Chapters are not members of ISOC within the meaning of the ISOC Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. I suggested that this lacuna should be corrected. It would be appropriate for ISOC to treat our Chapters on a par with organisational members, particularly in view of the increasing importance of regional and national implementation of Internet-related policies and regulations.

Also, the position of the Trustees elected by Chapters is rather anomalous since the Articles of Association make it clear that it is the members who elect Trustees.

This issue – which I raised again with the Québec Trustees' meeting (July 2011) – is not just a formalistic legal quibble. It goes to the heart of the relationship between Chapters and ISOC. In short, Chapters should be treated as full members, as of right.

On several occasions, I had been led to believe that the question of Chapter membership was in the process of being resolved, soon, but nothing has happened meanwhile.

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The Internet Society Budget

In recent years, the ISOC budget has been significantly expanded, thanks mainly to increased income from the Public Interest Registry (PIR). Most of the additional money has been spent on expanding ISOC's central staff and on programmes controlled by the central staff. In spite of rhetorical support for regionalisation and for the Chapters, in fact very little has been done in those directions. In particular, the regional bureaus – which have, potentially, remarkably broad scope and responsibilities – remain with a sole or at most two staff members, which is not enough to fulfill their existing mandate and potential role.

Viewed from the vantage point of an outsider, I must say that I would find it very difficult to explain what it is that most of the, by now, large number of [ISOC staff](#) are actually doing. I think that in the interests of efficiency, local contact and transparency, (a) there should be a greater degree of decentralisation towards the regional bureaus and (b) there should be a clearer organigram as to who is reporting to whom, and for what purpose, within the ISOC bureaucracy.

Furthermore, since generating non-PIR external resources has become a priority, greater decentralisation would improve the image and contacts for ISOC, internationally.

ISOC support for Chapters

During the Bucharest Chapter meeting, November 2011, several Chapters raised the question of ISOC financial support for the administration of Chapters at the local level. The ISOC Chapter Handbook provides ample guidance as to how best to manage a local Chapter, but in practice few Chapters have the resources to achieve most of those objectives, particularly with regard to their local and regional governments and their individual members. To my recollection, at least two concrete proposals are on the table:

First that ISOC could fund on a permanent basis part-time **administrative and secretariat support** for each Chapter that so wished to employ such support. This would make far more sense than the present policy of intermittent project and event funding, where support for followup and longer term implementation is lacking.

A permanent, local, administrative infrastructure for the Chapters would also improve the image of ISOC on the ground and facilitate increased membership.

Secondly, ISOC has been requested since several years to support directly the **Internet presence of the Chapters** and particularly – should they so require – the construction and maintenance of their [websites](#). Here, there does appear to be some movement, at last, with respect to possible web hosting and templates. There will probably also need to be on-line training linking the implementation of improved web-presence to the first suggestion, above, for permanent administrative support.

Naturally, I welcome any improvements in ISOC support for the Chapters. My point is that the time it takes to get anything done inevitably reflects badly on the internal priorities of the ISOC bureaucracy. Changes in the budget and staff assignments could influence positively the time-to-deliver new services. Much more could be done in these areas.

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The European Bureau and ISOC-ECC

The Internet Society needs to be much more deeply rooted in local Internet communities world-wide, particularly outside the United States. The role of our association with regard to civil society needs to be clarified and reinforced. Many members of our Chapters expect our association to act clearly on behalf of civil society. Failing which, some of the valuable, limited, voluntary resource will migrate to other fora. They do not lack alternatives today.

Also, and most importantly, the Internet Society has to be seen to recognise that it is its members and Chapters that confer on its elected representatives the legitimacy and mandate to represent the association. This means that the staff are accountable to the membership and their elected delegates, whether they are Trustees or elected officers of ISOC-ECC.

As you know, from the start, I supported the creation of the European Bureau in Brussels, primarily to provide the administrative support to ISOC-ECC, and I maintain that position. On the contrary, it is clearly inappropriate for employed staff – however competent and well *encadré par ailleurs* – to intervene in European political matters without reference to our membership. There are several ways in which a more appropriate relationship could be achieved, which we could discuss. Meanwhile, I would ask that the European Bureau:

- keep the European Chapters informed on a regular basis about up-coming policy issues in the European context;
- consult effectively the ISOC-ECC and other European Chapter members, and accept the advice received, before acting vis-à-vis the EU Institutions;
- report regularly to member Chapters about how the Bureau is using its time and budgetary resources in Europe.

I would expect the Board of Trustees and senior staff of ISOC in Reston and Geneva to understand this point of view. They certainly would not imagine that ISOC could act globally, and unilaterally without reference to the local and regional situation in different parts of the world.

Concerning Europe and the EU in particular, in the context of governance and regulatory policy it is essential that ISOC's position to be seen to come from its members in Europe. Considering the nature of the Internet there are of course many ways to ensure that ISOC's policy is consistent, globally and internationally, but it is out of the question for the ISOC position to be prepared and expressed in isolation by the staff bureaucracy which at present is unaccountable.

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For all these reasons, I am looking for a fundamentally reformed relationship between the Internet Society's Trustees and staff on the one hand and our Chapters on the other hand. Chapters must be recognised as full members of ISOC before we can move much further forward together.

Secondly, basic principles of democratic accountability require that the ISOC staff accept that they act in Europe on behalf of and under the responsibility of our members. At present, the ISOC-ECC organisation is the only forum through which this could be achieved.

Finally, I revert to the human and personal dimension of this issue. The Internet Society cannot expect to motivate and benefit from the voluntary contribution of our members if an unaccountable staff presumes to require that nothing can be done without their “express permission”.

Yours sincerely

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