
Summary of the discussion

Introduction

1. **The IGF Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation (PNIF)** was set up to address the question of Internet Fragmentation, to raise awareness of actions and measures that risk fragmenting the Internet, and to facilitate discussion on what could be done to avoid fragmentation. To support a holistic dialogue on fragmentation, the PNIF developed its [PNIF Framework for discussing fragmentation](#) that differentiates between fragmentation of the Internet *User experience*, fragmentation of Internet *Governance and coordination*, fragmentation of the Internet's *Technical Layer*, and technical, political and commercial developments that may have an impact on fragmentation. In its 2025 cycle, the PNIF continues supporting the multistakeholder dialogue and monitors progress on the GDC commitment to avoid and address fragmentation ([GDC, art. 29, c](#)), well aware of the ongoing WSIS+20 review. More on the PNIF, including past meeting summaries, is available on the [PNIF webpage](#).
2. **The 30 September PNIF meeting** focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholder groups in Internet governance and aims to gather concrete suggestions on how each group can contribute to maintaining an unfragmented, open and interoperable Internet. The [WSIS Zero Draft](#) reaffirms *that effective Internet governance must preserve the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure nature of the Internet, and reject models of state-controlled or fragmented Internet architectures*.

Opening statements

3. *Constance Bommelaer de Leusse* stressed the importance of respecting the mechanism and balance of power that is embedded in the multistakeholder approach:
 - Governments should provide enabling policy frameworks, protecting human rights, competition, and innovation in the digital space, and refrain from imposing excessive national controls that could fragment the Internet.

- Private sector actors need to innovate in a responsible fashion, participate in the development of interoperable standards, and develop open economic and business ecosystems that allow user choice.
- Civil society needs to advocate for human rights online.
- The Technical community has to safeguard the infrastructure stability and interoperability, and needs to engage with policy makers to provide expert knowledge and avoid decisions that endanger this stability and interoperability.
- International fora and organisations should maintain their function as spaces for conversation.

The Tunis Agenda is clear about the unique role of each stakeholder group and it is recommended to stick to its original language.

4. *Renata Mielli* emphasised that discussions on global challenges related to the Internet, digital processes, and their governance, must take into account the profound technological transformations, the high levels of economic concentration, and their political impacts and consequences. Stakeholders should work to preserve the Internet's logical layer and avoid fragmentation, while also addressing challenges to safeguard human rights and democratic processes.

To keep the Internet globally connected and diverse, stakeholder groups have to work together with a shared vision that places the collective interest of the users at the center. The multistakeholder model is key to preserving an open Internet and needs to be strengthened. The [Sao Paulo Multistakeholder guidelines](#) offer a path to follow for stakeholder collaboration, consensus building, and decision making.

The multistakeholder and multilateral processes are complementary. Stakeholders should contribute their respective expertise to the governance spaces, maintain an open perspective, and pursue concrete and actionable outcomes that are in the best interest of users and society. Governments and the private sector should recognise civil society, academia, and the technical community as important partners. Spaces like the IGF, NRIs, are extremely important for stakeholders to understand each other's positions.

The Zero Draft addresses concerns about potential tensions and fragmentation within the global Internet governance space, a lack of alignment, and duplication of efforts in the GDC implementation. It would benefit from more precision regarding how to enhance a greater integration among governance bodies and events.

5. *Theresa Swinehart* noted that after the WSIS+20 review is concluded, there will be other international negotiations on issues that may impact the Internet and Internet fragmentation. As one does not know what technology will look like tomorrow, it is relevant that much of the language used throughout the WSIS process is technology neutral, and not

embedded in one or another type of technology. The multistakeholder model has demonstrated its ability to evolve with the Internet, with efforts made to strengthen it in the various processes and institutions. It has become clear that making good policy relies on the involvement of the different stakeholders, and that fragmentation disrupting the seamless communication or utilisation of the infrastructure may also be caused by non-technical forms of fragmentation.

The various stakeholder groups have their responsibilities, and nothing should occur in a silo. Work ICANN is involved in, such as the introduction of Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs), Universal Acceptance (UA), or the community engagement on GDPR, NIS-2, or DNS abuse, demonstrate that cooperation leads to success.

Emerging technologies and emerging players need to be encouraged to engage and participate, and the multistakeholder model should not be taken for granted. Lack of coordination and inclusiveness (= allowing for a seat at the table) are key risk factors - and not slowness. Stakeholders must be cognisant, proactively engage, and welcome others into the conversation. Communication, engagement, and understanding that a decision can have implications and unintended consequences at various layers or areas of work is extremely important. For example, a decision in the healthcare sector may have an impact on work being done on DNS-abuse, or vice-versa. All aspects of society rely on the Internet for different purposes, but none of these operates in a silo.

6. *Peter Koch* identified the governance of the Internet, the governance on the Internet, and the Internet governance space itself as three main areas where fragmentation may occur. The Internet fragments at the lower layer ('names, numbers, and protocols') when governments impose shutdowns or when incompatible alternative or competing technologies are introduced. Fragmentation on the content layers occurs in all kinds of situations when not everyone can access all online content or communicate with everyone online. Of particular concern are attempts to address issues at the upper (content) layer through measures at the lower layer (e.g., through domain or IP blocking). Fragmentation of the governance space occurs when issues and measures discussed in parallel or competing fora that do not connect or coordinate.

A clear understanding of the Internet technical community, defined as the people and entities that have the strategic and operational responsibility for planning and managing core Internet infrastructure (the 'names, numbers, and protocols') is essential when discussing stakeholder roles and responsibilities. Communication, expectation management, trust building, and proactive engagement with governments and other stakeholders are an important part of the technical community's task, both in the global and local context (for example by participating in discussions at NRIs).

Discussion

7. During the discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Whether the strict definition of the technical community should be revised or broadened to include those responsible for technologies that intersect with the Internet (such as AI and data governance specialists), and if not, where these people and organisations fit in the WSIS stakeholder group categorisation.
- It was noted that the definitions of the stakeholder groups should be comprehensive so that everyone falls into a stakeholder group and no one is excluded, and that each stakeholder group carries a responsibility towards the overall multistakeholder system to ensure that the relevant people are brought into the discussions.
- The digital ecosystem is alive and evolving. During WSIS, the Internet's technical community identified itself, because of the specific Internet infrastructure it is running. Today, international intergovernmental bodies and spaces are being established to address issues related to AI. It is fundamental that these multistakeholder, they need the power of the industry, the legitimacy of the civil society, and the participation of some sort of technical community.
- Key issue is ensuring that there is a seat at the table where issues are discussed that impact the area one is working on, passionate about, or engaged in.
- AI has a technical, as well as a governmental, civil society, and private sector component.
- The technical community must accept that governments and civil society have legitimate concerns regarding the protection of the Internet users, and should be open to discuss new technical solutions to address these concerns. Likewise, policy makers must understand that policies, to be effective, must be technically feasible and avoid causing negative impact or doing more harm than good.
- The categorisation into stakeholder groups is a tool to ensure that the right people are at the table, and is not a mechanism for exclusion.
- The boundaries between stakeholder groups are not sharp and sometimes overlap. A single voice cannot represent a full stakeholder group, and who should sit at the table depends on what the actual policy question is.
- Solving an issue in the online environment is not necessarily the same as addressing it in the offline environment. The role a stakeholder group plays in the offline world may differ from the role it can play in the online environment.
- There is a tendency to seek technological fixes for every problem, but society will never be perfect. This creates an opportunity to involve other sectors, such as environment, education, health, in digital governance and multistakeholder discussions.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all participants to the meeting and the panellists-discussant **Ms Constance Bommelaer de Leuse**, Executive Director, AI & Society Institute, University of ENS-PSL; Tech and Global Affairs Innovation Hub, University of Sciences Po, **Ms Theresa Swinehart**, Senior Vice President of Global Domains and Strategy, ICANN, **Ms Renata Mielli**, Coordinator NIC.BR, **Mr Peter Kock**, Senior Policy Advisor, DENIC eG, The PNIF is coordinated by **Ms Tereza Horejsova**, MAG member, PNIF co-facilitator, **Ms Sheetal Kumar**, PNIF co-facilitator, **Ms Bruna Martins dos Santos**, PNIF co-facilitator, **Mr Wim Degezelle**, Consultant PNIF, IGF Secretariat.

Links

[Session recording](#)

[PNIF webpage](#)
