

GNSO Liaison to the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)

Annual Report 2018

The GNSO Liaison to the GAC (the Liaison) has now been in effect for four years, and while it does seem to be a reasonably successful measure for improving communication between the GNSO Council and the GAC Leadership, it is fair to say that the role is still adapting.

It is clear that the role of governments in Internet governance in general, and ICANN in particular, is increasing, and needs to be properly accommodated. It is also clear that many GAC members are frustrated as they perceive their voice isn't heard in the ICANN processes, particularly as it relates to GNSO policy development. At the same time, many GAC members have very little time to devote to ICANN among their many duties, and as the turnover in representatives is very high, the representatives are not always well briefed or familiar with ICANN structures and procedures, which makes it hard for them to participate effectively in the PDP process.

There has been various attempts to support new GAC members get up to speed with the role of the GNSO and the PDP, but as the somewhat disappointing attendance at the webinar in 2018 showed, engaging GAC members between ICANN meetings remains a challenge. While GAC members have found the regular GNSO policy briefings (forwarded to them) useful, we should perhaps consider a condensed focused version specifically for the GAC that focuses on the GAC concerns and interests as part of the pre-meeting information package.

It is encouraging to see the active GAC participation in recent GNSO activities. From the start, the GAC has been very actively involved as a participant in the EPDP that has dominated the GNSO agenda. Apart from the EPDP, there has not been any major new PDP activities during 2018 that would have been the subject of the early engagement mechanism, but there are many new activities on the GNSO horizon that might change the situation. It should also be noted that GAC has been actively sharing the lead in the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures PDP Working Group Work Track 5.

There has been a shift in communication between GAC and GNSO, in that direct communication between the leaders is now more common. This positive development has led to multiple parallel communication channels (leadership, support staff and liaisons) that are not always well coordinated. The Liaison role is also not fully incorporated in the established communication procedures, with copying the Liaison being more of an afterthought (that sometimes gets overlooked) rather than established procedure. The termination of the current arrangements for independent secretarial support for GAC will also pose a challenge in 2019, with new arrangements and channels to be established.

From the GNSO point of view, it is sometimes challenging to judge when individual GAC representatives are speaking on their own behalf as opposed to representing a common GAC position when participating in working groups, as establishing a common, approved GAC view outside the meetings and communiqués is not always possible.

An important part of the Liaison role is being present at GAC meetings, being able to answer questions and provide additional information about ongoing PDP activities. This poses a scheduling challenge, as the Liaison needs to spend as much time as possible in the GAC sessions during the meetings, while at the same time staying up to date with both GNSO Council and PDP activities

(with meeting schedules that conflict with the GAC sessions). As it is impossible for the Liaison to participate in the work of all PDP working groups, keeping up to date with their status and issues will require more extensive co-operation with the PDP leadership teams and support staff between the meetings.

While there has been many productive private conversations between the Liaison and GAC members during ICANN meetings, designating a set seating location for the Liaison in the GAC room during the plenary sessions would make it easier for GAC members to seek out the Liaison for questions and clarifications. It would also be useful if the Liaison was able to volunteer comments and clarifications during discussion of GNSO-related activities.

While it has been very convenient to have a designated contact both with the GNSO and GAC leaderships, in some instances it would be more expedient to be able to email the full GAC leadership directly. Unlike the case with gnso-chairs@icann.org, the Liaison does not have direct email rights to gac-leadership@icann.org, so messages end up in the moderation queue.

It would be extremely useful for the Liaison to have (read-only) access to the GAC mailing list, but it is understandable that GAC policy might prevent this.

In summary, this report contains the following specific recommendations:

- Producing GAC-specific GNSO policy briefings as part of the pre-meeting information package
- Making sure the Liaison is included/copied in GNSO-GAC communication channels and procedures
- A possible fixed seating location in the room for Liaison during open GAC sessions
- Increased coordination between Liaison and PDP chairs and liaisons between meetings
- Ability for Liaison to answer questions and comment on GNSO-related issues in GAC sessions
- Posting rights for Liaison to gac-leadership@icann.org to facilitate direct communications