

**European Internet Foundation
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World Summit on the Information Society
Assessment and Perspectives of Geneva

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1. Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me thank you first of all for the opportunity to address you at this breakfast of the European Internet Foundation dedicated to the World Summit on Information Society.

The Summit is held in two phases, December 2003 in Geneva and 2005 in Tunis. After Geneva and before starting the preparations for Tunis I would like to share with you some reflections on where do we stand today - and where are we going to?

1. **The initial ambitions** of the Summit could be summarised as follows:

- **Agree on a vision** shared by all stakeholders and **Formulate key principles** that could constitute a sound basis for an appropriate framework at global level.
- **Adopt a Plan of Action** to make the vision happen **and deliver a few key political messages** :
 - On the role of **e-Strategies** leading to an inclusive, sustainable and enabling environment are vital to participation in the global economy, and
 - On the importance of a process associating all stakeholders, and offering new perspectives for each of them.

- Follow an **enabling preparatory process** anticipating on the rule of multilateral governance for the 21st century

However, during the negotiations for the Geneva Summit, participants faced several divides, between:

- Democratic societies and authoritarian regimes: Human rights and freedom of access to information;
- Industrialised countries and emerging economies: Trade issues and Internet governance;
- Different cultures: divergences on ethics and reference to religion or even divergences on data protection;
- Rich and poor: financing issues and creation of a Digital Solidarity Fund

And participants faced a difficult preparatory process marked by attempts to put in question the multilateral construction and by a Cancun effect.

2. Geneva delivered an overall encouraging result

The agreement reached represents a success for the supporters of a multilateral approach, and of a regulated globalisation, as advocated also by the EU.

The WSIS Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action form the basis for an approach to the Information Society common to all the Member States of the United Nations.

Clear principles were adopted on vital issues: Human rights, freedom of access to and communication of information and media; and on good governance.

The participation of civil society and the private sector was effective, even if improvements may still be needed for the second phase of the WSIS. A “Civil Society Bureau” was created to channel more systematically the input of civil society in the WSIS process.

The principle of solidarity in the fight against the digital divide was recognised and moreover the potential of ICTs in contributing to the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The decisive role of legal and regulatory frameworks and the need to devise e-Strategies at all appropriate levels was accepted.

Standards – different models for software development - linguistic and cultural diversity - security of networks and information have been also addressed.

Agreement was reached on processes to deal with the two contentious issues: Internet Governance and Financing the fights against the digital divide.

The texts adopted at UN level reflect a number of principles close to the EU approach towards an “Information Society for All”. During all the process, EU exerted real influence, thank to its cohesion and longstanding experience in the field.

3. But much remains to be done up to Tunis 2005

For the second phase

- The preparatory process for Tunis has to be defined,
- As the organisation of the Working group on Internet governance and of the Task Force on Financing placed under the authority of the UN Secretary General.
- The follow up of the Plan of Action in order to translate it in actions with clearly identified targets, timetables and allocated resources.

The main outcome of Geneva is the Political Declaration. The Tunis phase will be more technical and address specific issues of the Information Society. The Plan of Action will be the focus of the forthcoming months. The challenge is to develop tangible actions, including through public private partnerships.

Improvement is needed with regard to the participation of NGOs and the private sector, who consider that their participation was not on an “equal footing”.

The preparatory process should reflect this orientation and should be characterised by a lean agenda with clear priorities and putting “focus” instead of broad debates. Alongside with very few general PrepComs, thematic meetings could be arranged.

In addition we do hope that the Tunis Summit will allow advancing in the question of human rights in Tunisia, as it has been expressed by Civil Society representatives.

For the EU,

- The implications of the Geneva results will have an impact on Information Society policies and policies related to Information Society.
- It will also be necessary to elaborate a common EU position in order to influence the process, as it was done during the Geneva phase of the Summit,
- And to insure an effective participation in the two working groups set up under the UN Secretary General Authority.

And priorities for the follow-up of the Plan of Actions adopted in Geneva :

- New or enhanced dialogue and co-operation with partners in third countries covering policy dialogue and stakeholders networks;
- Promotion of eStrategies, including assistance to set up an appropriate enabling environment;
- Actions in the priority fields of applications:
eGovernment, eLearning, eHealth, eBusiness

- IST co-operation and International networks for Research and education.

5. Conclusions: Challenges for the Information Society

The Plan of Action endorsed at this Summit is a point of departure. It could give renewed impetus to the development of a truly global Information Society for all.

It could trigger new models for emerging economies. Large potentials are untapped and in particular the citizens with low purchasing power, provided that affordable services are available.

It is an invitation for stronger co-operation and new partnerships. It shows the value of international and multilateral mechanisms.