

Go Online Greeks: The Greek Internet from Birth to Adolescence

by Nikos Vasilakos, Chairman of the Association of Hellenic Internet Users (EEXI)

When the Association of Hellenic Internet Users (EEXI) began operating on December 1993, there was not even an Internet Name Register (.gr) available, no EETT no OTENET or any others. Only FORTHNET and two or three providers, most of which no longer exist.



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The past: Participating Self-management

Only a few remember that today's Hellas On Line is flesh from the flesh of EEXI. That the second basement of 30-32, Patriarchou Ioakim St. (also known as the "submarine") was the place where almost all Greek Internet services operated for the first time based on open templates and free & open source software. That it provided free hosting to non-profit organisations during those rough first years, when Greek sites could be counted with fingers as well as training through specialised seminars.

Does anyone remember that the big and modern OTENET has used both the know-how and the human resources of EEXI to reach its current status? That EEXI has hosted the first Web Banking facility by Alpha Bank?

In the days of EEXI there were no Independent Authorities [Data Protection Authority (DPA) Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission (EETT), Hellenic Authority for the Information and Communication Security and Privacy (ADAE)], Electronic Crime Force in the Hellenic Police Headquarters.

Those days we were all internet "kids" and, conventionally, kids rarely commit crimes. We were making and receiving "blanters", which were monitored by the System Administrators (Sysadmin or Admin or system root) when limits were exceeded.

Things have changed and we have now reached our internet "adolescence". We take the keys for the broadband "car" without Dad knowing it and we run to test its strength and our endurance. We run without caution.

Today: Redefinition

When someone spends so many years striving to connect and to remain connected, the question heard today sounds humorous: "Do you have ADSL? Which package?"

However, everything is advancing. Connection, in urban areas is uninterrupted, hassle-free and with full technical support. There is of course always room for improvement, focusing on two main points: The role of OTE and the interference of EETT.

On the one hand, OTE must free itself from the pirate logic of financial raids through bills, to abandon the safe rebellious behaviour towards alternative providers and to treat the customer as a citizen-consumer.

EETT on the other hand must become even more flexible and open, to control bureaucracy, to avoid introversion and tail chasing and based on its financial independence, to start producing work and to build the foundations for the Greek Internet.

If Greeks had invented the Internet, this would probably be a super-pc in the basement of the National Information Service. Unfortunately although we did not invent Internet, we hold the broadband resources closed to use. In Research centres and Universities with subnormal operation.

Instead we see non-use and disuse of resources in public services and bodies which from time to time only serve personal interests.

Tomorrow: Co-regulation

Let's say we are online. Let's say that we do have fast access. Now what? What should we do then?

Every broadband connection is a communication node and on every node there are services being slowly but steadily built. Anything built on connections and spaces beyond suspicion cannot be controlled through the known monitoring mechanisms. Not with EETT's vans or through telephone bills, nor through security policies.

The state must first of all take the necessary measures followed by the public as well as the private sector. Such measures are the continuous training of employees on technology depending on their job position and information to supervisors and officers on a continuous basis and with consistency.

Last but not least, comes the user. It is true that we are afraid of the individual users who may use a broadband connection as a hobby in order to set up and provide services without being appropriately trained. We must protect him and the only way to succeed is to have lots of "eyes" on the Market, whether domestic, international or black market.

Habemus C.E.R.T.

As long as monitoring remains a request (we prefer observation and prevention), we are equally interested in ways of handling the matter. Currently, there is no national strategy on handling technological crisis. Instead, the Ministry of the National Defence, the Police, the Electronic Crime Force strive on their own and the Independent Authorities together.

> A success in handling relevant incidents may be the result of co-operation, information exchange, knowledge, know-how and secrets. We are quite successful in conferences and we wish that such would be held more often.



But shouldn't we organise our society in terms of institutions?
> Is the Greek Computer Emergency Response Team beginning to face such need?

- > Should we hurry and act instead of waiting for a severe attack that will embarrass us on international level?
- > Is it time to stop hoping that the good Lord will protect Greece?
- > On what terms will C.E.R.T. be organised?
- > Who are to participate?
- > How many levels will there be?
- > Will it be the result of hard work and long discussions?
- > Will it be based on participation and will it be sufficient?
- > Will it function?
- > Will it be independent?

> And most importantly: will it be effective?

Last bits...

Regardless of whether C.E.R.T. will actually be established, regardless of whether we change as organizations, institutions and individuals, our technological struggle is a common cause. We are faced with images and patterns of crime that we try to fight by enhancing Security and the Protection of the Users. It is very important to understand that internet crime exists not because it is organised but because it has customers...

And here's the punch line: Should we discuss first and most importantly the role, the action, the work and the days of A.I.X. (Athens Internet Exchange: www.aix.gr).

Just asking...