**WSIS+20 Stakeholder Consultations:
European Union input to inform the Zero Draft of the outcome document, on the basis of
the Elements Paper.**

1. What are the most important achievements arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft?

The World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) set out the Principles and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, which define the Internet as a global public space, open to all on a non-discriminatory basis. Since the start, the WSIS process has promoted global cooperation among all stakeholders (governments, civil society, the technical and academic communities, the private sector, and international and regional organisations), among others, to expand equitable access to and use of digital technologies, and to address inequalities in how persons connect and benefit from the digital world.

The **multistakeholder model** of Internet governance that the Tunis Agenda established is instrumental in keeping the technical layer of the **Internet open, interoperable, and global**, a crucial condition for socio-economic development. The implementation of WSIS targets within the Action Lines´ framework has contributed to digital development, putting infrastructure deployment, skills enhancement, policy frameworks that advance the WSIS vision, and multistakeholder collaboration firmly on the global agenda, and remain highly relevant. WSIS led to the establishment of the **Internet Governance Forum** (IGF) as a platform for ongoing dialogue on Internet governance issues among all stakeholders, promoting transparency, inclusiveness, and sustainability. Together with the IGF, annual WSIS forums keep the process vibrant and aligned with **global digital and development priorities**.

WSIS established targets as well as **mechanisms to monitor and track progress** on their implementation. These were complemented by indicators established by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development initiative.

In particular, WSIS was concerned about the digital divides, which are evolving with new and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum technology, 5G/6G, neurotechnology, and immersive tech and exacerbate other divides in society. Despite these challenges, Internet access has significantly improved, with users increasing from 972 million in 2005 to an estimated 5.4 billion by 2024 according to ITU data.

WSIS has highlighted the potential of ICTs in accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) e.g. by contributing to social inclusion, e-government, poverty eradication, and gender balance. The framework also supports international collaboration, crucial for an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet.

Building on the commitments made in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), the European Union and its Member States remain steadfast in their efforts to bridge digital divides, including the gender digital divide, as well as other divides that relate to age, capacities, or rural-urban gaps. The zero draft should include a dedicated section on the gender digital divide, including the need to support and empower women and girls in the digital age, as well as language related to the skills, age, disabilities and rural-urban gaps, among others.

The EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to the Geneva Declaration of Principles, the Geneva Plan of Action and its Action Lines, the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. The EU and its Member states reaffirm their commitment to respect, protect and promote human rights online and across the digital world as enshrined in international human rights law, and an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet as highlighted inter alia by the Global Digital Compact, the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles and the Declaration on the Future of the Internet.

The zero draft has to contain clear reference to roadmaps linking WSIS with global frameworks such as the Global Digital Compact and the 2030 Agenda and the post-2030 development agenda.

2. What are the most important challenges to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future that need to be addressed in the Zero Draft?

Some of the most important challenges include persistent and evolving digital divides (2.6 billion people offline); insufficient financing and institutional capacity in the Global South; declining trust in digital technologies; governance and regulatory gaps; human rights implications; market concentration; strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies that impede equal participation and equity in the digital and data economy.

Addressing persistent divides, including the gender digital divide, is crucial. Maintaining the security and resilience of technical infrastructure is essential for public trust and preserving Internet openness. The zero draft should establish new measurable commitments to bridging digital divides, focusing on connectivity, skills, gender equality, and equitable access to technology. More efforts need to be undertaken to address gender digital divides as well as divides affecting marginalized groups and populations in remote areas. A dedicated section on digital divides should be reflected in the zero draft, in particular with references to CSW conclusions and UN Women, as well as Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Challenges, such as declining Internet freedom[1], misinformation and disinformation, digital technologies' environmental impact, and barriers to competition and innovation, also need to be addressed. The zero draft should reaffirm WSIS principles of trust and human rights, emphasizing rights-respecting regulatory frameworks for digital safety, information integrity, and data protection.

The EU and its Member States acknowledge their responsibility to maintain the Internet as an open universal decentralized network, reinforcing it as a driver for economies to thrive and societies to prosper worldwide, and recognize the enormous potential of emerging technological advances as catalysts for innovation, economic growth, and social development The benefits of digital transformation must be equitably distributed, ensuring safeguards to prevent deepening inequalities, while encouraging innovation. The zero draft should promote open, interoperable, and inclusive digital markets, equitable access to digital public goods, and frameworks for data justice and innovation, supporting sustainable development. The EU and its Member States consider digital transformation rooted in human-centric and human rights-based approaches as key

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[1] See Freedom House work supported by UNESCO: https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map?type=fotn&mapview=trend&year=2024

to progressing towards and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as reflected in its own Global Gateway strategy and reaffirmed in the Pact for the Future and the GDC.

Enhanced cooperation post WSIS+20 should focus fully on enhancing cooperation among governments, academic and technical communities, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations, on equal footing and with meaningful diverse participation. Enhanced cooperation remains crucial to overcome existing and emerging challenges and ensure inclusive, sustainable progress. Further efforts should also be made to enhance the ability of governments and other stakeholders from developing countries to take part in effective local, regional and global multistakeholder cooperation. Consequently, in the context of the WSIS it should be made clear that the term 'enhanced cooperation' does not have a connotation of intergovernmental oversight.

The proliferation of parallel processes has caused policy fragmentation and implementation gaps. Existing processes and fora should be consolidated and streamlined and effective synergies must be forged to maximize impact and avoid duplication. WSIS+20 should reaffirm the WSIS framework as a key implementation platform for the digital aspects of the 2030 Agenda and the Global Digital Compact, and promote greater coherence across global digital policy efforts. The EU and its Member States are determined to build onto the WSIS+20 Review Process to advance the implementation of the GDC, ensuring their fullest possible convergence and advocating for a unified and strengthened coordination structure through a reinforced UNGIS with the involvement of all relevant UN entities, especially those active in the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The composition of UNGIS should reflect recent developments in digital governance and could be broadened by including the UN Office on Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and other relevant UN bodies and agencies. Moreover, the functioning of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development could be reformed to be more efficient, include meaningful participation by stakeholders and effectively set strategic priorities, coordinate overall WSIS activities and foster coherence within the UN system. Special consideration should be given to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), including its Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), Leadership Panel, and National, Sub-Regional, Regional and Youth IGF initiatives (NRIs)—drawing on the outcomes of the 2015 WSIS+10 Review and the 2024 Netmundial+10 Multistakeholder meeting in São Paulo, among others. Both the CSTD and the IGF require financial sustainability.

3. What are the most important priorities for action to achieve the WSIS vision of a 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society' in the future, taking into account emerging trends?

The WSIS vision of twenty years ago is still valid today. If anything, the multi-stakeholder implementation and follow-up of the WSIS should be further enhanced and this requires collaborative action between all types of stakeholders.

Strengthening WSIS to address the digital divides: aligning Action Lines with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Digital Compact (GDC) commitments

- Favour incremental Action Lines updates grounded in the development of a concrete roadmap linking the WSIS Action Lines, the Sustainable Development Goals and Global Digital Compact commitments. This approach ensures coherent and effective implementation of updated policies aimed at bridging digital divides and sustainable development. Oppose reopening the WSIS Action Lines or adding new ones.
- Align the WSIS review with the post-2030 development timeline by proposing, if necessary, an **early review in 2030**, but opposing the creation of new governance entities or processes and considering the emerging divides.

Defending the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet through multistakeholder governance
- Fortify the existing inclusive, human right-based and human centric multistakeholder governance model of Internet governance to preserve the unity, interoperability, and openness of the global Internet, and counteract initiatives aimed at state-controlled or fragmented Internet architectures, while **opposing reopening the Tunis Agenda and attempts to negotiate a UN international legal framework concerning Internet governance**.
- **Encourage Multistakeholder Governance Labs** (building on existing networks) **as collaborative and adaptive spaces within the IGF** where diverse stakeholders — including governments, civil society, technical communities, businesses, and academia — jointly explore, anticipate, test and come to a common understanding of the impacts caused by the deployment of emerging technologies on internet governance and identify appropriate, innovative solutions to address them.
- **Integrate and build within the Labs** the relevant work being done with existing structures, particularly IGF Policy networks, Best Practices Forum, Dynamic Coalitions which are formed with the aim of being fair, open, collaborative, multistakeholder-based, and bottom-up initiatives dedicated to specific Internet governance issues. To contribute meaningfully to the assessment of the impacts caused by the deployment of emerging technologies, they should strive to include experts in said technologies from the multistakeholder community.

Strengthening the Internet Governance Forum (IGF): the cornerstone of multistakeholder Internet governance
- Permanently **institutionalise the IGF beyond 2025**, securing stable funding via the UN regular budget via the reallocation of existing funds and voluntary contributions, thus reinforcing its position as the primary multistakeholder platform for inclusive digital governance, and making sure there is a Director and sufficiently strong secretariat for the IGF.
- **Improve balanced representation and participation from developing countries**, marginalised groups, and youth ensuring inclusive discussions and actionable outputs.
- **Formally recognize the work undertaken by the IGF ecosystem,** including its global network of national, regional and Youth IGFs (NRIs).

Digital transformation and human rights: the human-centric, human rights-based approach
- **Strengthen the WSIS framework by anchoring it in universal international human rights** law and principles, embedding safeguards against surveillance,

(algorithmic) discrimination, Internet shutdowns, censorship and online harms, especially for children and persons in vulnerable situations, considering the opportunities and threats of emerging technologies.
- Explicitly reinforce the role of the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) within WSIS processes to combat digital authoritarianism, protect fundamental freedoms (e.g., privacy, expression), and address human rights crises related to digital technologies – particularly the application of human rights throughout the whole lifecycle and especially during election times.

Multistakeholder digital governance at the core of the UN system
- Advocate to consolidate the **multistakeholder governance approach as a central principle within the broader UN digital governance framework**, ensuring meaningful engagement of all stakeholders—particularly from developing countries—in the implementation of the WSIS vision, inspiring other UN-led processes.
- Promote **practical implementation of the NETmundial+10 guidelines** to drive inclusive participation, balanced representation, and effective multistakeholder collaboration, supporting equitable digital policies, interoperability, and openness.

4. What additional themes/issues, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper?

The following themes and issues should be included and/or significantly reinforced in the zero draft of the outcome document:
- Clearer Integration of SDGs and GDC Commitments with WSIS Action Lines.
- Explicit Reference to the Human-Centric and Human Rights-Based Digital Transformation
- Specific Section on digital divides (gender, elderly, disabled, rural areas)
- Stronger Emphasis on Multistakeholder model of the Internet Governance
- Emphasize the Role of the Technical Community.
- Multistakeholder Governance for the Future Internet
- Institutionalisation and Strengthening of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)
- Sustainable Digitalisation and Environmental Sustainability
- Digital Commons, Open-Source Technologies, and International Standardisation
- Cross-Cutting Approach to Emerging Technologies
- Avoid Duplication in Cybersecurity Governance
- Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Digital Transformation

The EU and its Member States acknowledge the broad coverage provided by the WSIS+20 Elements Paper but note several critical gaps. Specifically, the following themes and issues should be included or significantly reinforced in the zero draft of the outcome document:

- **Clearer Integration of SDGs and GDC Commitments with WSIS Action Lines:**

While the Elements Paper rightly recognizes digital divides and the importance of equitable connectivity, it does not sufficiently articulate the need for clear, practical linkages between the WSIS Action Lines, SDGs, and GDC commitments. The EU strongly advocates for the development of roadmaps linking these three frameworks. The roadmaps could be a key outcome of the WSIS+20 Review, which would significantly enhance coherence, facilitate implementation,

and ensure the meaningful contribution of digital technologies to sustainable development. The WSIS+20 review is a critical opportunity to articulate these linkages explicitly while maintaining WSIS as the cornerstone of UN digital governance.

- **Explicit Reference to the Human-Centric and Human Rights-Based Digital Transformation:**

The Elements Paper broadly mentions human rights but lacks explicit references to embedding universal international human rights law and principles at every stage of digital technologies' design, development, deployment, standardization and implementation. The EU proposes strengthening the WSIS frameworks by explicitly embedding safeguards against online actions and harms that represent human rights risks especially for children and persons in vulnerable situations. This should include unequivocally condemning the use of Internet shutdowns and unlawful restrictions, including the blocking of access to communication platforms, to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to, or the dissemination of, information online Moreover, there must be explicit reinforcement of the OHCHR role in combatting digital authoritarianism, mis and disinformation, and addressing human rights crises related to digital technologies, such as Internet shutdowns. Gender equality should be dealt with in a separate section with references to existing CSW conclusions.

- **Stronger Emphasis on Multistakeholder Governance and Internet Governance:**

One of the most critical issues requiring attention is the language used in the Elements Paper concerning Internet governance. Specifically, the elements paper´s reference in 59 to governance being "multilateral and democratic" departs from the established international consensus reaffirmed in the Global Digital Compact. To ensure consistency with existing UN commitments and the WSIS framework, the zero draft should restore the GDC-agreed language. As stated in paragraph 27 of the GDC:

"We recognize that Internet governance must continue to be global and multi-stakeholder in nature, with the full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities. We reaffirm that Internet governance should continue to follow the provisions set forth in the outcomes of the summits held in Geneva and Tunis, including in relation to enhanced cooperation."

This language represents not only the shared understanding of the international community, but also a key safeguard for preserving an inclusive, open, and rights-based approach to digital governance. The WSIS+20 process must reaffirm this multistakeholder vision and avoid introducing terminology that could be interpreted as regressive or incompatible with the principles agreed in the Tunis Agenda and the GDC.

- **Emphasize the Role of the Technical Community**

In the WSIS process, the technical community is recognized as an independent stakeholder group. However, in the Elements Paper, the role of this stakeholder group is not sufficiently highlighted. Key processes related to Internet regulation should not be left solely in the hands of Governments,

who often have limited exposure to the Internet governance ecosystem and lack a deep understanding of how the Internet actually works from a technical point of view. This aspect is very important in terms of the unintended consequences that legislation can bring. The technical community must actively participate in the process to ensure that the development of the Internet and related policy-making processes remain informed and balanced. Decisions made by governments have a far-reaching impact on the way the Internet functions and its resilience. Long-term engagement of the technical community is crucial to ensure that technical realities are properly understood, that regulatory decisions do not inadvertently undermine operational stability, and that the Internet remains safe, open, and interoperable.

- **Multistakeholder Governance for the Future Internet**

The Elements Paper currently lacks explicit mention of innovative governance mechanisms such as Multistakeholder Governance Labs (building on existing networks), as collaborative and adaptive spaces within the IGF where diverse stakeholders — could engage in collaborative experimentation and reach a common understanding to address the challenges resulting from the deployment of new technologies on the Internet architecture, with a view to preventing Internet fragmentation and ensuring the resilience of the global digital ecosystem.

- **Institutionalisation and Strengthening of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF):**

Although the Elements Paper recognizes the IGF's importance, it lacks specific commitments to its permanent institutionalisation and sustainable funding. The EU strongly supports permanently institutionalizing the IGF beyond 2025 with secure, stable funding from the UN regular budget via the reallocation of existing funds, and work to complement it by incremented voluntary contributions from all stakeholder groups to ensure long-term stability, inclusivity and financial independence. This would reinforce the IGF as the primary multistakeholder platform for inclusive digital governance and ensure balanced representation and participation from developing countries, marginalized groups, and youth. Inclusive and meaningful participation of youths in digital governance processes more broadly remains essential, especially for those most affected by the digital divides.

- **Sustainable Digitalisation and Environmental Sustainability:**

The Elements Paper mentions environmental impacts of ICT but the EU proposes a more robust focus on sustainable digitalisation, resource efficiency, and promoting a circular economy approach in ICT/digital technologies. These dimensions are critical for addressing the environmental footprint of digital infrastructures and ensuring that digital transformation aligns with broader environmental sustainability goals.

- **Digital Commons, Open-Source Technologies, and International Standardisation:**

The Elements Paper insufficiently addresses the strategic role of open-source solutions and digital commons as instruments for enhancing access, innovation, cultural and linguistic diversity, and democratizing digital spaces. The EU suggests explicitly reinforcing these elements, furthermore addressing the role international standardisation can play in maintaining global interoperability,

contributing to innovation, safety, sustainability and human rights protections, and counteracting potential fragmentation.

- **Cross-Cutting Approach to Emerging Technologies:**

The Elements Paper treats AI and data governance as separate themes and invites proposals for potentially new institutional arrangements. This potentially contradicts the EU's stance on technology-neutrality of WSIS Action Lines and the integrative treatment of these cross-cutting issues within the existing WSIS frameworks. The EU strongly urges an evolutionary and integrative approach, ensuring emerging technologies and related divides are addressed holistically, in a closer relationship with GDC language and SDGs, rather than through new governance structures or Action Lines.

- **Avoid Duplication in Cybersecurity Governance**

The EU acknowledges that cybersecurity and cybercrime are relevant concerns in the digital landscape and notes that references to existing international processes and frameworks are appropriate in this context. However, the EU is strongly against addressing substantive cybersecurity governance issues within the WSIS+20 review, as doing so duplicates discussions in other specialised fora – such as the newly agreed Global Mechanism on Developments in the Field of ICTs in the Context of International Security and Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in the use of ICTs. The Elements Paper should therefore refrain from introducing new or detailed substantive language on cybersecurity and cybercrime, reaffirming or referencing instead the importance of implementing the framework for responsible State behaviour in the use of ICTs, including the 11 non-binding norms, and building trust and security in the use of ICTs in ways that are consistent with international law, including international humanitarian law, the law of state responsibility and international human rights law.

- **Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Digital Transformation:**

Finally, the Elements Paper should explicitly include measures to promote linguistic and cultural diversity as essential aspects of digital inclusion and equality, helping to prevent the marginalisation of minority groups or languages and enhancing universal accessibility and resilience of the digital ecosystem. A reference to the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is therefore needed.

These additional themes and refinements are necessary to ensure the comprehensive alignment of WSIS with other international frameworks, particularly the SDGs and the GDC, and ensuring robust, human rights-based, and inclusive digital governance.

5. Do you wish to comment on particular themes/issues/paragraphs in the Elements Paper?

The EU and its Member States would welcome adjustments to better align certain sections of the Elements Paper with established international consensus and the Global Digital Compact.

On **human rights online (47-49)**, we would like to see the issues of information integrity and content moderation be addressed separately from issues related to AI (47). Before the widespread

adoption of (generative) AI, the issue of information integrity already represented challenges and has not emerged due to AI. Generative AI has compounding effects on the spread of disinformation and the accompanying risks for human rights online can be addressed in the AI section. Paragraph 48 should be reasoned the other way around, as the current formulation could set dangerous precedent for the protection of human rights online: "Restrictions on the protection of human rights online, such as the freedom of expression, should be proportionate, lawful and necessary to serve the identified public policy objective, and should be in accordance with international law, including international human rights law". The list of so-called abusive uses of ICTs in paragraph 49 should be in line with existing UNGA resolutions on the subject and should be in accordance with international human rights law. These are all very different categories of behavior, of which some are illegal and others are merely unwanted.

On **Internet governance,** the term "multilateral" should be replaced with the agreed language from the GDC, which reaffirms that Internet governance must remain *"global and multi-stakeholder in nature"*. In this context, we note that para 61 refers to "governments and other stakeholders" leading up to para 63 and 64 on enhanced cooperation. Both paragraphs re-open unnecessarily and deeply regrettably in our view the discussion on enhanced cooperation ignoring the language established in the GDC and the developments of the last decade, including two CSTD Working Groups which were unable to reach consensus on this issue and more specifically the IANA transition which arguably rendered the original argument for this term obsolete. While recognizing the role of governments as per the Tunis Agenda, the EU opposes references to **enhanced cooperation** outside the context of this multistakeholder model. The zero draft should acknowledge the various ongoing contributions to the goal of enhanced cooperation of all stakeholders, including governments from the Global South and underrepresented groups, for example within ICANN, the international organizations and the WSIS Framework, such as the IGF, in order to and avoid interpretations that might suggest a move towards intergovernmental oversight. In addition, the language in para 63 runs counter to what has been agreed in the GDC and is not reflective of the consensus wording on this matter in other documents, such as UNGA resolutions.

Furthermore, the Elements paper falls short on ways to strengthen the IGF. The zero draft should recognize that the mandate of the IGF needs to be renewed and made permanent with adequate funding. It should also include a recognition of the role of the national and regional IGFs.

Regarding **AI, data governance, and cybersecurity (65–76 and 51–56)**, the EU is against proposals that could lead to new (UN) institutional arrangements outside the existing frameworks. These issues should be treated as cross-cutting and addressed through evolutionary integration of GDC commitments and SDGs into existing WSIS action lines. We would like to note that, contrary to para 69, the CSTD working group on data governance is mandated to report by its 81st General Assembly which arguably could also be at the end of this session, in September 2027.

6. What suggestions do you have to support the development of the WSIS framework (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.)?

The WSIS framework will benefit from the following measures:

- Strengthen WSIS to address the digital divides: Integrate SDGs and GDC commitments into WSIS Action Lines, improve harmonization of data and data collection in the context of measuring the advancement of digital society.
- Defend the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet through multistakeholder governance
- Permanently institutionalise the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) with adequate funding as the cornerstone of multistakeholder digital and tech governance and the primary platform for its discussion
- Digital transformation and human rights: the human-centric, human rights-based approach
- Multistakeholder digital governance at the core of the UN system

Strengthening WSIS to address the digital divides: Aligning Action Lines with SDGs and GDC commitments

- The EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to global digital inclusion, including universal meaningful digital connectivity as one of the central levers to sustainable development, social inclusion, and economic opportunity. While digital divides still persist and their nature is changing with development of new technologies, ITU data shows positive evolution in Internet access worldwide, especially in developing countries since the beginning of WSIS 20 years ago (e.g. in Africa, Internet penetration has increased from 2% to 37%). Through several initiatives, including the Global Gateway strategy, the EU and its Member States reinforce their commitment to bridging the digital divides through investments in high-quality, trusted, secure, resilient, and inclusive digital infrastructure, boosting digital skills, and facilitating fair and affordable access to connectivity, particularly in underserved regions. Repositories of policies and best practices made available by IGF could be a source of inspiration for the solutions searched within the GDC implementation.

- The EU recognises the persistent and multidimensional nature of the digital divides within and between countries on issues such as digital infrastructure, connectivity, early warning systems to prevent natural and man-provoked disasters, socio-economic situation (poverty and income inequalities), skills, age, gender and rural-urban gaps, among others. In that context, the EU will continue to support innovative financing policies that focus on fair and affordable access, capacity-building, technological innovation and collaboration, such as community networks, while stressing the interlinkages between the infrastructure that provides connectivity and digital skills that enable the use of digital technologies in all socio-economic spheres and activities.

- The WSIS process is an essential tool in helping reduce the digital divides and progress towards the SDGs. The WSIS+10 review gained significant ground by mapping WSIS Action Lines onto the SDGs and reaffirming the need for a multistakeholder approach. Moreover, the recently adopted CSTD resolution requests CSTD to conduct a stocktaking exercise on how WSIS Action Lines, SDG principles and the GDC are being integrated into digital cooperation frameworks and recommends UNGIS to prepare an implementation roadmap focused on GDC commitments. Building on these efforts, the EU sees WSIS+20 as an opportunity to go further by asking the Action Lines facilitators, in coordination with UNGIS, including ODET, to develop targeted and result-oriented

implementation roadmaps that integrates SDG principles and the implementation of the GDC principles and commitments to the WSIS Action Lines That would ensure actions' concrete and interlocked implementation, boosting the role of digital technologies and digital public goods in sustainable and inclusive development, including in the post-2030 agenda. Seamless alignment could also be ensured by an exceptionally shorter 5-year WSIS mandate to conclude in line with the adoption of the post-SDGs framework in 2030, if needed. The EU will ensure that the key achievements of WSIS—such as the multistakeholder approach, the IGF, protection of human rights online, and multistakeholder Internet governance —are effectively integrated into the post-2030 sustainable development agenda.

- Rapid digitalization should go together with measures to increase linguistic diversity to avoid creating new or reinforcing existing vulnerabilities and power imbalances in digital systems that societies increasingly depend on and that could disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

- The EU supports the deployment of high-quality, trusted, secure and resilient digital infrastructures, taking into account the convergence of different network types such as fixed, mobile, satellite and broadcasting, promoting community networks, advancing connectivity including complementary coverage in unserved areas, to enhance connectivity without creating unsustainable debt or unwanted dependencies.

- The EU's commitment to protecting the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure, Internet is essential to its socio-economic development vision. The emergence of dominant digital platforms poses a challenge for competition enforcers and raises broader concerns about the dynamism of the economy and about consumer rights. At the same time, political efforts to impose centralized control to the Internet architecture threaten to undermine the Internet's fundamental openness, risking fragmentation and compromising the very attributes that have made the Internet a catalyst for progress and innovation. This all demands a renewed focus on creating and maintaining an enabling environment at the local, national, regional and global levels.

- The EU and its Member States support the maintenance and the development of open-source solutions and digital commons to enhance access to digital technologies and contents, cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as to promote an open, public and multistakeholder digital space respectful of democratic principles. The EU and its Member States underline the continued importance of international standardisation in ICTs in multistakeholder fora to ensure global interoperability, contribute to safety, innovation and respect for human rights, and avoid fragmentation.

- Emerging technologies such as for example immersive virtual environments, extended reality (XR), multimodal interfaces, and AI-driven tools, will bring significant societal and economic opportunities, but also new digital divides and challenges in terms of access, capabilities, and outcomes. To ensure inclusive and equitable benefits globally, it is critical that the WSIS+20 review explicitly recognises both the emerging technologies great potential and these emerging and potentially growing divides, promoting international

cooperation for innovation, and investment to enhance digital infrastructure, ensure inclusive design, and strengthen specialised digital literacy and skills, especially in underserved regions and among persons in vulnerable situations.

Defending the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet through multistakeholder governance

- The EU steadfastly protects the inclusive human centric and human-rights based, multistakeholder approach to Internet governance and is committed to continuously improving its effectiveness. It opposes initiatives giving rise to state-controlled Internet architectures that could fragment and undermine the openness and security that have characterised the Internet since its inception.

- The EU and its Member States recognize the risk of Internet fragmentation, and its negative impact on human rights and Internet interoperability. The EU commits to proactively defend the general availability and integrity of the Internet as a global, interoperable network of networks, reflecting the importance of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance. The multistakeholder approach—enshrined in the Tunis Agenda and re-affirmed in the GDC—is based on the premise that effective Internet governance must be inclusive, participatory, action-oriented and consensus-driven, involving a broad array of actors from the public sector, civil society, academic and technical communities, private sector, regional and international organisations.

- The multistakeholder approach is essential for an effective, inclusive global governance of the Internet, a distributed technology by nature, ensuring that no single government or actor can unilaterally control its technical architecture or policy frameworks. This decentralised, cooperative governance structure preserves the global, interoperable and neutral nature of the Internet and prevents fragmentation—a crucial driver for development and a safeguard in an era where some actors seek to centralise digital control through state-centric and other models.

- Given the rapid advancement of emerging technologies, the Internet governance ecosystem must evolve proactively to anticipate profound technical and governance challenges that could ultimately threaten the unity and interoperability of the Internet. To safeguard the open, global, interoperable, reliable and secure nature of the Internet, the EU and its Member States will encourage the establishment of multistakeholder governance Labs (building on existing networks) within the IGF. These Labs will provide collaborative and adaptive spaces where diverse but specialised stakeholders — including civil society, governments, technical communities, businesses, and academia — can jointly explore innovative governance solutions, test policy approaches, and build consensus, on the impact of the deployment of emerging technologies, thereby preventing fragmentation, fostering specialised knowledge, and attracting new, diverse members—including youth—into the Internet governance community.

Strengthening the Internet Governance Forum (IGF): the cornerstone of multistakeholder Internet governance

- The IGF is the embodiment of the multistakeholder model. It is the primary multistakeholder platform where various stakeholders discuss digital issues on equal footing in a transparent, trusting, collaborative environment. Initially envisioned as a forum for discussing the public policy aspects of Internet governance, the IGF has evolved into the primary multistakeholder platform for addressing the broader spectrum of digital issues. The IGF's open, inclusive, bottom-up approach ensures that marginalized and underrepresented actors can voice their position on international digital policies, fostering inclusive, multistakeholder discussions on global Internet governance. The WSIS+20 outcome document should acknowledge its pivotal role as the primary multistakeholder platform for policy dialogue.

- Nevertheless, the EU and its Member States recognize that the IGF must evolve to remain effective and impactful amidst geopolitical fragmentation, technological change and emerging digital challenges. Strengthening the IGF involves improving its structure, sustainability, participation and outcomes. The EU and its Member States affirm that the mandate of the IGF as established in the Tunis Agenda remains valid, supporting the following measures to reinforce its political relevance:

  a. Based on an assessment of the IGF mandate implementation, renew and permanently institutionalise the IGF's mandate without reopening it beyond 2025 to ensure long-term stability and continuity of the multistakeholder dialogue, while giving continuity to the secretariat´s day-to-day operational independence, to UN DESA as its institutional home, IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and Leadership Panel.
  b. Involve the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) in cooperation with the Leadership Panel to streamline the IGF into an integrated WSIS and GDC framework and other relevant UN-led processes to ensure coherence in global digital governance. That would reflect the IGF's indispensable role for a successful WSIS/GDC implementation and provide direct feedback on WSIS/GDC-related developments to the IGF community, thus increasing the IGF's political weight, while maintaining its independence and multistakeholder character.
  c. Secure sustainable funding of the IGF Secretariat through the regular UN budget via the reallocation of existing funds, and work to complement it by incremented voluntary contributions from all stakeholders to ensure long-term stability, inclusivity and financial independence, as well as the participation of stakeholders from developing countries.
  d. Enhance the role of the IGF Secretariat through the appointment of a Director position, to better follow-up on IGF outputs and to interconnect the IGF with other (UN) digital initiatives.
  e. Improve a balanced and high-level representation of governments, civil society, academic and technical communities, and the private sector in the IGF to guarantee inclusivity, visibility, impact and reflect diverse stakeholder perspectives.

      f.   Enhance the participation of developing countries in the IGF through calling for reinforced voluntary financial support such as travel grants and support to remote participation hubs.

      g.   Strengthening National, Regional and Youth IGF Initiatives (NRIs) in the overall IGF ecosystem, considering also stronger financial support.

      h.   Reinforce multi-year thematic tracks and actionable post-IGF sessions, combined with a part of the IGF programme more focused on issues pertinent to the GDC implementation and simplified IGF outputs. This would contribute to a better accessibility, continuity of the discussions of complex topics and policy impact flanked by greater outreach and communication, thus ensuring stakeholders' support for IGF outputs and their wider dissemination.

      i.   We acknowledge that the IGF, consistent with its original mandate to facilitate open and inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders, engages in a broad range of issues related to digital governance.

- The EU and its Member States will oppose any attempt to end the IGF's activities or replace its multistakeholder format with a more limited, government-led, non-multistakeholder model of the forum.

Digital transformation and human rights: the human-centric, human rights-based approach

- As digitalisation accelerates, sustainable digital progress requires a human-centric and human rights-based approach in order to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms against rising threats like Internet shutdowns, mass surveillance, censorship, algorithmic bias, abusive data exploitation, technology-facilitated gender-based violence and (digital) attacks on journalists and human rights defenders. The EU and its Member States assert that human rights apply equally online and offline — a position embedded in the WSIS process and reinforced by the GDC, and that digital inclusion and human rights protection are mutually reinforcing contributing to both economic growth and social cohesion. In this context we reaffirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights as a necessary corollary and basis for sustainable development, rejecting any attempt to frame them in opposition to development. The EU will counter digital authoritarianism which violates human rights and democratic norms.

- In the WSIS+20 review, the EU will therefore support stronger human rights language, in line with the commitments of previous WSIS reviews, the GDC and relevant UNGA resolutions, explicitly recognizing the fundamental role that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should play in addressing human rights violations and digital authoritarianism and addressing tech-related crises. Given worrying trends such as digital repression and network restrictions, the EU will insist on stronger, unprecedented safeguards to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of opinion and expression, and right to privacy, and thus anchoring digital governance in existing human rights and fundamental freedoms including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the ICCPR and the ICESCR.

- The EU champions strong data protection frameworks to prevent the misuse of personal data. Human rights safeguards protect individuals from state overreach and corporate misuse of personal data. The EU advocates for global standards that prioritise user privacy yet ease data free flows with trust that support innovation and sustainable development.

- Emerging technologies offer substantial opportunities to strengthen human rights and digital inclusion, enabling diverse and marginalised populations to access tailored experiences and empowering new forms of self-expression and democratic participation. However, these technologies may introduce heightened risks, such as hyper-targeted manipulation, intensified forms of surveillance and discrimination through biometric and behavioural profiling, and exacerbated online and offline harms due to the immersive and realistic nature of interactions, which pose significant dangers especially to children and to elections processes. Ensuring the human-centric, human rights-based approach thus requires robust governance frameworks that uphold transparency, accountability, and user autonomy. To leverage these opportunities effectively and mitigate associated threats, it is essential to embed universal human rights principles, with particular attention to the rights and protection of children, at every stage of technological design, development, and implementation.

- Recognizing the environmental impact of digital infrastructures, including its energy and water usage and e-waste, the EU supports sustainable digitalisation and green technology solutions.

- The EU promotes high-quality, trusted, secure and resilient networks through risk-based assessments to safeguard digital infrastructure from cyber threats.

Multistakeholder digital governance at the core of the UN system's engagement

- The EU expects that the WSIS+20 review will consolidate the multistakeholder approach as a core principle within the broader UN digital cooperation framework, including the WSIS Action Lines. In particular, the EU will advocate for the explicit recognition of this model as essential for inclusive, sustainable and effective global digital cooperation, ensuring the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders across sectors and regions, making also reference to the 2024 NetMundial+10 guidelines, which detail how to improve concrete practices.

- By ensuring inclusive participation and balanced representation, the multistakeholder approach gives all stakeholders from every region, a voice in shaping digital policies that directly affect their economies and societies. It is instrumental for stakeholders from all countries, regardless of their level of digitalisation, to take part in decision-making processes.

- Need for open dialogue with the private and non- private sectors, highlighting the relevance of technical actors, promotes knowledge-exchange and capacity-building, enabling developing countries to bridge digital divides. Multistakeholder processes promote investments in infrastructure, education, and digital literacy in underserved regions.

Collaborative governance prevents the monopolisation of digital resources and promotes interoperable and open technologies. This helps keep digital services affordable and accessible to disadvantaged or marginalized communities, so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of digital transformation.

7. Do you have any other comments?

The EU and its Member States strongly welcome the establishment of the Informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board (IMSB) by the WSIS+20 Co-Facilitators. This initiative is an important step toward ensuring the inclusive, transparent, and responsive nature of the WSIS+20 review process. It reflects a shared commitment to engage all stakeholder groups in shaping the outcome of the review, in line with the long-standing principles of the WSIS process and the NetMundial+10 Guidelines.

The EU has consistently advocated for a structured, representative, and trusted multistakeholder consultation mechanism to inform intergovernmental negotiations. Stakeholder participation should be meaningful, and embedded at all levels and stages of the WSIS+20 Review process, particularly in the development of the outcome document. The Sounding Board's design represents a positive model of how this can be operationalised. However, the informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board (MSB) should not be regarded as the only channel for stakeholder input into the process.

The EU encourages the co-facilitators to continue convening regular interactions with the stakeholders and the Sounding Board and to ensure that its outputs — particularly consolidated recommendations and stakeholder reflections — **are transparently integrated into the drafting process. This mechanism will enhance trust in the process and contribute to a more legitimate and widely supported WSIS+20 outcome.**

We further encourage all WSIS+20 stakeholders to engage constructively in this process, and reiterate our commitment to a human-centric, human-rights-based, multistakeholder approach to digital governance — not just as a principle, but as a necessary condition for effective, inclusive, and future-proof outcomes.