

20 Years of the RIPE NCC. 1992 to the present.

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Quite a few of you know that I have been part of the RIPE NCC team for the past 20 years. Some of you may even know that I am the only one on the team who has been around that long. So when the organisers of the anniversary festivities asked me to say a few words, it was difficult to refuse. The traditional thing to do at anniversary occasions is to thank everyone -and their parents-. And today I will be entirely traditional: I will thank everyone - in turn - I will do it by groups so that we can finish in time for drinks.

When we think about the RIPE NCC, the first things that come to mind are IP addresses and autonomous system numbers. The RIPE NCC distributes "Internet Number Resources" and keeps the registry of who is using these resources for Europe and surrounding areas. We do this according to policies developed right here, by RIPE. This is called industry self-regulation. And we have been very good at it!

In the 1990s many have predicted that we would run out of IPv4 addresses by the turn of the century. Others have predicted that distribution of resources would be grossly unfair on the local, regional or global scale; yet others predicted that unresolvable conflicts were inevitable. Yet here we are, a dozen years later than predicted; We are going to deplete the regional pool of IPv4 addresses in the next few months. There is no panic, no desperate rush on the bank and no widespread discontent with our self-regulation. That is a tremendous success! -

We can be particularly proud of this success because we invented the concept of the regional Internet registry right here. The RIPE NCC was the very first of these organisations, governed and supported by the industry.

In the 1990s some proposed to just sell, or auction off IP addresses, as was fashionable then. Yet the RIPE community stubbornly decided to proceed with self-regulation. And we do have a fair number of policies to prove it. - These policies have not just appeared. They have been developed here, by you, volunteers from industry who have the welfare of the whole community at heart. Today the financial sector is a frightening example of what happens if an industry blindly believes in market forces and does not agree nor respect essential ground rules.

We are different. We agree on policies and we respect them.  
I believe we -you- were right in what we did.

Our self-regulation has supported the tremendous growth of the Internet, both here in the RIPE region and elsewhere in the world. Personally I believe that without the prudent distribution of resources based on self-regulation, this growth would not have been possible. I know that all of us here are pragmatists who work for a healthy and successful Internet. It is against our culture to congratulate ourselves for our own achievements. But what better excuse can there be than this 20th anniversary of the RIPE NCC and the fact that we have almost depleted the IPv4 address pool in an orderly way. Please join me in a big applause for this - our - achievement.

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Of course the RIPE NCC does more than distribute and register address space. After all it is the coordination center. So the RIPE NCC is your platform to organise any activity that is useful for the whole community and needs a neutral, impartial and professional team to just do it.

There is no time to mention all the RIPE NCC achievements. So let me just mention a less obvious one: the DNS area. You all know that there is a big domain name industry organised elsewhere and yet the RIPE NCC supports some essential parts of the DNS. We do this because DNS operations are essential to a healthy Internet and thereby to the success of the RIPE community. We operate one of the DNS root name servers: k-root. We provide initial support for country TLDs, ENUM and the like. We have helped to ensure real DNS software diversity by instigating and kick-starting development of the NSD name server software. We have contributed significantly to the development and deployment of DNSSEC. We have also served as an incubator for CENTR, the organisation of ccTLDs in our region.

Such efforts need funding. Our community has risen to that challenge by always providing the necessary resources. Of course community funded activities need formal organisation and the associated governance. And we have been pragmatic and successful in doing both. At first we found an organisational home for the start of the RIPE NCC: RARE, the organisation of national research and education networks that is now called TERENA. That way we did not get distracted from the "real" work by creating a formal organisation. RARE played a crucial role in getting the RIPE NCC started. And RARE did so at a time, when the eventual smashing success of the Internet was not widely foreseen. Many RARE members were in fact pursuing a competing network architecture with considerable support from national governments and the European Community. So it was by far not a natural thing for RARE to become the home for the Internet coordination center.

But RARE did, and that was very important. Almost all the national research networks even found a way to contribute to the operating costs of the RIPE NCC as did the, very few, commercial ISPs.

For governance at first we had a "contributor's committee". The name alone spells it out: first contribute resources, then govern how they are used.

Being in Ljubljana I'd like to recognise a Slovenian who played an important role for the RIPE NCC at that time: Tomaz Kalin was secretary general of RARE, while it provided the organisational home for the NCC. So Tomaz was my boss, not an enviable position at any time -. It was an especially difficult job at that time, since there was always a little antagonism between RARE and the RIPE community because of the "protocol wars". So while being part of RARE, the RIPE NCC was very concerned about its independence when it came to managing the actual work. Also the RIPE NCC was growing, trying to keep up with the Internet, much faster than RARE was growing. RARE's rules and method of operation were suited neither for this kind of independence nor for the growth. So there was ample opportunity for friction. It was almost inevitable that Tomaz and I disagreed from time to time. But eventually we always made it work. Tomaz has taught me, among other things, that the word "bureaucrat" can be said without a derogatory connotation; and he has taught me to value a seasoned bureaucrat, who is on my side. -

Later the RIPE NCC grew even more and needed a more suitable organisational structure. This community decided to incorporate it as an association. Associations are very democratic organisations where the membership makes the important decisions. Everyone contributing resources to the RIPE NCC is a member and gets a say in how these resources are used. This is how we are organised today.

Let me recognise one more person who contributed very much to RIPE NCC governance: Rob Blokzijl. Of course you know him as the chair of RIPE. But many of you may not realise his continued contribution to overseeing the RIPE NCC as well. That is not surprising, since Rob has hardly had any formal role in RIPE NCC governance. Yet, every time a crucial decision was to be made, by the Contributors Committee, the RARE Council of Administration, the TERENA Executive committee or the RIPE NCC board, Rob was there and provided invaluable advice and wisdom. Sometimes Rob even forgot to check whether he was invited to these meetings or not. - Without Rob the RIPE NCC would not be what it is today.

So please join me in a big applause for all those who have served in one capacity or another on the various governance and oversight bodies. They all have played contributed to make the RIPE NCC a success.

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Last but not least of course there are the people who do the work, who make it all happen: the RIPE NCC staff.

Personally I am still around because doing the work and making it happen is extremely rewarding. However the most important reason to stay around for me are the people at the RIPE NCC. They come from all over the world, 20 odd nationalities They are dedicated and hard working. Working in this team is fun!

We just completed an employee satisfaction survey. The first thing the survey professional said when he presented the results was: "I'd like to work here!" I agree with him.

On the other hand I am also very proud of what has become of the people who have left us over the years. Many have stayed in the industry; some even have come back. Of the first four from 1992, three are still in the Industry: Anne Lord is with the Internet society, supporting ISOC chapters, especially in emerging countries. Tony Bates has been at MCI and Cisco. Today he is CEO of Skype. I am proud that quite a few successful people in our industry have contributed to the success of the RIPE NCC and that maybe being part of the RIPE NCC team has contributed to their success as well. A few more that come to mind are those who went to ICANN: John Crain, Leo Vegoda and recently Filiz Yilmaz. Olaf Kolkman went to lead NLnet Labs and became a very well respected chair of the Internet Architecture Board. Too many excellent and creative people went to Google. .... I could go on.

I am very proud that the RIPE NCC team has always been dedicated, professional and well respected. So finally please join me, and join the present RIPE NCC staff, in a standing ovation for all RIPE NCC staff, past and present.

You made it happen!