

Brief analysis of the Internet Governance Forum in Rio

Three major points emerged from the Internet Governance Forum in Rio de Janeiro.

1/ An intensified « multi-stakeholder » debate

Innovated during the WSIS, the multi-stakeholder dialog was strengthened during the first IGF in Athens as an institutionalized and accepted process. Rio took it a step further : the different stakeholders were placed « on an equal footing » to ensure the largest possible freedom of expression.

Every aspect of Internet-related activities was addressed (in more than twenty daily meetings) and the debate initiated in Athens increased in breadth of topics as well as in the intensity of the discussions.

The world-wide dimension of these activities is but one indication of the challenge of developing efficient regulatory mechanisms. In this context, the debates underlined the need for an operational organ in charge of making synthesis of the debates and proposing practical measures based on the analyzes presented in the course of the Forum. Failing this, it is not possible to continue the discussions without drawing, in the most extreme cases, the necessary conclusions from them. The most striking illustration of this necessity was conveyed through the theme of child protection.

2/ The Rio Forum did address, for the first time, all the subjects listed at the WSIS

The theme « Critical Internet Resources » induced a discussion on the logical and physical structures of the Internet. Their relevance to reinforcing economic and social development of emerging countries was put under scrutiny because, it was declared, the problem now is not only to manage well existing systems but to provide access to all inhabitants of the world.

From this point of view, the traditional opinions on Internet Governance are overturned and the debate opened the way to discussion of important institutional changes. Nothing, of course, was decided in this respect but not taking into account these priorities will not be possible any more and they will become one of the major objectives of the IGF in its following meetings which, by the way, will be convened in emerging countries.

3/ Preparations for New Delhi Forum will begin imminently

Emerging nations will soon begin the formulation of their positions, taking into account the US presidential election which will take place one month before the next Forum in New Delhi. Their purpose is to deliver a proposition of noteworthy value to the Americans and one that would incite them to « re-engage the world » in the words of J.Edwards. Finally, it was generally agreed that a debriefing and evaluation should follow each Forum and that increasingly open and transparent procedures should be developed for the preparation of the subsequent Forum.