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| Note by the Secretary-General |
| EUROPEAN UNION’S STATEMENT TO THE 42ND CWG-WSIS&SDG |
| **Purpose**This document outlines the European Union’s statement to the 42nd CWG-WSIS&SDG.**Action required**This report is transmitted to the Council Working Group on WSIS and the SDGs **for information**.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**References** [*CWG-WSIS&SDG website*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/cwg-wsis/Pages/default.aspx) |

42nd meeting of ITU Council Working Group on WSIS/SDGs

10-11 February 2025

*EU statement*

Madame Chair,

The European Union and its Member States welcome the broad consultation of stakeholders, launched by this Working Group as a follow-up to ITU Council Resolution 1332. We submitted our contribution with a view to helping provide feedback on the ITU’s actions over the 20 years of WSIS implementation, as well as some suggestions for the way forward, beyond WSIS+20.

In our contribution, we highlighted the efficacy of the WSIS process as the first comprehensive global framework for digital collaboration. Through its human rights-based and human-centric approach to digital transformation, WSIS has contributed positively to reducing digital divides between and within countries, and between underrepresented groups, while promoting inclusivity, universal accessibility, and the protection of human rights. The ITU has played a significant role in working towards advancing meaningful connectivity, facilitating several Action Lines, and closing digital divides. The EU has supported the ITU’s efforts in this regard.

Guided by the principles of the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance established unanimously in the Tunis Agenda in 2005, the global and open Internet has played a pivotal role in enabling unprecedented access to information, education, and economic opportunities worldwide. Going forward, Internet governance must remain intrinsically global and multi-stakeholder in nature, as also reaffirmed the UN Global Digital Compact, while ensuring constant improvement and inclusivity as well as the responsible and sustainable use of emerging digital technologies. New efforts to exert centralized control over the Internet undermine its fundamental openness, potentially fragmenting the global network at the very technical root and compromise the very attributes that have made it a powerful catalyst of development.

Despite all the progress made over the past 20 years, we still encounter significant challenges to the implementation of a digital society envisaged in the WSIS founding documents. Persisting divides in access to the open internet need to be addressed without delay, what calls for an even better alignment of WSIS to the SDGs. We today also have a clearer picture about the various risks and divides associated to emerging technologies for our societies, including in terms of violations and abuses of human rights online. For this, the WSIS beyond 20 must include a stronger human rights focus, including with regard to the protection and promotion of children’s rights in the digital age.

We should also ensure alignment between the WSIS process and the implementation of the Pact for the Future and the GDC to maximise impact and synergies, while reducing duplication and further competition for scarce financial resources. The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville presents an opportunity to support such synergies by identifying drivers that may boost science, technology and innovation, to ensure that no one is left behind.

The WSIS ecosystem offers the most logical overall framework for the implementation of the GDC, with the Internet Governance Forum as its primary platform, to address digital divides and achieve the SDGs in a truly human-centric, human rights-based and multi-stakeholder approach.

The IGF notably has proven itself as *the* place for all stakeholder groups worldwide, from grassroots to the highest political levels, to come together and discuss technological developments and policy implications that align with WSIS principles. The WSIS review should renew and strengthen the IGF mandate, including by ensuring a sustainable financial basis from the regular UN budget that such a global, inclusive effort deserves and needs.

We welcome the recent appointment of the two co-facilitators for the WSIS+20 Review modalities, call for a swift announcement of the co-facilitators for the WSIS+20 Review itself, and are looking forward to engaging constructively in a truly multi-stakeholder and inclusive process with a view to addressing digital divides and achieving the SDGs.

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