

Date: **9 October 2005.**

Intermediate report from the president of ISOC Belgium.

New organisation status:

April 19th '05, the ISOC Belgium board decided to legalise its status "not-for-profit" (vzw/asbl). This registration helped us to be recognized by the federal and regional governments, as well as by other important organisations working in the same area as we do (Internet).

The board of directors is composed of:

- Frans Gerbosch;
- Beni Monsecour;
- Sander Viane;
- Godelieve Viane;
- Rudi Vansnick

At the same time, we decided to open up our structure to a wide variety of activities, which allowed us to answer interests all over the country. The Regional structure is now finalised, having for each region one responsible representative (see Regional services). These functions are filled in by :

- Frans Gerbosch - Flanders
- Rudi Roth – Brussels
- Michel Lenoir – Wallonie

The creation of the Taskforces took more time than initially was planned. Now, we are happy to announce that we have reached the final stage and before the year end our 4 pillars will be active. We are now in the process of defining the topics on which each taskforce (and sub-taskforces) will concentrate. The group around Web accessibility is already working intensively.

More than 15 people are putting up together the programme that ISOC Belgium will present before the year-end to the Belgian Internet community. Some excellent ideas were brought forward and it's up to us now to give them structure.

Member status:

Since January 2005 till now we have 17 new members. In addition, not one single member has resigned from their original subscription date.

This brings our total members up to 142 (there are still members to be added to the ISOC USA database). Furthermore and despite several meetings, we have not yet been able to add to our database the more than 6000 members from TIK (representing the Belgian cable Internet users – approx. 480.000 customers). With this organisation we signed a MoU. The purpose of this agreement is that ISOC Belgium represents its members at different levels (government, official organisations, business environments, etc ...). An additional approach is now into consideration, as we wish to acquire the address information from each of those 6000 TIK members. Nevertheless, we already do consider the TIK members as being ISOC Belgium members as well.

A similar project is now ongoing with another organisation which represents the Belgian ADSL internet users. There seems to be a strong interest in developing such cooperation.

Activities:

W3C partnering.

In February '05 we organised a first seminar under the W3C umbrella focusing on Semantic Web. It brought us a few new ISOC members and recognition in some new sectors. Recently (3/10) we organised another tutorial XHTML2 & XFORMS with W3C Netherlands.

From April till today we have been working on a few important topics, essentially based on security and accessibility of the internet.

Project development:

First important project: tackling the illegal gambling websites.

Since the beginning of this year we are working on this topic. In April, we actively participated in the international debate during the *International Congress on Gambling* in Brussels. The “gambling commission”, which is part of the Ministry of Justice, invited us at a later stage to continue the debate on the position we defended during the congress. Today and in Belgium alone, more than 9000 websites offering illegal gambling opportunities are known to be active, but none of them were finally removed from the internet... This was and is essentially due to the fact that there is no article of law which can tackle this particular problem, one of the reasons why the Ministry of Justice asked us to continue on finding solutions on this issue. Despite the fact that we asked for funds to support our intervention, we continue on doing this for free. We strongly believed that, as the solutions we offer proved to be correct, funds from the government would naturally become available to us.

We started a global approach, not only focusing on Belgium, and organised 2 meetings with the following bodies invited (and being present) :

- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Economical affairs
- Federal police
- Federal Computer Crime Unit
- Federal Attorneys General

The conclusions at the second meeting were very clear: go for an adequate solution!

Today, we are planning an international congress where we would like to invite important persons and bodies which are able to take position in actually removing (technically or legally) illegal gambling sites, not only in Belgium, but worldwide as well. We discussed this issue already with the Belgian TLD (DNS.be), the Dutch TLD (SIDN), and with the former Vice-President of ICANN, Paul Verhoef). All of them stated that our project was more than worth while and even crucial in making internet a secure (and clean) environment.

We also drafted a project proposal to be integrated into the ISOC funding programme, unfortunately the time schedule was against us (the document was finally drafted on Monday morning at 4am, October 3rd 2005, which apparently was 2 days late). Nevertheless, this will not prevent us from moving forward and we will try to get other organisations involved and will go on looking for sponsors to support the project.

Second project: "Internet Ombudsdienst".

After having received lots of requests from internet users, which have become victims of fraud on auction platforms, we now offer a specific service which is called the "Internet Ombudsdienst". This project focuses on collecting information from unfortunate users (buyers/sellers) of internet platforms, such as eBay, amongst others. Most of the complaints were cases where people had been paying a certain amount of money for a specific object, which was never actually delivered. There was one particular fraudulent case in which a laptop was offered for sale for 650€. ISOC Internet Ombudsdienst was the only organisation that was able to detect this case, which claimed 150 internet victims. We organised several meetings with some of the victims, discussed the case with the Federal Computer Crime unit and helped them in finding the offenders. The case is still not closed, as it seems there were more objects for sale on internet by one particular gang, resulting in 600 victims of fraudulent commercial actions.

This project is still ongoing and even growing in importance, as more and more people are finding their way to our service. Up till now, this service is for free, but it becomes more and more difficult to guarantee its effectiveness without proper funding. Nevertheless, such kind of support proves itself to be of vital importance to the common internet user, as there is not one single organisation in the country, apart from ISOC Belgium, offering any kind of service whatsoever to them. This project proposal was unfortunately finally drafted on that same Monday, 3rd of October '05, again too late for integrating it in time into the ISOC USA funding programme.

Other activities.

In May 2004, ISOC Belgium signed an agreement with the WSA organisation, defining the setup of a National Contest, awarding the best e-content- and creativity projects in Belgium. In June this year, we decided upon 47 nominations in 7 of the 8 categories. A national jury selected the 7 winning projects and sent them to Austria.

Unfortunately, the company that ISOC Belgium had an agreement with to organise the congress, (which was planned on taking place on June 29th '05, in order to grant the national awards), cancelled the congress 4 days before it was supposed to take place! This put us in an extremely awkward position, but we continued on looking for alternatives.

Finally, we are proud to announce today that the "gala" will take place on October 27th '05, in collaboration with our new partner EROV (Economic Council of Oriental-Flanders).

In the meantime, I was asked to be "rapporteur" at the UN WSIS Conference in Vienna (June '05), an invitation I gladly accepted. Afterwards I was also selected a member of the Grand Jury for the WSA evaluation in Bahrain, which had the task of selecting the 40 best worldwide projects. The event was hosted by ISOC Bahrain; making it a real pleasure to become acquainted with my colleagues of ISOC Bahrain, in particular Ahmed Al Hujairy and Waheed Al Balushi.

Since September, ISOC Belgium has been working closely with EROV, which resulted in a partnership, called "godfather-ship", for their European programme for the Social Profit sector and this until April 2006. Based on this cooperation we are now in process of defining the extension of this programme till the year 2010, in accordance with the programme of the European Social Funds. Deadline for submitting the proposal is mid October '05. The idea is to compose a white book for the Social Profit sector, describing the needs for and expectations of ICT and Internet services, as well as define the participation of the Open Source world in helping the Social Profit sector to become able to manage their administration without having to spend huge amounts for ICT support.

Furthermore, ISOC Belgium has been asked to participate in several national and international congresses, conferences and seminars as a guest-speaker or as a panel member in debates. During these occasions we were offered the opportunity of presenting ISOC's mission and goals, receiving in return more and more interest in the purpose of ISOC and its related activities. This interest reached countries beyond our borders.

Conclusions.

After 10 months of very intensive work, my other professional activities being invariably forced to paddle at quite a slow pace, I am quite confident that ISOC Belgium will become one of the most active Chapters. My main concern is now to finalise the strategic plan of actions for 2006 and to find the necessary funds to turn this action plan into operation. I personally invested about 80.000 euros in ISOC Belgium and therefore, I sincerely hope this investment will at least prove to provide solid ground for further expansion of our Chapter on various levels, while being an incentive for other chapters to stay alert and active.

However, we are aware of the fact that, at the same time, we could not focus much (or enough) on policy procedures and governance, as we clearly gave first priority to understand and define properly and clearly the needs and expectations of the internet user. We definitely booked success on this level. Rules and regulations only prove to be helpful if one knows exactly what they are needed for in the first place. In the coming year, we will focus, in as much as possible, together with other partners, on getting the appropriate laws, rules and governance approved and applied.

I dare hope to get enough appreciation from the ISOC international community and receive the sincere and necessary support, which is needed in order to keep ISOC Belgium to continue on functioning as a decent example of how ISOC worldwide can help the internet society as a whole.

Rudi Vansnick
President ISOC Belgium vzw
October 9th 2005