MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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Abstract

Diplomacy is the art of advancing national interests through permanent negotiations and a sustained exchange of information among nations and peoples. In the present world of instantaneous information, multilateral diplomacy has every chance to sustain even more its relevance.

One of the most important components of multilateral diplomacy activities over the 2002-2005 period is dedicated to meetings at sub-regional, regional and global levels dealing with the future architecture of the Information Society. In 2001, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) decided to hold a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases: the first from 10 to 12 December 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland and the second in 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia.

The global Information Society is evolving with extraordinary rapidity. The convergence between telecommunications, broadcasting multimedia and information and communication technologies (ICTs) is driving not only new products and services, but also new ways of conducting business and trade. Trade, social and professional opportunities

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are expanding alongside with new markets open to competition, foreign investment and participation. This unprecedented dynamic brought by globalization requires global discussions and negotiations. The WSIS will provide a unique opportunity for all concerned people to meet at a high-level gathering and to develop a better understanding of this revolution and its impact on the world community. It will bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society in a single political and diplomatic event.

The anticipated outcome of the Summit is to endorse a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the Information Society, taking into account the different interests of various groups of States.

A High-Level Summit Organizing Committee has been established under the patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, who has frequently argued that the principal challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all peoples, instead of leaving millions behind in poverty and squalor.

Many questions are waiting for adequate answers. The twin phase World Summit on the Information Society in 2003-2005 provides an excellent opportunity to make tangible progress in this area. It is vital to

elaborate a set of basic principles of the Information Society which is expected to be universal and empowering. It should promote global digital solidarity and prevent new divisions.

The humanistic concept of Opus Solidaritatis Pax, developed by the Holy See, is fully applicable in our globalizing world. The WSIS is expected to serve as a catalyst for "inclusive globalization" and afford a diplomatic and professional opportunity to deal with a large range of issues raised by the emergence of an information-intensive society. It should contribute to consolidating dialogue among civilisations. Socrates' teaching is always topical: "There is only one good, knowledge; and only one evil, ignorance." The WSIS is expected to give further tangibility to this truth. Diplomacy will not be condemned to irrelevancy in this process.

1. A Challenging Mission for Diplomacy

As the world changes, the way countries manage their mutual relationships in the emerging Informa-tion Society is also changing. Our planet has become a gigantic village in which distance is no longer measured in kilometers but in bandwidth capacity. The number of people using the Internet reached over 200 million at the start of 2000 and is expected to touch two billion by the end of 2005.(1)

Globalization is irreversible. As emphasized recently: "For decades it has been evident that the forces of globalization will lead to a situation where nations become more and more economically intertwined. The role of diplomats of any nation is thus bound to shift from the traditional diplomacy of international politics towards one that places more emphasis on trade and investment promotion."(2)

Diplomacy is the art of advancing national interests through permanent bilateral and multilateral negotiations and a sustained exchange of information among nations and peoples. Its purpose is to modify attitudes and behavior in order to promote cooperation. It is the practice of state-to-state persuasion. In spite of contrary pessimistic views, in the present world of instantaneous information, diplomacy has every chance to make its professional and political relevance even more visible. We are eye-witnessing what is designated as "catalytic diplomacy", characterized by a close interaction between State and non-governmental diplomacy.

This new diplomacy is getting an increasing importance, as the information revolution promotes unprecedented developments and offers new flexible opportunities for multivectorial connections encompassing the modern world in its totality.

An important component of multilateral diplomacy activities over the period 2002-2005 is dedicated to meetings at sub-regional, regional and global levels dealing with the future architecture of the Information Society. The United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) launched on 6 February 2003, in the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the first cycle in 2003 of the series "Policy Awareness and Training in the Information Technology". The programme has been developed for ambassadors and diplomats from permanent missions to the United Nations in New York.

Diplomats and decision-makers are not only required to master and understand the use and significance of information technology, but also have to be able to address new challenges. They have to acquire specific computer skills and be exposed to the workings of the Internet; and to raise awareness and understanding of policy and security issues related to the Information Society.

Diplomatic activities take place frequently outside traditional conference rooms and consist of getting involved with ordinary people at all levels. Information technology

(IT) and the Internet are overcoming distances and making continuous contact with all segments of one's own diplomatic establishment, as well as with international institutions feasible. IT also frees the diplomat from a lot of routine work and enormously enlarges his capacity for action, while leaving him available to focus on his core duty: to establish,maintain and cultivate personal contacts and relations. It is this new revolution that will shape the diplomacy of tomorrow. Technology will fundamentally change the nature of diplomacy.

These developments prompted UNITAR to organize a seminar entitled *Diplomacy and Cyberspace* held in Rome on June 23-27 2003. It was aimed to offer the participants a comprehensive introduction to the concepts of ICT in International Relations and increase their awareness of the social and economic issues pertaining to ICTs.

This seminar was a part of the training programme "Strengthening Diplomat's Capacity to Make and Implement ICT Policy", as it is acquiring an ever-growing importance on the diplomatic agenda. One of the main objectives was also to support insertion of the emergent and developing countries in this diplomatic process and to that end to address the needs of national delegations, as well as those of professionals and civil society leaders involved in international negotiations and initiatives for the build-up of the Information Society.

The seminar dealt with an agenda including: Concepts and issues of the Information Society; international initiatives and organizations; regional initiatives and organizations; international Internet Governance: Laws and Institutions; National ICT Strategies and Action Plans; ICT applications; national and regional E-government strategies and action plans; E-government applications; security issues.

A broad range of concepts was reviewed, such as Information Society, Global network, info structure, Digital Divide and other aspects focusing on specific issues of IT, like infrastructures, law and regulation (including privacy and intellectual property issues), information policy, education, E-government.

International initiatives related to the Net and the ICT have spread out during the last few years, especially in the field of the reduction of the "digital divide". Therefore, the principal international actors and their initiatives at bilateral and multilateral levels have to be properly considered. The same approach is valid for regional actors' strategies, including Asia, and for the institutions dedicated to the Net, in particular those providing coordination tasks and international regulations.

Significant problems of international law raised by the coordination of the Internet (including privacy, copyright, freedom of expression, and security issues) have to be addressed and gradually solved. In addition, greater attention must be given to the roles of the United Nations system organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNESCO, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).(3)

It is the extraordinary richness of its applications that increases the value of the Internet. However, when considering potential applications, governments should define priorities and choose technologies and methods that fit the capacities of the target organizations and their environments. The number of problems increases with the Internet expansion. There is a permanent risk of contracting computer viruses and diplomats, like everyone else, have to face this risk. Moreover, the Internet is also a breeding ground for Cyberspace pirates in search of confidential information and misinformation campaigners.

It is an obvious fact that information systems are becoming very strategic resources. Any malfunction can lead to chaos for communities and even countries and can make an entire telecommunications network ineffective. There are solid reasons for heightening diplomats' awareness on the issues of computer security at individual and strategic levels. Development of cryptographic methods to ensure confidentiality and authentication is urgently needed. All these issues are animating the current debates related to ITC taking place at international level, with a special focus of the ongoing preparatory process of the World Summit on the Information Society to which we dedicate the following pages.

As a result of many diplomatic consultations and negotiations at various levels, in 2001, the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** decided to hold a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases: the first to be held from 10 to 12 December 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland and the second in 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia.

The UN General Assembly recommended in 2001 and 2002 that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (Prep-Com) that would define the agenda of the Summit, decide on the modalities of the participation of other stakeholders in the Summit, and finalize both a draft Declaration and a draft plan of action. It invited the ITU to assume the leading managerial role in the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and requested Governments to participate actively in its preparatory process and to be represented in the Summit at the highest possible level. It aims to bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of

United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society in a single high-level event.

The Summit offers a unique opportunity for the global community to reflect, discuss and give shape to our common destiny in an era when countries and peoples are interconnected as never before. It is a challenging mission for multilateral diplomacy.

During all preparatory meetings both diplomats and experts in IT noted that the global Information Society is evolving with extraordinary rapidity. The accelerating convergence between telecommunications, broadcasting multimedia and information and communication technologies is driving new products and services, as well as ways of conducting business and trade. Commercial, social and professional opportunities are really exploding, as new markets open to competition, to foreign investment and participation. The modern world is undergoing a fundamental transformation.

The industrial society that marked the 20th century gives way to the Information Society of the 21st century. This dynamic process prompted by globalization promises radical changes in all aspects of our lives, including knowledge dissemination, social interaction, economic and business practices, political engagement, diplomacy, media, education, health, leisure and entertainment.

It is nearly a platitude to assert that we are in the midst of the greatest revolution that humanity has ever experienced. To benefit the world community, the successful and continued growth of this new dynamics requires global discussions and fruitful global negotiations. The WSIS will provide a unique opportunity for all key stakeholders to assemble at a high-level gathering and to develop a better understanding of this revolution and its impact on the international community.

The anticipated outcome of the Summit is to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the Information Society, while fully reflecting all the different interests at stake. The scope and nature of this ambitious project will require partnerships with public and private entities, and such partnerships will be actively sought. A High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) has been established under the patronage of Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General. Its purpose is to coordinate the efforts of the United Nations family in the preparation, organization and holding of WSIS.

To help provide a forum to facilitate the media's input into the summit, the UN Department of Public Information is organising, in conjunction with the major broadcasting associations, and the government of Switzerland, a World

Electronic Media Forum in Geneva in December 2003, immediately preceding the Summit, on the subject of the world media in the information society.(4)

In their pursuit of the public interest, governments can raise awareness, facilitate access to information for the public, and can lay the foundations for all citizens to benefit from Information and Communication Technologies in terms of improved quality of life, social services and economic growth. The private sector will play an active role, in conjunction with governments and civil society, by offering an economically viable model to achieve the development objectives on the world agenda. The contribution of the private sector is instrumental in creating the material conditions for universal access to information and value-added ICT services.

Civil society is playing an active role in identifying the social and cultural consequences of current trends and in drawing attention to the need to introduce democratic accountability on the strategic options taken at all levels. Its diversity and, often, hands-on approach to issues, make civil society a key player in the renewed international partnership called for by the UN Secretary-General.

The UN family of organizations serves as a catalyst for change by bringing together governments, the private sector, international institutions and civil society in pursuit of common

goals. Regional preparatory conferences have been scheduled under UN auspices for each of the regions of the world.

Diplomacy is facing challenging tasks. An estimated 1.3 billion people in the world subsist on less than a dollar a day. The most striking global divide of today is that of information inequality. It was reminded that in Manhattan alone there are more Internet links than in the whole continent of Africa. On other continents the situation is much better. In 2001 Asia and the Pacific emerged as the top Internet region by number of users and Chinese language sites show the fastest growth(5). Europe also offers a promising example.

2. European Contributions

We will deal with two main "cases" relevant from the diplomatic point of view: the Pan-European Regional Ministerial Conference, based on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) membership, which took place in Bucharest, from 7 to 9 November 2002 and the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, held in Tokyo from 13 to 15 January 2003.

The Conference in Bucharest focused on issues of relevance for the region, while keeping the balance between regional specificity and global dimension. It aimed at adopting a common action plan in the field of

communications and information technology. It offered an opportunity for presenting national strategies, achievements and challenges meant to facilitate an accurate view of the stage in the transition process to the information society, as well as an occasion to develop a platform for dialogue that includes all major stakeholders.

At the Bucharest Conference over 1500 persons representatives of Governments (ministries, governmental agencies, public administration units etc.) and international organizations, private sector and civil society from the 55 member countries of the UN/ECE have participated.(6)

During several parallel events, round tables, thematic debates, workshops and forums a number of practical issues have been considered, such as: Youth as users and creators in the Information Society; Building a gender sensitive Information Society; e-Government; Defining the Information society; e-Inclusion; Quality of life in the Information Society; Creating an attractive environment for investments in the Information Society; Designing new patterns for interaction; The role of mass media in promoting the Information Society; The role of new technologies in developing the Information Society; Better Government, Digital Cities and Innovation in the Context of Knowledge Society; Data Protection and Information Society.

On 9 November 2002, the Conference adopted the Bucharest Declaration entitled Towards an Information Society: Principles, Strategy and Priorities for Action. The document starts with an agreed set of ideas formulated as a Vision of an Information Society beneficial to all (E-inclusion). The principles are the following: securing access to information and knowledge; promoting universal access at affordable cost; promoting linguistic diversity and cultural identity; setting up an enabling environment, including legal, regulatory and policy frameworks; building confidence and security in the use of ICTs; addressing global issues.(7)

The European vision reflects an aspiration according to which all persons, without distinction of any kind, exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The Information Society offers great potential in promoting sustainable development, democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance. There is also a need for a people - centered approach, one that emphasizes social, cultural, economic and governance goals. This approach must ensure that the

knowledge and experience of citizens is integrated into this process as the driving force behind the new information society.

The Information Society is based on broad dissemination and sharing of information and genuine participation of governments, private sector and civil society. Their contribution is vital in the efforts to bring full benefits of the Information Society to all. Governments and other stakeholders should also provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge, as well as equal opportunities as participants and decision-makers in all aspects, related to the shaping of ICT policies and frameworks.

The fundamental principles proclaimed in the Declaration aim at defining the main directions for e-strategies for developing an Information Society.

International policy dialogue on Information Society at global, regional and sub-regional levels should promote the exchange of experience, the identification and application of compatible norms and standards, the transfer of know-how and the provision of technical assistance with a view to bridging capacity gaps and setting up cooperation programmes, in particular in the field of creation of content. Sharing success stories and best practice experiences from all continents

will also pave the way for new forms of collaboration.

3. Asian-Pacific Contributions

In November 2002, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific(ESCAP) and the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) organized the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference "E-commerce Strategies for Development" at which ministers and other delegates responsible for the development of information and communication technology and e-commerce issued a declaration that recognized that urgent action was needed to narrow the gap between countries in e-commerce capacities and ICT infrastructure. This forum resolved to strengthen cooperation and commitment to promote access to ICTs and to enhance e-commerce activities. It addressed an invitation to the WSIS and its preparatory process to build a concrete plan of action to facilitate the access by all 62 ESCAP members and associate members to global telecommunication and information infrastructure and to technology.(8)

In the same context, ESCAP organized a series of capacity building workshops and meetings on "gender and ICT" and made specific policy recommendations relating to education and training.

New challenges to the region have not been ignored. Cybercrime, which has evolved from offences such as forgery, fraud and child pornography, to encompass threats to critical infrastructure and the use of the Internet for terrorist activity, was on the agenda of several ESCAP meetings. Cybercrime is a global threat that transcends national borders and requires cooperative, proactive approaches in support of the less-developed countries of the region. The Asia-Pacific Conference on Cybercrime and Information Security held in November 2002 developed a pragmatic vision, endorsed a set of guiding principles and an action plan framework with specific goals that are already helping to build consensus on the practical measures needed at the national and regional levels to fight cybercrime.

Yet, while the benefits of the information society have been largely confined to the industrialized world, the developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and especially the least developed, land locked and island developing countries, as well as the economies in transition, are greatly affected by the digital divide. Therefore, ESCAP is interested to extend its cooperation with other international and regional organizations and institutions in supporting member countries of its area to overcome existing gaps.

In this spirit, representatives of the governments of 47 countries, 22 international organizations, 54 private sector entities and 116 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of the Asia-Pacific region gathered at the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, held in Tokyo from 13 to 15 January 2003, to develop a shared vision and common strategies for the Information Society. The objective of the conference was to discuss how best to work together to contribute to the region's transition to an effective Information Society. ESCAP was a co-organizer of the Conference with the Government of Japan.

The Conference re-emphasized the important role that ICTs can play in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, which describe a fundamental set of principles and guidelines for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality.

An Information Society is one in which highly-developed ICT networks can help people achieve their potential, promote sustainable economic and social development, improve quality of life for all and facilitate participatory decision-making processes. With this interpretation, the Information Society in the Asia-Pacific is expected to become a driving force for the promotion of sustainable economic and technological development by enlarging the gross national product (GNP) through increased technological innovation and

continuous research and development through robust economic growth.

The participants in the Tokyo Conference agreed about the necessity to enhance the sharing and strengthening of global knowledge for development by ensuring equitable access to information for educational, scientific, economic, social, political and cultural activities, leading to a vibrant public domain of information. They came to a consensus view on the need to preserve the rich and diverse cultural heritage and social values of the Asia-Pacific region in the information age.

How can information and communication technologies help in meeting one of the UN Millennium Development Goal targets of halving absolute poverty by the year 2015? This is a fundamental question to which the Tokyo Conference contributed with valid answers. It was the culmination of the efforts of various international organizations and conferences. By its results, it represented a new point of departure for future innovative actions able to create a better future in the area of Asia and the Pacific.

4. Towards a World Consensus

Prep-Com-2 of the WSIS, convened in Geneva in February 2003, attracted 1,535 participants of which 887 were from UN Member States, 390 from civil society and non-governmental organizations, 59 from the business sector, and 24 from the United Nations and specialized agencies.(9)

As a result of intensive negotiations a Draft Declaration of Principles was elaborated and released in Geneva on 21 March 2003. The document gives expression to a potential consensus reflected by common desire and commitment to build a new kind of Information Society, premised on the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.(10)

In the Draft Declaration to be adopted in December 2003 by the WSIS, knowledge, information and communication are considered to be at the core of human progress. However, in a realistic spirit, it is recognized that the information and communication revolution is still in its infancy, and the untapped potential of ICTs to improve productivity and quality of life is a serious issue for all. In spite of these difficulties, individual and collective ability to create and share knowledge has become a driving force in shaping the future, and concrete action and global commitment are now required to ensure that these new technologies accelerate the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals. The new challenges require new forms of solidarity and cooperation.

In conformity with its basic philosophy, the Information Society should be people-centered, as emphasized during the Bucharest Conference, with citizens and communities at its core, and be at the service of humankind. It should be an environment where information and knowledge are disseminated and utilized by all sectors of the population, for their economic, social, cultural and political development.

The essential requirements of an equitable Information Society include inter alia: the respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms; the commitment to democracy and good governance, as well as the existence, in accordance with the legal system of each country, of independent, pluralistic and free mass and other communication media in their various forms, as an important means of fostering public information, societal development and social cohesion; the adherence to international undertakings with respect to peace and security, sustainable development, equality, solidarity, tolerance, human dignity, economic progress, and the protection of the environment.

Emphasis was also put on some other relevant aspects such as: the necessity of an environment that inspires confidence and trust in using ICTs, and ensures security of networks and information, in particular the protection of privacy; ensuring the adequate development of human capacity in order to be able to fully exploit the benefits that ICTs offer and building public awareness on the capabilities of ICTs to improve the lives of people by circumventing traditional obstacles like distance and time.

In addition, many participants referred to the topicality of nurturing of creativity and support for the flourishing of a free flow of a multiplicity of ideas from a diversity of sources, while recognizing cultural identity in all its variety, linguistic diversity, and multilingualism, as well as the need for creating favorable conditions meant to encourage the production, processing, dissemination and protection of local content.

At universal level, the Information Society must serve the interests of all nations, in a manner that secures the fair, balanced and harmonious development of all the peoples. Most particularly, the interests of the developing and least developed countries (LDCs), Smaller Islands Developing States (SIDS), economies in transition and post-conflict countries, should be addressed, taking into account the unique geographic features and demographic diversity of nations and regions.

The Information Society must be oriented towards eliminating existing socio-economic differences, averting the emergence of new forms of

exclusion and becoming a positive force for all by helping to reduce the disparities between and within countries.

Empowerment and inclusion are fundamental characteristics and objectives of the Information Society. Accordingly, special attention must be paid to: the marginalized, including migrants and refugees, unemployed, underprivileged and disenfranchised peoples; the vulnerable, in particular children and the elderly, the disabled, and those with special needs, as well as indigenous peoples and communities.

While being aware that young people constitute the majority of the world's population, and are leading creators and adopters of ICTs, in practice many of them, especially those in developing countries, remain disadvantaged and disconnected. Consequently, more and special attention must be given to empower young people as learners, the future work-force, and citizens with special needs.

In a more general context, cyberspace must be subject to universally held ethical values such as truth, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human dignity, shared responsibility and accountability. All actors in the Information Society must seek to promote the common good and to prevent abusive uses of ICTs.

If the Information Society is intrinsically global in nature, a policy dialogue based on global trends must take place at global, regional and sub-regional levels in order to facilitate: the provision of technical assistance aimed at national and regional capacity-building for the maintenance and reinforcement of regional and international cooperation; technology transfer; the sharing of experiences; the sharing of knowledge; and the development of compatible regulations and standards that respect national characteristics and concerns.

Alongside with governmental contributions, it should be acknowledged that numerous observers present at Prep-Com 2 in Geneva brought significant contributions to the draft Declaration of Principles to be adopted in December 2003 by the WSIS.

The observers cogently reminded that by its very nature, the global Information Society is the society where all peoples of the world shall appear as representing together a unique community and where individuals shall be able, beyond their particular identity, to feel that they are part of this unique community. Building the global Information Society represents the first opportunity given to the international community to imagine and prepare as a whole its own future, which should help at least to narrow existing imperfections, contradictions, and divides.

While adopting a framework for cooperation based on solidarity aiming to enable developing countries to benefit from adequate means to achieve a harmonious social integration and economic development, it should not be forgotten that such a result is the most important factor that could ensure security and stability. Therefore, it is suggested that the final text of the Declaration should include provisions dealing with: safe and healthy, secure and fair working conditions; human dignity, human rights and world peace; global solidarity to redress social and geographic inequities.

There is no doubt that an inclusive and sustainable society can only develop when knowledge is clearly considered a common good and when the principle of access *to* and the free flow *of* information can come to reality.

On the other hand, due to the heterogeneity of the interests and to the diversity of the underlying cultures and values,it is almost unavoidable that conflicts will permanently occur. These conflicts should not be solved on the basis of political power, but by negotiations and other peaceful means, in conformity with an ethical-based discourse.

Any ethical approach must respect heterogeneous interests and cultures and must build reliable partnerships between governments, private sector, and civil society. Ethical dimensions of ICTs must include the need to guarantee the respect of personal privacy and of human dignity, particularly in the context of growing invasive information technologies, surveillance systems and "information awareness".

5. Developing A Global Digital Solidarity

In the framework of legal and ethical debates and negotiations at the informal meeting in Geneva dedicated to the preparation of the WSIS, in September 2002, the European Union stated inter alia:

*"One of the major outcomes of the Summit should be a "shared vision of the future" or a list of the guiding principles for the information society. Among such principles we would see: human rights and human development, universal access to information and knowledge, promoting economic growth and social cohesion and communication for all at affordable costs, priority for linguistic diversity and cultural identity, data protection and security, **prevalence of the international solidarity** and co-operation, and an inclusive and participative society."(11) (emphasis added)*

It would be challenging to see solidarity finally reflected in the WSIS documents to be adopted, having in

mind the idea that the Information Society is built on the assumption that solidarity may be globalized.

In the address made by Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, at Prep-Com 2 of the WSIS, it was cogently emphasized that according to the way in which North-South relations develop, the digital divide can be seen as a glass that is half full or half empty. The understanding of that divide must fuel the inevitable conclusion that it serves to reduce opportunities, exacerbate intellectual and economic poverty and, above all, drive a wedge between cultures and civilizations. Yet, our planet is in need of cohesion in diversity and of mutual comprehension and respect

It is within this context that the concept of **digital solidarity** was put before the Prep-Com. The appeal was made to adhere to a common notion, starting from the objective existence of the digital divide. In practical terms, digital solidarity might consist, for example, in stating that any country whose rate of Internet usage was higher than a certain level should engage in a specified, quantified action for the benefit of countries where the rate is lower than a given level. The ITU could then establish the various statistical ranges and coordinate such actions with governments and the private sector.(12)

It has been cogently recalled that unlike the French Revolution, the information revolution is a revolution with lots of liberty, some fraternity, but no equality.(13) Fraternity is the Christian name of solidarity. Promoting digital solidarity is a very complex task. Therefore, in order to make the idea more understandable , it was suggested that one could imagine a digital snake fluctuating between a lower and an upper limit. The joint effort would then be focused on ensuring that all countries were within the snake. The snake would evolve through time and the fluctuation amplitude would narrow, ultimately causing the digital divide to disappear.

What should be the next step? This process could be enshrined in the Charter on digital solidarity to be signed by all States having signified their adherence.

It is necessary to remind that this suggestion was not advanced on an empty field. It was specifically linked with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which offers a framework within which the concept of digital solidarity could succeed. This principle should, within the framework of NEPAD, make for balanced access to the planet's abundant technological resources.

However, digital solidarity cannot be limited to a North-South exchange. The South has demonstrated its ability, under certain conditions, to serve as an example of successful digital emergence. The example of India

was quoted to inspire leaders from the South, as that country had succeeded in the space of a few years in transforming itself into a veritable technological power, thereby positioning its people as a major player in the Information Society.

Solidarity is considered to be social power in its final, most perfect state. It refers to the condition in which a group of people view each other as cherished partners in achieving a common goal. There are reasons to believe that solidarity should be addressed as a universal concept and should become a universal value.(14) *The humanistic concept of Opus Solidaritatis Pax (Peace is the fruit of solidarity), developed by the Holy See, is fully applicable in our globalizing world.(15)*

In its practical manifestations solidarity connotes protection and security. A family, a village, a tribe, a nation requires the solidarity of its members to survive, to ensure its safety from outside predators, to secure its welfare. This implies specific forms of organization. In an elementary sense, solidarity is the most fundamental social requirement and there is no society without solidarity.

Solidarity with future generations, the transmission to the young people of both social values and a hospitable physical milieu have to be a central preoccupation. The proposal made in the United Nations to include in every important negotiation and debate a person appointed to represent the interests of future generations might be worth considering.

Solidarity has a strong emotional appeal , fostering political leadership. It may become a mobilizing force for a number of noble causes. Young people have a particular capacity to experience solidarity, to express the joy of giving , the satisfaction of being human with other humans and the capacity for permanent learning. The words of Socrates are quite relevant: "There is only one good, knowledge; and only one evil, ignorance."(16) This is a conviction shared more and more by the younger generation at global level.

Can diplomacy contribute to making digital solidarity a tangible reality? By the simplest definition, diplomacy is the point of contact between two or more States. Its action is through dialogue, known as negotiation. What is negotiation? Negotiation is having discussions and bargaining with the other party until common ground and mutually acceptable solutions are found. It requires properly explaining one's position and trying to understand what the other wants, so that concessions can be balanced. Negotiating is overcoming contradictions by an effort of imagination- a key to success in any field, including the Information Society.

With the development of international relations, the number of

issues requiring negotiation increases all the time. Missions to international organisations and delegations to international conferences are frequently relieved from the classic roles of diplomacy and become original "negotiating machines", completely dedicated to this task in numerous institutions and gatherings: councils, assemblies, committees and working groups, both official and unofficial.

The practice of diplomacy in general and of the multilateral one in particular will be revolutionized by the vast problematic emerging from the Information Society: telecommunications, intellectual property rights, censorship. While technology will change the world, diplomacy has good chances to remain the same recognizable business of communication and compromise it has always been. Yet, the players in the international system will gradually modify their conduct, while remaining loyal to their fundamental interests.

The continued dominance of States can be presumed for the future, as well as their capacity to retool themselves as providers in the new information economy. In realistic terms, there will be no global epiphany, no descent into uncontrollable anarchy, but the nature of diplomacy must continuously adapt itself to a new global system, with some new rules and some new players reshaped by the irreversible process of globalization. (17)

In this regard it is appropriate to recall *that Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, has frequently argued that the principal challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization is inclusive and becomes a positive force for all the world's peoples, instead of leaving millions behind in poverty and squalor.* (18)

In a programmatic document issued by the White House in September 2002 there is an explicit pledge to "make freedom and the development of democratic institutions key themes in our bilateral relations, seeking **solidarity** and cooperation from other democracies ….."(19) This is very important for the recognition of solidarity as a fundamental value for international relations in the current century.

Peace-loving countries share the belief that together they can make the world a better place. Through diplomacy and solidarity they can change the existing world politics. The Information Society may be instrumental in that regard. But to fulfill its tasks properly it has to be based on the ethics of science, civic responsibility, democracy, development and peace.

The WSIS will, certainly, strengthen a broad conviction not to accept the transformation of the Internet, the communications networks, and the mass media into vehicles for the

dissemination of hatred, religious fanaticism, xenophobia, and racism, or into tools serving international terrorism, violence and organized crime structures. On the contrary, through tenacious efforts, using the tools of multilateral diplomacy, the WSIS can bring an efficient contribution to giving tangibility to fundamental values and articulating them to the unprecedented requirements of the Information Society.

Diplomacy will not be condemned to irrelevancy, but will be more and more demanded to perform its functions in a manner conducive to the attainment of global aspirations of all peoples. Accessibility, inclusiveness, flexibility, and connectivity will become watchwords of a new "digital" diplomacy emerging during the Information Society.

This new diplomacy will recognize that old structures and habits are no longer sufficient to engage and lead in the Information Society.(20) It must cope with the emergence of a universal civilization in which the Information Society is expected to bring its strong lights.

References

1. See the inspiring address of Shashi Tharoor, UN Under-Secretary-General for communications and public information, delivered on May 28 2003 at the Conference of the Information and broadcasting ministers from around the Asia-Pacific region which met in Bangkok on May 28 2003. The address was published under the title **Bridging the broad divide** by **Bangkok Post** on 30 May 2003.

2. See **The Nation**, July 14, 2003, Editorial: **Diplomats needed for economic talks.**

3. See www.egov.unitar.org/spip/article.php3?id_article=49 retrieved on July 10 2003. See also G.S. Smith, "Driving diplomacy into cyberspace," **The World Today**, June 1997; p.156; G.S Smith, "Reinventing diplomacy: a virtual necessity," United States Institute of Peace, **Virtual Diplomacy Series** no. 6, February 2000.

4. See note 1 supra. An interesting recent example at non-governmental level is offered by the academic conference **hosted by Siam University on 21-23 July 2003 officially entitled** AUAP-IAUP-APHEIT-APDMEN

International Conference on ICT and Higher Education for the New Economy: Building a Sustainable Knowledge Society. E-Governance.

5. See note 1 supra.

6. For the Bucharest Conference see www.wsis-romania.ro home page, and then look for the detailed information needed.

7. The full text of the Bucharest Declaration is available at www.wsis-romania.ro.

8. All ESCAP activities in the field of information are reflected in materials available at http://www.unescap.org/icstd/index.asp retrieved on 4-5 July 2003.

9. All basic documents about the preparation of the WSIS and related events are available and periodically updated at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/documents_Documents_PrepCom1.html

10. The full version of the draft Declaration can be consulted at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/index.asp

11. The participation in the preparatory process and the specific contributions of the European Union to the WSIS are accessible at

http://www.europa.eu.int/index_en.htm visited on 25 June 2003.

12. The address of the President of Senegal is available in its full version at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/index.asp

13. See note 1 supra. See also W. H. Reinecke, **Global public policy: governing without government?** Washington DC, Brookings, 1998. Also, by the same author, "The other world wide web: global public policy networks," **Foreign Policy**, 117, 1999-2000; pp. 44-57.

14. For an interesting presentation of solidarity from a diplomatic and universal point of view see www.um.dk/udenrigspolitik/copenhagenseminars/building_world/ retrieved on 15 June 2003

15. The motto of the present pontificate could be phrased as **OPUS SOLIDARITATIS PAX**: Peace is the fruit of solidarity. See in that regard www.lilt.ilstu.edu/jguegu/social.doc visited on 5 July 2003.

16. The quotation from Socrates is extracted from www.un.org/Docs/SG/quotable/6756.htm retrieved on June 5 2003.

17. For the adaptation of diplomacy to the requirements of the information age see inter alia: M. Leonard & V. Alakeson, **Going public: diplomacy for the information society**, London, Foreign Policy Centre, 2000. Center for Strategic and International Studies, **Reinventing diplomacy in the information age**, CSIS, Washington DC, 1998; pp. 94-8. B. Hocking, "Catalytic diplomacy: beyond 'newness' and 'decline'" in J. Melissen (ed.), **Innovation in Diplomatic Practice**, Houndsmills, Macmillan 1999.

18. See among various addresses: Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, made a fervent call for an `**inclusive**' **globalization** in an address to the Yale University, New Haven. www.southcentre.org/info/southbulletin/bulletin44/bulletin44-02.htm

19. The quotation is from **The National Security Strategy of the United States of America** available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html visited on 10 July 2003.

20. See **Toward a New Digital Diplomacy: Information Technology and US.** available at

www.cisp.org/imp/may_99/05_99moran.htm, retrieved on July 3 2003.