

European Union Intervention in the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

Rio de Janeiro, 15th November 2007

Plenary Session "Taking stock and the way forward"

Text prepared in meetings of representatives of EU Member States and the Commission

Dear host country, dear IGF Secretariat, dear participants,

I am speaking on the behalf of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union.

This IGF meeting in Rio has been a very successful event. The European Union is particularly grateful to Brazil for having hosted the Forum and to the IGF Advisory Group and Secretariat for having ensured a good framework for dialogue and exchange.

Both the number and diversity of the participants and the impressive amount of workshops, best practice forums and dynamic coalitions have proven that Athens was crucial for the start of a successful process, and Rio managed to bring us an "Athens plus".

The Internet is a platform of global value that should develop in the spirit of its pioneering times, offering ample opportunities for creativity and innovation to all users. It should remain open, people-centred and multilingual, flexible to foster new technologies and uses, preserve neutrality, inclusive and supportive of global social, cultural and economic interaction and development, but at the same time meet the new challenges of today and tomorrow.

Improving access to the Internet is a goal for us all, and freedom of expression and access to knowledge through the Internet stand as important democratic values to be preserved.

The current arrangements for Internet Governance have worked effectively to make the Internet the highly robust, dynamic and geographically diverse medium that it is today.

The European Union remains fully committed to the IGF. We have shown this commitment by our active engagement in the process, by hosting the first IGF, and by financial contributions to the secretariat. This forum is an important tool for the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action and of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. It has successfully established a wide platform for stakeholders to contribute, based on their specific expertise, knowledge and interests. The multistakeholder approach of the IGF, allowing for sharing points of view and best practices among very diverse groups, stands at the core of its success.

The European Union and its 27 Member States have shown in concrete projects a strong commitment to the development of the Information Society in several regions of the world, with specific cooperation programmes such as ALICE with Latin America EUMEDIS with Mediterranean non EU countries or Asia IT&C in the Asian region. An important chapter of this cooperation is dedicated to the interconnection of the regional Research and Education networks with the EU GÉANT network, currently achieved through projects like REDCLARA (in Latin American), EUMEDCONNECT (in the Mediterranean), TEIN 2 (in the Asia Pacific region) and ORIENT (in China).

A similar cooperation scheme with Sub Saharan countries has been prepared and is planned to be adopted at the EU-Africa Summit to be held in Lisbon on 8 and 9 December 2008 under Portuguese Presidency.

The European Union current initiative for the Information Society, namely i2010, can be a source of inspiration for the WSIS follow-up. As in the European Union, we should promote that the benefits of the information society can be enjoyed by everyone, including people who are disadvantaged due to limited resources or education, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. (namely, e-Inclusion), people with disabilities (namely, e-Accessibility) as well as those living in less favoured areas (preventing "digital divide" resulting from unequal access to high speed "broadband" connection to the Internet), while assuring more security and a safer Internet, in particular for children. The contribution of the Internet to capacity building, to economic development and competitiveness, to the provision of better public services (namely through e-Government and e-Health), and to strengthening and building social networks and movements has to be further extended for the benefit of people worldwide.

The working methods of the IGF also allow us to explore further improvements of its functioning and contributions to the implementation of the World Summit for the Information Society goals.

The European Union and its Member States have been actively involved in dynamic coalitions and co-organized several of them. We believe that dynamic coalitions have brought added value to the IGF, in particular because they provide a good opportunity for pursuing work between sessions of the IGF. The EU will continue its active participation in dynamic coalitions in preparation of the next IGF in Delhi, in 2008.

The IGF agenda will also have to take into account the technological and social evolution of the Internet, including mobility and the upcoming Internet of Things.

The multistakeholder nature of the Advisory Group remains its vital characteristic. The role and experience of the Advisory Group have been instrumental in moving the IGF forward and the European Union supports its continued development and implementation in the same spirit. It is therefore of crucial importance that the Advisory Group starts the preparation of the next IGF in New Delhi as soon as possible, also taking into account the tasks of the Advisory Group set out in the Secretary General's decision.

Let me again thank the host country for the huge effort and commitment that enabled all of us to work together towards a successful IGF contributing to the sustainable, robust, secure and stable Internet envisioned by the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.