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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:
Translating the Geneva principles into actions**

**Commission proposals for the second phase
of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)**

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

The WSIS recognised that **information and communication technologies (ICT)** are among the **most important contributors to growth and sustainable development** in today's economies. They lead to higher productivity growth and foster inclusion. The Geneva Summit of December 2003 laid the foundations for a common approach to the global Information Society (IS) in terms of principles, largely inspired by the EU approach to an "IS for All" developed in the context of the Lisbon strategy. The EU made a significant contribution to the preparatory process and to the first session of the WSIS and will continue its commitment to multilateralism as a defining principle of its external policy.¹

Following two earlier communications of the Commission on the WSIS – the first one outlining the EU approach² and the second one assessing the results³ of the Geneva Summit, **this communication outlines concrete proposals for the second phase of the WSIS**. In particular, proposals are made for the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action (POA), the follow-up of the two groups (on financing the fight against the digital divide and on Internet governance) and for the contribution to the preparatory process.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WSIS PLAN OF ACTION

2.1. General considerations

The first phase of the WSIS culminated in the Geneva **Declaration of Principles** for a global IS and the **POA**, which should be seen as a common reference for the different players in all parts and regions of the global IS. The second phase of the WSIS will **transform these principles into tangible results**, based on the POA. The EU advocated focusing on a limited number of priorities for tangible results to be achieved.

¹ The European Union and the United Nations: The choice of multilateralism – COM(2003) 526, 10.9.2003.

² Towards a global Partnership in the Information Society: EU Perspective in the context of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) - COM(2003) 271, 19.5.2003.

³ Towards a global Partnership in the Information Society: Follow-up of the Geneva Summit of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) - COM(2004) 111, 17.2.2004.

In addressing the “digital divide”, the challenge is to make ICT available and affordable, to support services that will enable generalised availability of applications. It is proposed to organise the implementation of the POA addressing them at different levels: Enabling environment; ICT applications; Research & Development.

For the EU, the follow-up of the WSIS has two dimensions:

- The **EU’s internal IS policies** are followed up in the Implementation reports of the EU regulatory framework for communications services, the eEurope reports, the reports on the EU research policy and other relevant reports. On this basis, the Commission will prepare a synthetic progress report for the different policy areas.
- The proposals in this communication address the **EU’s external policies**, based on the political dialogue and co-operation with third countries in the field of the IS. The focus should be on a predictable legal environment that fosters innovation and on concrete projects that engage the private sector. These policies also seek to promote human rights in third countries and to combat abusive uses of ICT.

2.2. Enabling environment

The creation of an environment capable of attracting investment and providing for sustainable growth and development in an inclusive manner is the first priority. It encompasses several components to be put in place at national or regional level.

2.2.1. e-Strategies

The WSIS agreed on the importance of e-Strategies at all appropriate levels, which should include:

- **Renewing the public action models:** ease the interaction with civil society and re-engineering social services; encouraging interaction among stakeholders to develop innovative approaches towards more efficient labour markets;
- **Acting as a leader** in its own field of activity: rendering public administration more efficient, delivering public services and promoting inclusive policies;
- **Capacity building:** by shaping actively the transformation and preparing the future generation for the IS;
- **Ensuring a full ownership** of all stakeholders in the elaboration of eStrategies, strengthening the dialogue between governments, civil society and the private sector.

A worldwide **collaboration on e-Strategies** could build on the Open Method of co-ordination for eEurope 2005. The Commission’s core of experience in common target setting, indicators and benchmarking and in exchange of best practice could be broadening to a progressively wider collaboration.

In specific cases, mobilisation of investment resources could be considered, e.g. possible financial participation of the Commission and/or Member States in studies to be undertaken or in order to improve access to infrastructure and services, as laid down in the POA.

A **Global ePolicy Resource Network (ePol-NET)** was launched at the Geneva Summit to help ICT policymakers in developing countries develop effective national e-policies and e-strategies. The Commission could examine the conditions for participating in this initiative.

2.2.2. *Regulatory frameworks*

To seize the benefits of the IS, it is necessary to create a favourable regulatory environment, as also recognised in the POA. In this context, independent regulatory authorities are a prerequisite. In EU policies, these various issues are closely related and addressed in the eEurope context. In developing countries, such a framework benefits consumers, whose confidence and trust in communications services is a precondition for integration in the international ICT market through better and cheaper access to ICT resulting from increased trade and investment by the local or foreign private sector.

Regulators worldwide recognise the need for co-operation to enable them to discharge their public responsibility for health, safety, the environment, cultural diversity and consumer protection with increasing interdependency. The Commission could envisage co-operating with **European national regulatory authorities** in the activities related to the promotion of regulatory frameworks in the WSIS context.

2.2.3. *Best practice, benchmarking and observatories*

Benchmarking is crucial for assessing the progress in use and impact of ICT. The POA calls for the development of indicators to monitor this progress for the Tunis phase of the Summit, and following on from that. The POA also emphasises the need to monitor progress towards achieving international development goals, including those of the Millennium Declaration. The development of indicators and the building of capacities – in particular for groups at risk of exclusion and in developing countries - in this regard require a concerted effort at the national, regional and international levels involving many stakeholders. An appropriate monitoring and benchmarking exercise for developing countries and emerging economies contributes to the dissemination of **best practices**.

The availability of affordable ICT infrastructure is a prerequisite to the take-up of IS services and applications. Investment in suitable infrastructure is necessary, but not sufficient. An additional significant barrier is in acquiring the knowledge of **how** to provide the necessary network infrastructure and user access. Information about best practice is of key importance. National and regional authorities in Europe and worldwide are taking measures to stimulate the **competitiveness of their ICT industries**. In the WSIS context, it could be considered to use these experiences as a model to **raise awareness at national and regional levels**.

2.3. **Priority applications**

e-Inclusion aims at ensuring equal access to and the availability of IS services for all at affordable cost. In this context it is essential to promote the development of ICT products and services in the IS following **Design for All**⁴ principles. **Actions to improve e-accessibility** could be considered, based on the proposals of the POA.

⁴ Design for All is the design of mainstream products and services to be accessible by as broad a range of users as possible.

Furthermore, the EU could base its proposals for priority applications on the following priority fields: eGovernment, eHealth, eLearning and eBusiness, in concretising proposals in the POA and taking into account gender and employment issues.

2.3.1. e-Government

e-Government is the use of **ICT in public administrations** combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes, the realisation of human rights and strengthen support to public policies. Here ICT can help to cope with the many **challenges of modern governance**: efficiency, i.e. to enable public administration to reach a higher productivity, equality, i.e. to serve all citizens without discrimination, while being responsive to individuals' needs, and active citizen participation. Citizens and businesses must be at the centre of attention in the design of on-line services that are easily accessible to all.

2.3.2. e-Learning

Everyone should have the **necessary skills to benefit fully from the IS**. ICT can contribute to achieving universal education worldwide, through delivery of education and training of teachers, and offering improved conditions for lifelong learning, encompassing people that are outside the formal education process, and improving professional skills. **eLearning complements the traditional methods** and offers wider delivery of education. It addresses, as the development of skills to access knowledge, numerous issues, such as local content, linguistic and cultural diversity and intellectual property rights. The **Global eSchools and Communities Initiative** was launched during the Geneva Summit, which is supported by several Member States and international organisations. The Commission could explore supporting this initiative.

2.3.3. e-Health

The objective of e-Health is to contribute to improvement in access, quality and efficiency of healthcare and in particular to be the enabling tool for reorganisation of citizen-centred health delivery systems. Access to information and services that support health is a basic right. Many countries lack adequate healthcare facilities and personnel, particularly in rural and remote areas. e-Health applications have an important role in a development context, particularly for the achievement of the **health-related UN Millennium Development Goals**.

2.3.4. e-Business

The use of ICT represents, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SME), a source of major productivity gains and of reduction of transaction costs. The wide adoption of e-business suffers the same challenges as on-line public services, failures of interoperability, the lack of common standards and the need for more effective exchange of experiences. The Commission has established and regularly consults the **e-Business Policy Group**. It could be considered to explore synergies between this group and ePol-NET.

2.4. Research & Development

The WSIS has recognised the importance of **Research and technological Development (RTD)** both in its aspirations to connect universities and other educational institutions by

2015 and in specific actions aiming at the improvement of research infrastructures and technologies.

For the EU, one of the key mechanisms is the RTD Framework Programme (RTD FP) which includes measures to help build research capacity through international human mobility and research training. However, the currently available instruments might need revision in order to enable third country participation and integration into EU research efforts and programmes. In addition, the challenge of developing affordable ICT, particularly suitable for Least Developed Countries (LDC), could be envisaged. For the follow-up of the WSIS, the Commission proposes to focus on **innovation for development** and on the extension of **communication and research infrastructures** based on the experience of GEANT.

2.4.1. Innovation for development

The 6th RTD FP provides for international co-operation with a total amount of EUR 600 million, whereof EUR 90 million are earmarked for research in the IS Technologies (IST) Programme. The **participation of third countries** should remain an important objective in the next FP. EU participation in research programmes of third countries could also be envisaged.

Also, **RTD results should be usable for the largest number of users** possible. Accessibility and inclusion should be considered in the projects so that the application of the technologies produced does not create additional barriers. Thus it is important to invest in RTD on “Design for All” for mainstream products and services. The available instruments may need a revision how to include partners from emerging economies and developing countries in EU projects. Further, it may need to be recognised that international cooperation projects in which may be of a different from others. Projects must allow for recognition of **local priorities** and should be based on local know-how but also benefit from capacities of multinational companies.

Enlargement, and the greater prosperity differentials in Europe, will require more investment in easy-to-use and affordable infrastructures, terminals and services. European leadership in development of appropriate technologies for the “**next 2 billion**” in the world’s ICT-user markets would be both a valuable contribution to the WSIS objectives and establish wider markets for European-designed equipment and services.

2.4.2. Global Education and Research Network

The POA indicates that projects and adaptation of technologies to local needs and conditions must be developed. GEANT fosters already **linkage between research network backbones** across the world. Through the combination of financial support from different sources, significant international connectivity has been achieved, giving GEANT the status of a global connectivity leader for research. Developing countries could be assisted in their efforts to create research networks by drawing upon European expertise. This knowledge transfer might be supported by the European Commission in the context of existing development aid programmes. The wider extension of GEANT to universities in the main developing countries (Brazil, China, India, etc.), with Europe as the hub of this “knowledge infrastructure” could become an explicit aim.

Europe could in this context also take leadership in **multi-lingual collaboration capabilities**, where it has, in particular after enlargement, a rich and diversified experience.

2.5. EU approach to implementing the Plan of Action

Here the Commission may envisage using existing instruments and embed the actions to be undertaken in the overall EU political relations and co-operation with its partners.

2.5.1. General orientations and methodology

The methodology will be based on existing instruments for dialogue and co-operation:

- **New neighbours:** The common interest lies in harmonisation of the regulatory frameworks, directly inspired by the EU regulatory framework, in order to create a common electronic communications area.
- **Emerging economies** (Brazil, Mercosur, China, India, South Africa): Priority may be given to the development of eStrategies, open and competitive markets and industrial partnerships.
- **LDC:** Access to infrastructure and services remains the main problem. An initiative to use the potential of existing dispersed infrastructures in different sub-Saharan countries may be envisaged, using different technologies, including mobile and satellite.

2.5.2. Instruments for implementation

The Commission and the Member States dispose of a number of instruments to contribute to the implementation of the POA.

- **Development aid:** The main orientations are mainstreaming of ICT in development projects in cases where ICT can bring added value, including the promotion of human rights and democratisation.
- **Economic co-operation:** Policy and regulatory dialogues between the Union and its partners have been established, which find a natural extension in the implementation of co-operation programmes.⁵
- **International scientific co-operation:** RTD co-operation, especially in the framework of the IST programme helps promote mutually beneficial partnerships with both advanced and emerging economies alike.
- **Financing institutions:** Co-operation with EU financing institutions, such as the European Investment Bank, in projects and programmes has to be envisaged.

2.5.3. Partnerships for co-operation

The following categories of partners may be identified to have maximum impact:

- **Third countries or regions with existing co-operation agreements:** This is the case e.g. for Latin America, the ACP, the Mediterranean region or the Newly Independent States.

⁵ Cooperation programmes with the EU's partner countries in Asia, Latin America and the Mediterranean include demonstration projects in the fields of education, health, local governance and e-Inclusion. Complementary initiatives aim to strengthen research and stakeholder networks.

- **Stakeholder networks and Public Private Partnerships:** This encompasses co-operation with different civil society organisations, regulatory authorities, development organisations or research entities. The commitment and participation of the private sector and civil society in the deployment of the POA is key to its success. Co-operation with individual companies, industry associations, users' organisations and non-governmental organisations may be envisaged.
- **Co-operation with international organisations:** In order to increase synergies, co-operations with the United Nations and different international organisations could be envisaged.

3. FOLLOW-UP OF THE UNSETTLED ISSUES OF PHASE 1

The Geneva Summit agreed to set up two working groups under the authority of the UN Secretary General for the two most contentious issues of Phase 1: Internet governance and Financing.

3.1. UN Working group on Internet governance

An over-riding public policy objective is the continued stability and growth of the Internet and its ability to deliver social and economic benefits. There is a need to build on the present structure of the Internet to reinforce its stability and growth potential. Wherever possible, a **bottom-up approach to policy making** should involve all stakeholders, in particular developing countries whose participation to policy making can be improved. Naming and addressing, security and dependability of the Internet, including spam, are key priorities for governments impacting directly on the proper functioning of the Internet. At the same time, a broad range of public policy issues are relevant for the Internet such as harmful content, data protection and privacy, consumer protection, e-commerce, intellectual property rights (IPR) and the digital divide. The Commission may envisage participating actively in the UN Working group.

3.2. UN Task Force on Financing

The fight against the digital divide was one of the main topics of the Geneva Summit. ICT are not to be considered in isolation, but as part of an overall development strategy and policy dialogue with beneficiary countries. The international community can play an active role by pointing to the potential benefits of new policies and helping interested countries in designing appropriate policies as a function of their situation and priorities. Depending on the final set-up of the Financing Task Force, the Commission may envisage active participation.

International co-operation and financing related to WSIS should be framed in the context of the Monterrey consensus with proposed actions at the level of foreign direct investment and other private flows, international trade, as well as financial and technical co-operation.

In its communication on the progress on the Monterrey consensus⁶, the Commission advocates for stronger EU coordination in the area of development cooperation. Aid-recipient developing countries and countries with economies in transition could be assisted in

⁶ Translating the Monterrey Consensus into practice: the contribution by the European Union – COM(2004) 150, 5.3.2004.

strengthening their capacity to mainstream ICT in their national development plans and poverty reduction strategy papers and to effectively co-ordinate donor funding. In this context, it may be proposed to elaborate a document outlining the activities of Member States and the Commission to present a **full overview of development aid delivered by the European Union** in the field of ICT.

Follow-up of the EU-ACP Joint position on the IS for Development

In this joint position, signed on 10 December 2003 in Geneva, the ACP group and the EU have agreed a strategic partnership on IS to jointly contribute to the implementation of the POA. It reaffirms the common determination to intensify collaboration to develop demand-driven IS strategies in ACP countries and regions in the context of overall development strategies, including where appropriate, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. As a first step, the Commission has recently approved an “ACP ICT-Programme”.

4. HORIZONTAL ISSUES OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The Geneva POA also calls for action on horizontal issues. Progress at international level could be useful in particular on issues such as: security, spam, different software models, IPR. Some of the issues are already discussed in other international forums (e.g. IPR in the World Intellectual Property Organisation) and it should be assessed where a discussion should take place, as WSIS might not be the most appropriate forum for each of them.

Network and information security is about ensuring the ability of a network or an information system to resist accidental events or malicious actions that compromise the availability, authenticity, integrity and confidentiality of data and related services offered by or accessible via these networks and information systems. Communication networks are global, and security issues highlight the need both for closer international co-operation and for a common approach. Although many initiatives need some adjustment to local environments, it is clear that international co-operation should be more widespread. There is a need to pursue a truly open, global and multidisciplinary approach to security to effectively tackle the complexity and global nature of the security challenges.

Spam (unsolicited commercial communications by e-mail) is another challenge for the Internet that can undermine confidence in the use of ICT. To combat spam effectively and thereby implement the Action Plan, appropriate action at both national and international level should be taken. Efforts made in the EU and other regions of the world should be echoed by similar efforts at global level. The European Commission facilitates both bilateral cooperation and multilateral cooperation, including in organisations like the OECD and the ITU. The WSIS should seek to promote greater awareness, as well as the need for effective legislation against spam, the need for international cooperation on enforcement, the need for best practices and (technical) solutions by industry and for greater user awareness.

The WSIS agreed to encourage research and promote awareness among all stakeholders of the possibilities offered by **different software models**, and the means of their creation, including proprietary, open-source and free software, in order to increase competition, freedom of choice and affordability, and to enable all stakeholders to evaluate which solution best meets their requirements. This should in particular be seen in the co-operation with the developing world. Common accessibility standards for the web and also of ICT equipment can lead to better and cheaper products that would be compatible across borders, facilitating access to the

IS and related services to a large number of potential users that are excluded today. Industry will also benefit from the possibility of having larger markets and governments and public administrations could offer better accessible services and environments for their employees and for all the public.

On **IPR** protection, the WSIS concluded that it is important to encourage innovation and creativity in the IS. Facilitating meaningful participation by all in IPR issues and knowledge sharing through full awareness and capacity building is fundamental for an inclusive IS. The EU attaches great importance to adequate IPR protection and the respect for and enforcement of established rules.

EU initiatives taken to address these horizontal issues (e.g. ENISA, the Action Plan for Safer Use of the Internet) could be used as **models for actions at the global level** and could take a broader worldwide leadership in the WSIS follow-up.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The EU has a broad offer for international co-operation in the IS, which can be used as a basis for the actions to be developed for the Tunis Summit. This communication gives an outline of possible actions, which could be developed in more detail during the co-ordination process for the second phase of the WSIS.

The proposals in this communication may form the basis for the EU-input to the second phase of the WSIS, enabling the Commission and the Member States to have a comprehensive package of actions ready for the Tunis phase to contribute to the success of the Tunis Summit.