

Report on participation in Freedom not Fear 2024

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Freedom not Fear (FNF) is a yearly conference which is self-organized by digital rights activists from across Europe. The conference follows the barcamp format, meaning that sessions are for a large part organized spontaneously on the days of the conference and participation can vary. This was my first participation in the conference.

As a participant, I was particularly interested in sessions related to AI. I therefore took part in a session on the German security package, which includes provisions for the use of AI systems in asylum and migration processing as well as by the police (scraping of facial images from the internet and facial recognition). Furthermore, there was a session on AI regulatory sandboxes and the participation of civil society in them. It was interesting to learn how this is done in other countries, since Norway has a successful and extensive regulatory sandbox coordinated by Datatilsynet, but without much civil society participation.

Furthermore, I wanted to learn about developments which have not been on my radar so far. For example, I attended a session on the new EU directive on violence against women, which includes some provisions to protect against digital violence.

Because I wanted to gather more information on how the implementation of the AI Act is progressing in other countries, I decided to also lead a session on „AI Act Implementation across Europe“. In the session, participants from across about 6-7 European countries shared what topics they are currently working on regarding the AI Act. A challenge shared by most participants was that their governments are keeping the process of implementation very in-transparent and don't provide opportunities for civil society to engage. I was also able to share my knowledge of the developments in the European level and we have set up a Signal group where we communicate irregularly on the process of AI Act implementation. Furthermore, all participants have learned what the other organizations are working on, which enables them to collaborate where appropriate. We at EFN are particularly worried about the use of facial recognition by the police in Norway, and thanks to the workshop I now know which other organizations are working on this topic nationally and are therefore potential sources for feedback, sparring or collaboration. I was particularly glad to meet with organizations in the workshop who are not members of EDRi and therefore not part of the network where we have been doing our work on the AI Act so far.

Besides the sessions themselves, I was mainly interested in going to FNF to network, both with organizations who are part of EDRi, as well as others. I was very happy to meet with Ella Jakubowska, who is head of policy at EDRi and who coordinated out AI Core Group in the past. We discussed the AI Core Group and also how to engage with people from the European Commission in a meaningful way. Her vast experience on this was very valuable. Furthermore, I used most of the time on Sunday to directly engage with others, especially with participants from Greece, Cyprus, Germany and Italy. With Greece and Cyprus we also discussed the possibility of future projects through EEA grants.

The conference took place near the European quarter of Brussels in [Mundo Matongé](#), a local community center which has hosted FNF before and is also home to civil society organizations working with migrants, marginalized communities, the environment or human rights.

The program was accompanied by a self-organized bar-hopping event on Friday as well as an organized networking dinner on Sunday. Both gave ample opportunity to engage with others and discuss topics such as the upcoming Internet Governance Forum in Norway in 2025.

The barcamp setting was something I experienced for the first time. While this limits the time you have to organize the sessions, it does foster more debate and exchange. Especially for me, who came to the conference mainly to learn and network, the format provided the freedom and flexibility to do that, talk to who I wanted to and also have enough space to discuss with others or pose my questions in the session. This is certainly a learning on conference methods that I will remember.

To summarize, the conference has broadened my knowledge on different legislation and particularly on AI and the implementation of the AI Act across Europe. This also provides a good basis for future collaboration.

Particularly valuable were the direct meetings with participants, most of whom I met for the first time. Building those connections is important since EFN does engage in topics in Norway where their experiences might be valuable. Additionally we met with potential partners with whom we could apply for funding from the EEA Grants. Participation in FNF has therefore been very valuable for me and I hope to participate again in the future.

Freedom not Fear does not publish an official report on the conference and content is limited to the participants in order to ensure a trusted and confidential atmosphere. Information relating to the conference can be found here: <https://freedomnotfear.org/2024/preliminary-programme>

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