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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION
TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Towards a Global Partnership in the Information Society:
The Contribution of the European Union to the Second Phase of the
World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

Further to the second Preparatory Committee (PrepCom-2) meeting, the process leading to the second WSIS Summit meeting (Tunis, 16-18 November 2005) has entered a crucial phase. It should lead to an agreement on final documents presenting conclusions on the two unresolved issues from the first phase, Internet governance and financial mechanisms, and outline what form WSIS implementation and follow-up should take.

In parallel to the WSIS process, the European Union (EU) is itself at an important juncture with regard to Information Society policies. The Commission has recently launched a key initiative to boost the Lisbon agenda and to promote higher growth, more jobs and greater inclusion. Policies on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), content and Research and Development (R&D) play an important role in this context. Thus, the Commission is about to present **i2010**, a new initiative to tap the economic potential of ICTs for generating growth in Europe. In addition, the Commission has just tabled two major proposals to strengthen Europe's position in ICTs: the **seventh R&D Framework Programme (FP7)** and the **Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP)**.¹ Furthermore, the EU has reviewed its contributions to the Millennium Development Goals process.² Finally, the EU is defining its position for the ongoing WTO negotiations, and for the upcoming 2006 Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

The EU should capitalise on the momentum from this and the WSIS process to support the enhancement of the Information Society within its Member States and with its partner countries, in particular in emerging and developing regions.

¹ For i2010 and FP7 see *infra*. The ICT Policy-Specific Programme of CIP proposes € 800 million for 2007-2013 to encourage take-up and use of ICTs (cf. press release IP/05/391 of 7 April 2005).

² Speeding up progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: The European Union's contribution, COM(2005) 132 final; Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: Financing for development and aid effectiveness, COM(2005) 133 final; Policy coherence for development: Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, COM(2005) 134 final; all of 12 April 2005.

This Communication sets out to provide the basis for discussions at the Telecommunications Council in June 2005 and thus to prepare common EU positions ahead of the third Preparatory Committee (PrepCom-3, 19-30 September 2005) and the Summit meeting in Tunis itself.

2. EU PRIORITIES FOR TUNIS

The EU aims to promote an Information Society for all, respectful of human rights and of freedom of expression and cultural and linguistic diversity, as stated in the Declaration of Principles adopted during the first phase of the Summit.³ This is the vision the EU will be taking into the second phase of the WSIS to strengthen the sound foundations that have been laid for a global Information Society. It is preferable, therefore, **not to reopen the debate on the issues settled in Geneva.**

The EU considers that the main objective of the Tunis phase is to translate principles into actions, and to trigger a broad movement among all stakeholders towards **implementation**, focusing on a limited number of priorities to achieve **tangible results**. This approach was confirmed by the last Telecommunications Council conclusions.⁴

In line with these conclusions, the EU should base its input into the second WSIS phase on the priorities and experiences with EU policies described in the following section. The Commission therefore considers appropriate to take stock of positive developments since the first WSIS phase, and to promote further actions in areas where progress has been made. To this end, the EU cooperates as well with third countries where there are provisions for coordinating positions in international bodies such as WSIS (e.g. with Russia, Ukraine).

2.1. Preserving the Geneva acquis

PrepCom-2 demonstrated the risks of reopening the debate on the agreed principles. The EU is not favourable to such developments. However, should the debate be reopened, the EU should stress the importance it attaches to the critical role played by human rights in the Information Society. That role is rooted in the wide range of instruments adopted by the international community relating to the freedom of expression and opinion and the freedom to receive information, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The emergence of new media should not serve as a pretext to undermine full respect of those rights. In making these points, the EU could also draw on recent activities of the Council of Europe⁵, and on provisions which it has itself adopted in the human rights field, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

As regards the location of the second Summit meeting in Tunisia, the EU notes that there are still several areas at odds with the respect of human rights, in particular regarding the **freedom of expression and of association**. These freedoms are vital to the democratic process and are likely to encourage economic and social development. As host country of the WSIS, Tunisia has the opportunity to set a good example by applying the Geneva Declaration

³ www.itu.int/wsis/index.html.

⁴ Telecommunications Council of 9 December 2004; www.eu2004.nl/default.asp?CMS_TCP=tcpAsset&id=B44C0E30C17A46DA81E62332EA6C2B7AX1X51359X3 pp. 16ss.

⁵ Ad-hoc Committee of Experts on the Information Society (CAHSI), www.coe.int/t/e/integrated_projects/democracy/02_Activities/00_CAHSI/.

of Principles and the Plan of Action. The EU attaches great importance to the full participation of NGOs, including from developing countries, in the WSIS.⁶

As regards the final Tunis documents, the EU may consider raising certain issues where progress has been made and could be taken even further. Since the first WSIS phase, tangible results can be observed in emerging economies as a consequence of setting up an appropriate enabling environment. The EU considers that this effort should be enhanced by backing the development of accesses with comprehensive strategies for Information Society development, including the development of creative content and applications. Priority should be given to inclusion and a better life for citizens, including ICTs for democracy, good governance and enhanced protection in emergency cases (early warning systems for disaster relief). Finally, the role of active innovation policies in fostering ICTs must be stressed.

2.2. Promoting the adoption of comprehensive Information Society strategies

The EU sets out to create fresh impetus for an Information Society for all. This should be clearly reflected in political decisions and expressed through the adoption of comprehensive Information Society strategies at national and regional level in all UN Member States. These strategies should be developed in an open process and include all interested stakeholders. The EU has broad experience to offer on strategies and on regulatory issues.

Strategies for the development of the Information Society: Under the forthcoming **i2010 initiative**, the EU should take advantage of the momentum created by two developments: on the one hand, ICTs are entering a period of mass deployment; on the other, a new wave of technological progress is emerging from the convergence of computer industries and consumer electronics. i2010 should focus on three objectives: building a Single European Information Space; encouraging innovation and investment in ICTs; and ensuring inclusion, better public services and quality of life. The initiative should rely on an implementation mechanism built around benchmarking and exchange of best practice, and around policy coordination with stakeholders.

Regulatory environment: The European electronic communications regulatory framework came into force in 2002. Where it has been implemented consistently and effectively, it has opened up competition. If necessary, new technological developments can be taken into account in a review scheduled for 2006. Outside the EU, the framework will be implemented by candidate countries, and it provides a point of reference for numerous third countries.

The EU will draw on its experience with i2010 and its regulatory framework on electronic communications in the regular **external dialogue** it holds with specific countries or groups of countries, notably with the Latin American and Caribbean countries and the Mediterranean group.

2.3. Seizing the dynamism and the impact of R&D

The European R&D Framework Programmes have supported ICT projects since the 1980s. Under the current sixth Programme (2002-2006), € 3.6 billion is assigned to ICTs under the priority “Information Society Technologies (IST)”. As international cooperation in R&D is

⁶ Cf. EU final declaration on the occasion of the 5th EU-Tunisia Association Council, 31 January 2005.

also a high priority in European research, a total of € 315 million is earmarked in support of international cooperation.

The Commission recently adopted its proposal for FP7 (2007-2013).⁷ The strong emphasis on ICTs should be upheld with the objective of enabling Europe to master and shape the future developments of ICTs to help meet the demands of society and citizens. To this end, € 1.8 billion should be allocated to ICTs annually. The new IST priority should focus on technology, new perspectives for ICTs (e. g. relations with life sciences), multi-disciplinary integration, and future and emerging technologies.

Finally, the proposal seeks to strengthen international cooperation in R&D projects in the thematic areas through: a) the opening-up of all activities to researchers from third countries, and b) dedicated coordination actions targeted at specific countries or groups of countries (e.g. industrialised advanced countries, emerging and developing countries, candidate countries).

This effort should be accompanied by horizontal actions to support international cooperation in other parts of the FP, notably under the components “Capacities” and “People”. This should open up new opportunities for international cooperation.

2.4. Developing e-applications and contents

Since the beginning of the WSIS process, the EU has favoured concentrating on a few priority applications, taking into account both their value for citizens and the direct involvement of public authorities in their deployment: e-education, e-government, e-health and a framework for e-business. These were priorities under the *eEurope* 2005 Action Plan with corresponding policy objectives, and were reflected in projects funded under the R&D FP, and in international cooperation in the field of ICTs between the EU and third countries.

Under the **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EuroMED)**, regional pilot projects are in place in health, innovation and education, e-commerce and tourism and culture. Two networks have been set up: EUMEDIS to fund the creation of a link between the European and the Mediterranean research centres, and EUMEDCONNECT to facilitate interconnection between Mediterranean universities and research centres.

The EU programme for **Latin American countries**, **@LIS** (Alliance for the Information Society), supports nineteen ICT applications in four priority sectors: local e-government, e-education and cultural diversity, e-public health, and e-inclusion. The @LIS Programme has also set up three networks, namely, of regulators, researchers and stakeholders. In addition, it promotes open and international standards.

As far as **Asian countries** are concerned, the EU has set up the **Asi@ICT Programme**. It covers six areas: agriculture, education, e-governance, environment, health, and transport. It strives to create broad and enduring technological and economic relationships between Asia and Europe. Furthermore, bilateral agreements have been established with China and India. An “EU-China Information Society Week” was organised in 2003, followed by the broader EU-China Information Society Dialogue.

⁷ Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the seventh framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007 to 2013), COM(2005)119 final, 6 April 2005.

Further to the signature of the ACP-EU Joint Position on the Information Society for Development, the European Commission increased its financial contribution to ICT-related projects in development aid. Approximately € 110 million from the **European Development Fund** is devoted to a broad selection of activities, ranging from an e-commerce project in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa to a continental programme to ensure African Monitoring of the Environment for Sustainable Development (AMESD).

Moreover, in the period 2003-2008, the **Investment Facility**, which is a € 2.2 billion fund managed by the **European Investment Bank (EIB)** for private sector development, will provide financial resources, including risk capital, to assist in promoting growth in the private sector and to help mobilise domestic and foreign capital for this purpose. The EIB will complement this amount with € 1.7 billion from its own resources.

In addition, the € 110 million **EU-ACP Partnership Programme Pro€Invest** promotes investment and technology flows to small and medium enterprises operating in key sectors, including ICTs. The programme is operated by the Centre for the Development of Enterprise which is an institution of the ACP Group of States and the EU, in the framework of the Cotonou Agreement.

2.5. Harnessing ICTs' potential for development

As part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the overall objective of the EU's development policy is to reduce poverty as far as possible. This explains the importance the EU attaches to bridging the digital divide and to harnessing the potential of ICTs as a development policy tool.

The situation of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa warrants special attention. The delay in infrastructure development (backbone networks and local loops) creates the risk that entire regions of the African continent will be isolated. Market forces themselves are not sufficient to launch a growth process that is both sustainable and that covers the whole territory. Therefore, public sector intervention could be required. With its African partners – in particular the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)⁸ – and in collaboration with the development banks and the private sector, the EU is continuing to give positive consideration to an initiative to deploy infrastructure on the African continent. Furthermore, training efforts are indispensable to give the necessary ICT skills to workers and the wider population. This could be done in partnership with the private sector and the ICT industry.

On the other hand, the content side of ICTs has often been neglected when dealing with ICTs and development. However, the creation and strengthening of a content industry in developing countries presents significant advantages: *socially*, as it provides contents for society by operators in close contact with it, its needs, expectations and demands; *culturally*, as it helps to keep local cultures alive and allows them to be presented to the rest of the world, thus safeguarding and enriching cultural diversity; *economically*, as it generates local employment, is based on own sustainable resources, and constitutes a source of income when exported.

⁸ Strategic framework for Africa's renewal launched by the 37th Summit of the Organisation of African Unity in July 2001, see www.nepad.org.

3. THE EU VIEW ON THE UNSETTLED ISSUES

The main items discussed during the second WSIS phase are two issues that remained unsettled after the Geneva Summit: financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, and Internet governance.

3.1. Financial Mechanisms

Financing mechanisms to bridge the digital divide in developing countries was one of the most controversial issues of the first WSIS phase. As no agreement could be found, it was decided to set up a Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) with the remit of “*a thorough review of their adequacy in meeting the challenges of ICT for development*”.

At the same time, President Wade of Senegal supported the creation of a voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF). His initiative was welcomed by African and, more broadly, developing countries. The DSF was launched on 14 March 2005 in Geneva. It is set up as a foundation under Swiss law, established in Geneva and supported by a number of local/regional communities (cities of Geneva, Lyon, the Basque government).⁹

Based on the findings of the TFFM report, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on the financial mechanisms on 17 February¹⁰ stating “*that a new United Nations Fund would not be an effective instrument for closing the digital divide*” and that “*a more holistic approach (was) required to mobilise human, financial and technological resources*”. Four main criteria underlie the EU position on the voluntary DSF: the Fund is the one based in Geneva, it is voluntary in nature, it is complementary to existing mechanisms, and it embraces a multi-stakeholder approach.

PrepCom-2 adopted an agreed wording for conclusions on the TFFM report which are in line with the EU position.¹¹ Should the negotiations be reopened at a later stage, the EU should explain its views to its partners, and place particular emphasis on the conclusions of the TFFM report: a fund cannot be *the* answer to financial needs; on the contrary, a clear commitment to using existing mechanisms should lead to concrete and tangible results.

Furthermore, in line with the February Council conclusions, the EU will inform its partners about possible measures, projects and programmes. To this end, the Commission and the Member States plan to publish a leaflet explaining how developing countries can better integrate ICTs into their development policies.

3.2. Internet Governance

In accordance with the Geneva Plan of Action, the UN Secretary-General has set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) with the mandate to a) develop a working definition of Internet governance; b) identify public policy issues that are relevant to it; c) develop a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing intergovernmental and international organisations and other forums as well as the private sector and civil society; and d) prepare a report on the results of this activity to be presented during the second phase of WSIS.

⁹ See www.dsf-fsn.org/eu/15c-en.htm.

¹⁰ www.eu2005.lu/en/actualites/conseil/2005/02/17ecofin/17ecofin.pdf, pp. 19ss.

¹¹ See www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory2/pc2/index.html.

As announced in a former Communication¹², the Commission benefits now from the work of the Directors-General of Member States who meet regularly under the chairmanship of the Commission. They have met eight times since their first meeting on 17 March 2004.

Among the priorities identified by the group of Directors-General, the question of internationalising the management of the Internet's core resources, namely, the domain name system, IP addresses and the root server system, appears to be one of the main issues currently being discussed.

The EU believes that a new cooperation model is needed in order to give substance to the provisions in the WSIS Declaration of Principles regarding the crucial role of all stakeholders within Internet governance, including governments, the private sector, civil society and international organisations. Existing Internet governance mechanisms should be founded on a more solid democratic, transparent and multilateral basis, with a stronger emphasis on the public policy interest of all governments.

This new model should be based on the following principles:

- (1) It should not replace existing mechanisms or institutions, but should build on the existing structures of Internet governance, with special emphasis on the complementarity between all the stakeholders involved in this process: governments, the private sector, civil society and international organisations;
- (1) The new public-private cooperation model should contribute to the sustainable stability and robustness of the Internet by addressing appropriately public policy issues related to key aspects of Internet governance.

The EU believes that governments have a specific mission and responsibility vis-à-vis their citizens, and their role within this new cooperation model should mainly focus on principle issues of public policy, and exclude any involvement in the day-to-day operations.

Furthermore, the EU should strongly reaffirm its commitment to the architectural principles of the Internet, including interoperability, openness and the end-to-end principle.

A common approach of EU members of the WGIG on relevant issues concerning its mandate is ensured by the Guidelines on Internet Governance adopted by COREPER on 13 October 2004.¹³ They outline the main issues to be addressed from an EU point of view and call for coordination in the Council where necessary.

4. THE WAY AHEAD

The discussion has started on a possible mechanism to ensure proper implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action and on the political follow-up to the Summit. The implementation mechanism addresses the technical follow-up in terms of monitoring of ongoing activities, whereas the political follow-up to the Summit concerns a potential post-WSIS process within the UN system.

¹² Towards a global partnership in the Information Society: Follow-up of the Geneva Summit of the WSIS, COM(2004) 111 final, 17 February 2004.

¹³ Document 13085/04 TELECOM 148.

4.1. The implementation mechanism

Major UN Agencies have participated actively in the WSIS process and should continue to be involved. The ITU, as the supporting agency, will deal with most of the issues related to electronic communications networks, development of access and interconnectivity. Other agencies will develop initiatives within their areas of competence (see Annex 2). In addition, the WTO references for liberalisation of the telecommunications and related sectors and the World Bank's activities have proved to be effective in promoting wider use of ICTs and are therefore directly relevant to the work of the WSIS.

As the main addressees of the Plan of Action, governments, the private sector and civil society will develop actions. The Plan of Action and the final documents to be adopted in Tunis will provide a reference framework, but the question is how to coordinate and to enhance synergies between the various initiatives.

The EU has made it clear that such a mechanism should be simple, efficient and based on decentralised activities within the existing framework of the UN system. It should work through an open method of coordination¹⁴ and promote synergies between the initiatives to ensure that the potential of ICTs is fully tapped.

4.2. The stocktaking exercise

This exercise was launched by the WSIS Executive Secretariat to take stock of activities related to the Plan of Action that are carried out by the various stakeholders. The EU contributed a document outlining the broad range of ongoing activities at EU level, and the actions carried out by the Member States. This EU contribution is included in the ITU/WSIS database and is available for downloading.¹⁵

The exercise is a first step in the implementation process and should be carried on beyond the Tunis Summit, as intended by the WSIS Secretariat. However, there may be a need for an improved structure of the database and related publications. Moreover, a detailed analysis of the impact this database may have as a reference for stakeholders' policies should be included in the final report on the stocktaking.

4.3. WSIS follow-up

Apart from the implementation mechanism, the next PrepCom will address the follow-up of the WSIS Geneva and Tunis Summits. In line with former EU positions, the Commission is not in favour of an automatic follow-up summit meeting after five or ten years, but would rather prefer *ad hoc* stocktaking exercises organised as appropriate, including on Internet governance. It considers that the digital divide issue should be closely linked to the MDGs. This dimension should, therefore, become part of the established broader MDG process.

The EU should closely monitor the decisions the UN Secretary-General takes in this respect and co-ordinate its own position as appropriate.

¹⁴ Such a mechanism was introduced in the EU by the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 as a means of spreading best practice and achieving convergence towards a predefined strategic goal. See the Lisbon conclusions, ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm.

¹⁵ www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking/index.html.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As in the previous phase, the EU will be able to speak with one voice and be in a position to influence the debate during the preparatory process and the WSIS meeting. The challenge is now to convince our partners that the Information Society is not a fixed concept, and that we have to be prepared for further evolution towards a knowledge society. In this context, priority should be given to translating principles already agreed into reality in order to allow citizens to reap the benefits of ICTs and to be prepared for the future challenges thrown down by economic, technological and social changes and by human creativity.

Annex 1

Main Events leading to the Second Meeting of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)

18-20 April 2005	Third meeting of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), Geneva.
May 2005	Expected start of intersessional activities (Group of Friends of Chair, negotiations on the WSIS implementation mechanisms), Geneva.
14-17 June 2005	Last meeting of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), Geneva.
1 July 2005	Expected publication of the WGIG Report.
18 July 2005	Public presentation of the WGIG report.
15 August 2005	Deadline for comments on WGIG report by stakeholders.
19-30 September 2005	PrepCom-3, Geneva.
16-18 November 2005	Second Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Tunis.

Annex 2

UN bodies taking part in the WSIS Process and their possible role in the WSIS implementation

UN body / agency	Full name	Possible field of competence ¹⁶
UN SG	UN Secretary-General	Global competence of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).
UN GA	UN General Assembly	The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the WSIS.
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs	Overall coordination; e-government.
ITU	International Telecommunication Union	ICT infrastructure; capacity building; confidence and security; international and regional cooperation.
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Access to information and knowledge; capacity building; e-science; cultural and linguistic diversity; media; ethical dimension of the Information Society.
WGIG	Working Group on Internet Governance	<i>Ad-hoc</i> group set up by UN Secretary-General to develop a common understanding of Internet Governance.
TFFM	Task Force on Financial Mechanisms	<i>Ad-hoc</i> group set up by UN Secretary-General to review financial mechanisms for ICTs.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	Millennium Development Goals; international and regional cooperation.
UN ICT TF	UN ICT Task Force NB: Its mandate expires at the end of 2005. Discussions are ongoing to create a Global Alliance for ICT and Development to follow-up on the work of the Task Force.	Millennium Development Goals; international and regional cooperation.

¹⁶ This is an indicative list and does not anticipate any EU position on the structure of the WSIS implementation mechanism.

FAO	Food and Organization	Agriculture	e-agriculture.
ILO	International Organization	Labour	e-employment.
WHO	World Health Organization		e-health; e-environment.
WIPO	World Intellectual Organization	Property	Confidence and security.
WMO	World Organization	Meteorological	Disaster relief.
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development		Development coordination.
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research		Cooperation with local authorities.
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme		e-environment.