
Reflections on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft

By Dr. Pari Esfandiari, Global TechnoPolitics Forum – October 2025

The Zero Draft of the WSIS+20 Review provides a thoughtful and constructive foundation. It reaffirms the people-centered vision of the Information Society and the enduring commitment to connectivity and multistakeholder cooperation—reaffirmations that are not only welcome but essential to the WSIS legacy.

Yet while the Draft recognizes the dangers of digital fragmentation, it does not fully confront the **geopolitical forces driving it**: competing assertions of digital sovereignty, divergent regulatory philosophies, and the growing concentration of technological power that are reshaping governance itself.

The United Nations' commitment to political neutrality remains central to its legitimacy as a convener of global dialogue. However, **neutrality must not become silence in the face of asymmetry**. True neutrality is active, not passive—it is the stewardship of shared values, defending the openness of the Internet and ensuring that no single political or ideological model dominates the global digital space.

The Draft's emphasis on inclusion is also commendable, yet inclusion must move beyond representation to **real agency**. Access and attendance are insufficient if many stakeholders remain distant from the processes that shape digital norms. The legitimacy of governance depends on how meaningfully diverse voices can influence outcomes.

In the aftermath of the *Pact for the Future* and the *Global Digital Compact*, the WSIS+20 Review has a vital responsibility: **to safeguard the Internet's core values—openness, universality, interoperability, and neutrality—and to embed them within governance systems resilient to geopolitical stress.**

The Zero Draft is an important step forward. Its next iteration should go further in balancing power, accountability, and legitimacy in digital governance while ensuring that transparency and participation are not used to justify control or restrict openness.

If WSIS+20 reaffirms not only principles but also the means to protect them, it can help preserve the Internet as a space of **shared trust rather than strategic rivalry**.

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