

**European Internet Foundation
Breakfast meeting on the WSIS
26 January 2005**

World Summit on the Information Society
Main challenges for the second phase

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1. Introduction

Chairman,
Honourable Members of the EP,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me thank you first of all for this second opportunity to address you at this breakfast of the European Internet Foundation. I remember with pleasure our meeting dedicated to the World Summit on Information Society just one year ago, in January 2004.

As we are now engaged in the preparations for the Tunis Summit, I would like to provide you with some new information on where we stand today and raise some issues and priorities for the process.

2. Where are we now?

- As you certainly remember the Geneva Summit adopted two documents:
 - A *Declaration of Principles* with a vision of ICTs as essential an foundation for an inclusive Information Society, characterised by universal, accessible, equitable and affordable ICT infrastructure and services. In this context, very important related subjects are IPRs, cultural diversity and freedom of the media.
 - A *Plan of Action* with action lines providing guidance to all stakeholders on how to implement the WSIS goals.

The so-called “Geneva acquis” lays its foundations on an Information Society based on some focal principles:

- Human rights, freedom of access to and communication of information and media, good governance.

- The participation of civil society and the private sector.
 - The principle of solidarity in the fight against the digital divide and 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.
 - The importance of standards – different models for software development respecting linguistic and cultural diversity – security of networks and information.
- The main issues left for the *Tunis phase* could be identified as follows:
 - Implementation of the Geneva commitments;
 - Internet governance.
 - Financing access to the information technologies in developing countries.

<h3>3. Commission priorities for the Tunis phase: from principles to action</h3>

There is a consensus on not to reopen the Geneva acquis. Instead, the Tunis phase will concentrate on the translation of the principles contained in the Geneva Declaration into specific actions, in line with the Communication adopted on 14 July 2004.

For the implementation phase, the EC considers that the WSIS actions should notably focus on:

- A **pro-competitive legal and regulatory environment**, which is a key factor to encourage investment and to foster a sustainable

economic development. This includes devising e-strategies with all stakeholders and monitoring the implementation.

- **Priority fields of applications:** to achieve concrete and visible results for the citizens, the EU suggests concentrating on a limited number of priorities (e-Government, e-Learning, e-Health and e-Business). These areas are directly related to development priorities and correspond to the action lines in the ongoing co-operation with other regions of the world.
- **Role of R&D:** the experience from the IST priority under the 6th Community Framework Programme on R&D should be taken into account. The Commission encourages third country participation in the IST programme and promotes actively connection of new countries to the GEANT research network.
- **Follow-up of the EU-ACP Joint position** on ICTs for Development, signed on 10 December 2004.

These actions were endorsed by the Telecom Council on 9 December 2004.

4. The Preparatory Process for Tunis

- Two UN working special groups have been set up: the **Task Force on Financial Mechanisms** and the **Working Group on Internet Governance**.
- The first UN Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom) took place in Hammamet (June 2004); the next one will be in Geneva in less than a month (February 2005) and the last one is scheduled in Geneva again, next September 2005.

- PrepCom-1 decided to establish a Group of Friends of the Chair to draft the necessary documents for PrepCom-2.
- Several regional meetings have taken place: in Western Asia (November 2004, Damascus/Syria); in Africa (February 2005, Accra/Ghana); in Latin America and the Caribbean (June 2005, Rio de Janeiro/Brazil) and in Asia-Pacific (mid-2005).

Thematic meetings have covered a wide range of subjects: ICT Applications in Natural Disaster Reduction, Measuring the Information Society, Indigenous Peoples in the Information Society, Ubiquitous Network Society, Cybersecurity.

5. Financial Mechanisms

- Financing access to information technologies was one of the most controversial issues during the first phase of the Summit.
- The Task Force received a precise **mandate**: “While all existing financial mechanisms should be fully exploited, a thorough review of their adequacy in meeting the challenges of ICT for development should be completed by the end of December 2004. This review shall be carried out by a Task Force under the auspices of the UN Secretary General.” (Plan of Action, Geneva 2003).
- The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms started its work in November 2004 and issued a **Report** on 22 December 2004. It will be the **main item discussed at PrepCom 2**.
- From a **First assessment** we could make some comments:
 - The report shows the broad variety of needs and the significant amount of funding for ICT already available.

- Rightly, the report stresses the role of the private sector in financing the roll out of ICT infrastructures.
 - It illustrates that the digital divide is a complex phenomenon which therefore can not be addressed through a single tool.
 - Therefore, the report does not identify a new global UN fund as **the** priority to fight against the Digital Divide.
 - Nevertheless, the report does not include a specific analysis of the Least Developed Countries with their political and economic characteristics and therefore their possible needs, nor does it contain clear recommendations.
- For these reasons, there is a risk of not reaching an agreement during the next PrepCom, therefore extending the discussion until the eve of the Tunis Summit.

The Council Working Party on Development is currently defining the **EU position** to be taken during the PrepCom 2 negotiations.

<h2>6. Internet Governance</h2>

As for the Internet Governance:

- The Geneva Summit set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) with a mandate to:
 - develop a definition of Internet governance;
 - identify public policy issues relevant to Internet governance;
 - develop a common understanding of the role of governments and other actors (international organisations, private sector, civil society).
- The European Commission created a High Level Group to prepare the basis for the EU position. The Council has adopted **Guidelines on**

Internet Governance outlining the main issues to be addressed to from an EU point of view. During all these last months the EU played a crucial role in the process of the WSIS and was able to speak with a single voice. It might not be a pure coincidence that the President of the preparatory process is a European citizen, namely Ambassador Janis Karklins, from Latvia.

- The UN WGIG has involved 40 Countries, industry, NGOs, governments and a significant participation of the European Union through the “Troïka” (in its new meaning, the European Commission, the current EU Presidency and the next one). It concentrated on identifying some possible 40 Internet-related issues that have to be reduced to core priorities and mapped with public policy issues.
- The Commission and Member States are now focusing on the question of “internationalisation” of Internet governance, but also on the stability and security of the Internet (including the issue of spam).
- Internet governance will be the **main issue discussed at PrepCom 3** (September 2005).

7. Implementing WSIS

- **Stocktaking**
 - A Stocktaking exercise of WSIS-related activities undertaken by governments and other stakeholders has been launched by the Executive Secretariat in October 2004.
 - The Commission and Member States have provided substantial input that gives an overview of the wide range of WSIS-related activities across Europe. The database is already available on

the WSIS website (See: www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking) and will be regularly updated even after the Tunis Summit.

- The EU considers the Stocktaking as a useful exercise to encourage, at international level, an exchange on policies and accomplishments aiming at translating the agreed principles into actions.
- It is now time to think about the possible mechanism to ensure the **Follow-up** and the **implementation of the outcome of the Summit**:
 - Several schemes are under discussion between specialised UN agencies for co-ordinating the implementation of the action lines of the Plan of Action.
 - Eventually, it will be the UN Secretary General who decides on the appropriate format of WSIS follow-up (WSIS +5 or +10).

8. Involvement of civil society and private sector

- A key question, in this particular phase of the process, is how to involve civil society representatives and the private sector in the WSIS, in the most fruitful way.
- Indeed, the creation of strong and effective PPP – Public/Private Partnerships – has been encouraged since the first Phase.
- During the PrepCom-2 and the future months we will all have an important role as catalysts in triggering those partnerships and in the involvement of civil society in the WSIS.

9. Conclusion

- The PrepCom which is going to take place next month represents a crucial stage in the process to Tunis. There is a prominent role for the EU which, during all the preparatory process, proved to be able to speak with a single voice.
- As I have said during this brief meeting, we have many issues at stake. I hope I contributed to identify the key elements or questions to foster the dialogue and co-operation towards the implementation of a global Information Society for all: a humanist vision, well anchored in the European culture.
- I thank you for your attention.