

World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Preliminary EU Views on the Preparatory Process for the Tunis Phase of the Summit

1. Objective of this paper

This paper is a preliminary European Union response to the WSIS Bureau request for contributions from delegations on the preparatory process for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. The paper sets out the EU's views on the main procedural and organisational issues in the light of the preparations for the Tunis Phase of WSIS. The EU position on the various issues treated herein will be subject to review and updating, as appropriate, in the light of the issues and challenges thrown up as the WSIS preparatory process evolves.

Based on this position, the EU will make a constructive and positive contribution to the success of the Tunis phase of WSIS and adopt a flexible approach throughout the process.

2. Summary.

In summary, the EU's position on Phase II includes support for:

- the continued commitment to and respect for the Declaration of Principles (DoP) and the Plan of Action (PoA) by all WSIS stakeholders;
- all discussions to proceed on the basis of, with no reopening of, the principles agreed in Phase I;
- the core focus of Phase II to be on the implementation of the Plan of Action and follow-up including through the promotion of partnerships between stakeholders;
- an appropriate theme and spirit for Phase II might be "From Principles to Action";
- a political document to be issued by Heads of State and Governments (HOSGs) but opposition to the idea of a political "Charter";
- a guarantee of the continued participation of all WSIS stakeholders, including representatives of Civil Society and the Private Sector, in the process;
- an effective preparatory process, but less elaborate and lighter than Phase I.

3. EU approach to Timing and Venue of PrepComs

3.1 The EU believes that the preparatory process should be effective, less elaborate and lighter than the preparatory process for the Geneva phase.

3.2 The EU believes that one way to keep Phase II costs down would be to hold at least two of the preparatory meetings in Geneva, where the use of ITU and other UN facilities would reduce the cost to the host government and the WSIS secretariat.

3.3 The EU will strive with all other WSIS stakeholders and partners to ensure that, as far as possible, the preparatory meetings/PrepCom's are of reasonable duration and more focussed than their equivalents in Phase I.

4. EU approach to funding of Phase II

4.1 The EU believes that the preparatory process for Phase II must be effective and structured to keep it within the budgetary resources available. The process should be accurately costed and should not, in any event, be overly expensive.

4.2 Some EU Member States have indicated their intention to give financial or support-in-kind toward the overall administrative and other costs of Phase II.

5. EU approach to Thematic and Regional Meetings

5.1 It is felt that the need for European regional meetings is not as obvious as in other regions. In the course of 2005, the EU will present reports of its Information Society strategies (eEurope 2002, eEurope+, eEurope 2005 and elements of other EU programmes relating to WSIS) as evidence of how it is seeking to implement the DoP and PoA.

5.2 The EU supports the organisation of thematic conferences involving or organised by governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and appropriate international and intergovernmental organisations. The EU will also consider thematic meetings on issues of greatest concern to it. The EU believes it important that issues such as human rights, enabling environment, security, gender issues, public-private partnerships and the regulatory framework be adequately

reflected in the preparatory process, including in possible thematic meetings.

5.3 In the development cooperation context, the High Level Forum on Financing for Development to take place at the UNGA 2005 will also provide an opportunity for discussion with all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, on appropriate WSIS-related issues.

5.4 The EU recognises that it would facilitate WSIS stakeholders if the WSIS secretariat, guided by the Bureau, and with the assistance of ITU Secretary General, drew up an open and comprehensive list of thematic and regional meetings.

Meetings could be listed on the basis of relevant criteria that would include:

- the meeting is being organised on the initiative of a recognised WSIS stakeholder from a government, the civil society, the private sector or an appropriate international organisation;
- the subject matter is relevant to the WSIS agenda;
- the outcomes of such meetings could be fed into the WSIS preparatory process proper for noting or endorsement by stakeholders, as they deem fit;
- participation in the meeting is open to all WSIS stakeholders and, as far as possible, financial costs of participation should not be prohibitive;
- the meeting has no financial implications for the WSIS budget.

5.5 The EU recognises the need to manage the input of any such meetings into the preparatory process to avoid an “overload” of papers within the process. A brief, written report of the results of these meetings should be presented to the preparatory meetings to be taken into account as appropriate. Such reports could also be posted on the WSIS website.

5.6 The EU believes that the coordination of the reports of the follow-up to the Plan of Action should be carried out by the WSIS secretariat (in collaboration with other relevant UN agency/ies) or the High Level Summit Organisation Committee (HLSOC). Accordingly, it does not see an identified need for any Coordination Group to carry out this work..

5.7 In the context of the implementation and follow-up to the DoP and PoA, the EU will promote the use of ICTs and the building of the Information Society in order to benefit the development of all countries. The EU has a comprehensive approach to development in all its aspects, of which financing is an important component.

6. EU approach to a political document for Phase II and related political issues

6.1 The outcome of the Tunis Summit should be a political document, to be adopted by HOSGs. It should be a single and concise document and could consist of two parts: a political preamble reaffirming the commitment to the implementation to DoP and PoA and an operative part, which could include issues relating to the implementation of the PoA, preparation of national e-strategies, performance evaluation and benchmarking, national reporting, follow-up on an integrated and coordinated approach in the UN system and public-private partnership mechanisms. The document could have the title of a memorandum, consensus or conclusion. The EU does not see the need for any other documents to come out of the second phase of the Summit.

6.2 The document should also acknowledge, record and, if considered appropriate, endorse the work and contribution to WSIS of the Task Force on Financing Mechanisms and the Working Group on Internet Governance. It should also record progress made between Phase I and II. The document should seek to locate the development aspects of WSIS within the integrated and coordinated approach in the UN system to the follow-up and implementation strategies for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The document should also encourage ongoing support for the process of sharing of good practice and experiences among the stakeholders.

6.3 The document should not reopen any of the principles agreed in Phase I.

6.4 The EU holds that the guaranteed right of access to information by all and at all times including during the second phase of the Summit must be respected. The EU also insists that no actions should be taken which might affect the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

6.5 The overarching theme and spirit of Phase II should be “From Principles to Action”.

7. EU approach to Internet Governance, Financing and other issues.

7.1 The EU will participate actively and contribute to the consultation process regarding the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms and the Working Group on Internet Governance.

7.2 With regard to development cooperation, there would seem to be particular potential for deliverables for ICTs and development under the Joint ACP-EU Joint Position on Information Society for Development, signed in December 2003. An opportunity for further dialogue on WSIS issues with the ACP group will be provided in the framework of the re-negotiation of the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, which must be completed by March 2005.

7.3 Donor funding for ICTs in development is increasingly provided through their integration and incorporation, as part of a holistic approach to combating poverty, into country-owned development strategies and, where appropriate, Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSPs). Indeed, the DoP acknowledges that ICTs should be regarded as tools for development and not as an end in themselves.

7.4 The EU, at EC and individual Member States' level, is one of the most significant external donors/investors in ICTs in developing countries, consistent with its commitment to the Monterrey Consensus. The EU will engage in more concerted dialogue with its partners and other stakeholders in the WSIS process on the EU's contributions and on further possibilities to jointly promote Information Society for development. The EU is yet to be convinced as to the need for the creation of a separate Digital Solidarity Fund.
