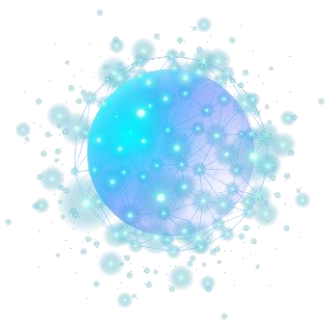


Croatian Internet Governance Forum

CRO-IGF 2026 – Final Report





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What is Internet Governance Forum?

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a global initiative operating under the auspices of the UN, with the primary goal of fostering inclusive and equal participation of all stakeholders in discussions related to Internet governance. Established in 2006 during the "World Summit on the Information Society" (WSIS) in Tunisia, the IGF was envisioned as an open platform for addressing Internet governance issues.

This decision was prompted by the recognition of the necessity to involve a broader community in the governance and regulation of the Internet. As a result, a diverse range of topics emerged, spanning from IP addresses and Internet protocols to domain management. In this context, it is crucial for multiple stakeholders, including civil society, academia, industry, and the private sector, to actively engage in these discussions alongside state representatives. This collaborative approach allows for well-rounded perspectives and ensures that a wide array of interests and expertise are considered in shaping Internet governance policies.

The IGF does not have a decision-making mandate, nor does it adopt binding acts, but their results may affect other processes, which have binding effects. The IGF, by drawing its conclusions and drawing attention to topics that are relevant, can influence decision makers and thus participate in forming an official national position or public policy in the field of internet governance.

The IGF is fully open to the participation of anyone interested in the issues of Internet stability, its security, usage and development. IGF is an annual event. Topics that will be discussed on the IGF can be suggested by anyone interested.

In addition to the global IGF initiative, there are regional (e.g. EuroDIG - European Dialogue on Internet Governance, SEEDIG - South East European Dialogue on Internet Governance), national (e.g. CRO-IGF), or age (Youth IGF) initiatives.

IGF initiatives, especially national and regional ones, are important as they promote communication among all stakeholders, foster the development of a culture of dialogue among different stakeholders on internet-related issues, which helps in anticipating different perspectives and interests. Important principles on which the IGF is based are:

- openness and transparency (allowing all interested parties to participate in the IGF, public insight into all parts of the IGF's work)
- inclusivity (enable active involvement of all concerned)
- bottom-up approach (involving the public in the creation of the IGF program)
- is not intended for sale of goods and services
- multi-stakeholder model (model of involvement of all stakeholders: academia, business sector and industry, civil society organizations and state and public administration)

Why CRO-IGF?

The National IGF has been running for several years now as a platform for open and inclusive multi-stakeholder discussions on Internet governance issues in Croatia. The first CRO-IGF was held in Zagreb on 6 May 2015 at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb. One of the topics discussed was about the benefits that CRO-IGF as a platform could bring to Croatia. Reports from the very first as well as subsequent CRO-IGFs have been uploaded to the global IGF website: <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/eastern-european-regional-group>.

The goals of CRO-IGF are:

- to point out to various stakeholders the opportunities for involvement in Internet governance processes relevant to their business and activities, and to encourage dialogue and, if necessary, help in capacity building for better understanding of Internet-related topics;
- to empower all stakeholders in Croatia to actively participate in national, and then directly or indirectly, regional and international Internet governance processes;
- to identify Internet governance topics that are important for Croatia.

CRO-IGF 2026 Preparatory Process

The Organizing Committee prepared program focusing on the following topics:

1. Space without borders, but not without rules

The space sector has become a dynamic market and a strategic interest for every country. Regulations often do not keep pace with the speed of technological development. Space is open for business, but do we know what the rules of the game are? We will talk about obstacles and responsibilities. Experts would present their views on the balance between the economic growth of industry and the preservation of security in orbit. Discover what kind of future awaits us among the stars.

2. Digital Networks Act: Key Changes and Market Implications (Digital Network Act - DNA)

DNA represents the European Union's effort to accelerate the development of advanced digital networks, strengthen the single market, and increase infrastructure resilience in an increasingly demanding technological and geopolitical environment. The DNA aims to prepare the European Union for future reliable and resilient digital networks. In the session we should find out key information about the application and significance of the DNA.

CRO-IGF 2026 Organizational Committee

<u>Academic Community:</u> Tihomir Katulić, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb Marin Vuković, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb	<u>Private sector/Industry:</u> Adrian Ježina, Telemach Hrvatska Hrvoje Hadžić, Ericsson Nikola Tesla Branimir Rajtar, NOG.hr Nataša Glavor, SPAN d.d.
<u>Public Sector:</u> Krešo Antonović, Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure Tihomir Lulić, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs Marin Ante Pivčević, of Ministry of justice, public administration and digital transformation Ivana Jelačić, CARNET Mislav Hebel, HAKOM, GAC Representative Zdravko Jukić, HAKOM, GAC Representative (Advisor)	<u>Internet Users/Civil Society:</u> Kristijan Zimmer, Croatian Open Systems Users' Group, HrOpen Ivan Čaleta, Safer Internet Centre/Centre for Missing and Abused Children

More detailed information on organizations with representatives on the CRO-IGF Organizing Committee:

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs	https://mvep.gov.hr/en
Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure	https://mmpi.gov.hr/en
Ministry of justice, public administration and digital transformation	https://mpudt.gov.hr/en
Croatian Academic and Research Network - CARNET	https://www.carnet.hr/en/
Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb	https://www.pravo.unizg.hr
Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb	https://www.fer.unizg.hr
Ericsson Nikola Tesla	https://ericssonnikolatesla.com/en/
Croatian Open Systems Users' Group, HrOpen	http://www.open.hr/
Network operators group Croatia (NOG.hr)	https://nog.hr/en/about/about/
Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industries (HAKOM)	https://www.hakom.hr/en/home/8
Safer Internet Centre/Centre for Missing and Abused Children	https://csi.hr/

CRO-IGF web site is available at http://www.carnet.hr/carnet_events/cro_igf

LinkedIn Profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/croatian-internet-governance-forum/>. CRO-IGF community contact could be reached using email address cro-igf@carnet.hr

CRO-IGF 2026 Event

The ninth Croatian IGF was held in Opatija on May 27th, 2026, at Grand Hotel Adriatic as an independent event at the MIPRO 2026 Conference. This event had the following agenda:

15:30 – 16:00	Welcome, coffee and networking
16:00 – 16:05	Welcoming speech – Krešo Antonović, Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure
16:10 - 16:20	ICANN and New gTLD Program – 2026 Round – Zdravko Jukić, Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industries (HAKOM)
16:20 – 17:30	Panel discussion – Space without borders, but not without rules
17:30 – 17:45	Coffee break
17:45 – 19:00	Panel discussion - Digital Network Act: Key changes and implications for the market (Digital Network Act - DNA)
19:00 – 19:10	Conclusion and messages

Ivana Jelačić, the Coordinator of this year's CRO-IGF opened the forum, presented the agenda for this year's Forum and invited Krešo Antonović to give a welcoming speech.

Welcoming speech

Krešo Antonović, Director-General of the Directorate for Civil Aviation, Electronic Communications and Postal Services, Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure as an opening speaker greeted the attendees and wished everyone a successful event. The ninth gathering of the Forum opened with a reminder of its history and key value – the power of open dialogue and exchange of opinions. This year's program focuses on two major topics: Space Without Borders and the Digital Networks Act. It was highlighted that the rapid development of space technology urgently requires clear frameworks for responsibility and sustainability, while the new European Act lays the foundation for the future of digital infrastructure, directly impacting the market and the quality of life for citizens.



Krešo Antonović, Welcoming speech

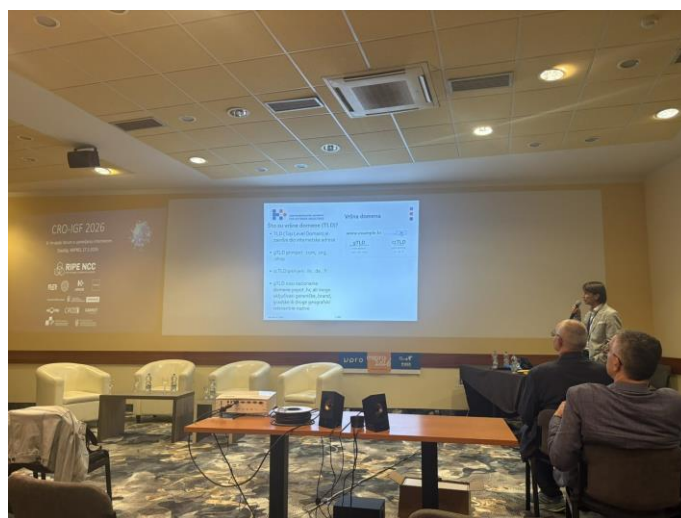
ICANN and New gTLD Program – 2026 Round

The presentation provided an overview of current topics in the field of internet governance, with a special focus on the new round of generic top-level domain applications that started this year, and the steps Croatia can take in this area. The first major gTLD application program was held in 2012, when as many as 1,930 applications were received, significantly expanding the internet space.

The application process for a new top-level domain is extremely demanding. Applicants cannot be just anyone. They must be powerful organizations that possess both the necessary technical prerequisites and technical strength, especially since the application fee is very high. Furthermore, special caution is required with geographic names, where it is crucial to assess whether it is legitimate to request a specific domain. It was precisely these geographic names that caused the most controversy in the 2012 round, as market and public interests clashed.

The new application round started in April 2026 and is currently in the submission phase. The key timeline for the process sets the application submission deadline for August 12, 2026, with the official public announcement of all received applications—known as Reveal Day—taking place 10 weeks later. Once published, all applicants and the public parts of the submissions will become visible, allowing interested states and stakeholders to review them for any potential conflicts of interest.

Governments and states participate in this process through the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), and for Croatia, acting involves a few crucial steps. First, it is necessary to monitor the announcements after Reveal Day to check who applied for what and identify who might be interested in reviewing the data. This leads to engaging key stakeholders, including the State Intellectual Property Office, regulatory bodies, and the expert community, determining if any action is needed. Ultimately, the key to success lies in a timely reaction, ensuring that any potential issue is recognized and addressed at the right legal moment.



Zdravko Jukić, New Round of Generic Top-Level Domain (gTLD) Applications

Panel discussion – Space without borders, but not without rules

Panel Participants:

- Goran Vojković, Ph.D., University North
- Assistant Professor, PhD Rutvica Rusan Novokmet, Faculty of Law, Zagreb
- Ana Katalinić Mucalo, PhD, Assistant Director of HAKOM

Moderator: Ivana Jelačić, CARNET

Key questions for the panel discussion

- How can regulations and legal frameworks keep pace with the extremely rapid speed of technological development in the space sector?
- What are the main obstacles and legal responsibilities that private companies face in the "open" commercial space market?
- How can we achieve a sustainable balance between the economic growth of the commercial space industry and the preservation of orbital security?
- Who bears the responsibility for space debris management and maintaining safety in orbit as the market expands?
- What kind of future awaits us in space exploration and commercialization ("among the stars") given the current geopolitical and economic interests?



Panel: "Space without borders, but not without rules "

Messages from the panel discussion:

- *Space Law Faces New Challenges - 1960s rules cannot keep pace with today's speed*
Space law is a young branch of international law currently experiencing a "new youth." While foundational UN treaties ensured decades of stability, technology is now skyrocketing while legislation lags. To address modern challenges regarding the commercial extraction of space resources, UN COPUOS issued a new advisory act on resource exploitation principles in May 2025. However, critical issues like temporary safety zones, priority rights, and benefit-sharing remain unresolved, highlighting the urgent need for closer collaboration between legal experts and engineers.

- *States retain sovereignty, but geopolitics dictates the pace*
Despite the massive rise of private corporations, nation-states will not relinquish control over space due to strict national security interests. The biggest obstacle to reaching a global consensus is the geopolitical rivalry among leading powers, meaning that the future legal framework depends heavily on the political climate back on Earth. Geopolitics acts as a legal roadblock, but politically, it serves as a powerful trigger that accelerates technological breakthroughs.
- *Sustainability and orbital congestion*
Space is getting crowded. We are facing a severe issue with orbital congestion caused by inactive satellites and space debris, which pose a constant collision risk. Under international conventions, absolute legal responsibility for any damage remains strictly with the launching state. This obligates national regulators to enforce rigorous technical standards and oversight mechanisms on private companies before granting launch authorizations.
- *Opportunities for small nation*
Croatia proves that small countries can find their niche in the space economy. The successful notification and mission of the first Croatian satellite, CroCube (which has been successfully orbiting for 15–16 months), has stimulated the local market and inspired tech startups. The national regulator, HAKOM, actively monitors these trends to foster market growth rather than block investment, connecting entrepreneurs via tech conferences. Since 2023, Croatia holds its own official orbital slot above the equator—a valuable national resource available for lease or monetization. For small nations, the path forward is integrating into European Space Agency (ESA) supply chains by manufacturing high-tech components and specialized subsystems.
- *Human Nature and the Next 20 Years in Space*
Although the current era is defined by intense competition, the vision for the next 20 years must focus on turning space into a domain of international cooperation for the benefit of all humankind. Expanding into space is a natural continuation of human history. We are the only species that ask questions, drives exploration, and hold an innate psychological urge to seek out new horizons.

The space boom has brought humanity to a crossroads where law must catch up with technology. A secure and sustainable future in orbit depends on interdisciplinary cooperation between lawyers and engineers, strict accountability of launching states regarding space debris, and the flexibility of regulators. Despite geopolitical tensions, space must remain a domain of cooperation, as exploration is hardwired into human nature.

Panel discussion - Digital Network Act: Key changes and implications for the market (Digital Network Act - DNA)

Panel Participants:

- Domagoj Maričić, HAKOM
- Martina Dragičević, A1 Hrvatska
- mr. sc. Morana Čulo Jovičić, Telemach Croatia

Moderator: Ana Katalinić Mucalo, PhD, Assistant Director of HAKOM

Key questions for the panel discussion

- How will the Digital Networks Act accelerate the development of advanced digital networks across the European Union?
- What are the key changes introduced by the DNA, and how will they contribute to strengthening the single market?
- In what ways does this legislation increase infrastructure resilience in an increasingly demanding technological and geopolitical environment?
- What are the market implications of DNA, and how will it affect market dynamics and key stakeholders within the EU?
- How does the application of the DNA prepare the European Union for the future of reliable and resilient digital networks?



Panel: "Digital Network Act: Key changes and implications for the market "

Messages from the panel discussion:

- The new Digital Networks Act is the result of the European Commission's strategic commitment outlined in the White Paper and accompanying reports, aiming to establish a single digital market in the European Union.
- The main purpose of this act is to present key changes and significance for the development of advanced, secure, and resilient digital networks, as well as strengthening the European economy.

- The project is currently in the early stage of institutional debate within the European Union, where member states are represented by their relevant ministries preparing official positions for Council meetings.
- According to current forecasts, the final act is expected to enter into force in 2028, while all discussions and negotiations should be completed by the end of 2027.
- European legislators prefer the form of a regulation because it is directly applicable in all states, but Croatia advocated for the form of a directive in the early stages to better respect national specificities.
- There is a need to align this act with parallel Omnibus initiatives for simplifying existing directives at the European Union level to avoid legal confusion and overlapping procedures.
- The idea of granting radio frequency spectrum management licenses without a time limit sounds good in theory, but in practice, it carries the risk that financially stronger actors might overpower smaller operators.
- The level of user and consumer rights protection in Croatia is significantly higher than the European Union average, making Croatia a recognized leader in this segment, which is why negotiations will aim to preserve these high standards.
- The principle of open internet access and net neutrality is not questioned, but operators express concern regarding the definition of specific 5G network segments, as insufficient definition could slow down the development of technological innovations and advanced services.
- The transition process towards new technologies and completely symmetric regulation is closely linked to the decommissioning of the copper network, which must consider the specific national situation in Croatia where copper is still significantly used.
- The issue of privacy and personal data protection within advanced services requires finding a balance, as telecommunication operators are among the largest data holders, and the development of new modern services is impossible without user analytics and segmentation, while strictly respecting privacy rules.
- HAKOM and the relevant ministry emphasize that the adopted framework position of Croatia is flexible enough for amendments and invite operators to proactive cooperation to build a joint national stance.

Audience

The Forum was attended by around 40 participants. The presence of participants from different stakeholders was evenly distributed among government and the public sector, private sector, academia and civil society representatives.

Conclusions

The main conclusions of the Forum are the messages generated in its open and inclusive format. The participants recognized that this format is excellent for exchanging ideas and positions that may influence relevant policy processes at the national and international levels. It is necessary to continue to further popularize such events and to develop a dialogue on issues related to the Internet and in particular Internet governance among all the interested stakeholders.

Special Thanks

CRO-IGF's annual event was made possible by the positive attitude and efforts of all the members of the CRO-IGF Organizing Committee. Special thanks to the MIPRO Conference that hosted this year's forum. Support and sponsorship from the RIPE NCC Organization was very valuable and very important in organizing the CRO-IGF 2026 event. Thanks everyone!

More Information and Contact

It is possible to contact the Croatian multi-stakeholder community for Internet governance issues by email: cro-igf@carnet.hr

Zagreb, July 6th, 2026