

## **Comments on the report of the UNSG's High Level panel on Digital Cooperation.**

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The UN report on digital interdependence is timely and highly relevant. Technology is fast developing and entails different intertwined consequences – of positive or negative nature. On the one hand, we experience the benefits of the Internet and its public service value in our everyday life, professional endeavours and future plans while on the other we face diverse challenges and risks that can affect human rights to a various degree and hamper individuals' full-fledged inclusion in the digital society. The ambiguous role of the new information and communication technologies require their careful following, studying and counteracting the harms that can impinge on the foundation of human life.

We support the idea of the report that the direction societies will go to is crucial. The crux of this direction is shall we preserve the humanistic principles and complexion of our society or allow technical approaches and artificial intelligence to dominate over human beings. Man should be at the core of the technological revolution and that is why we speak about a human centred reality the backbone of which is the human centred Internet. The problem is how to achieve and sustain a human centred technological revolution and Internet in particular. It is a huge project that requires coordinated efforts of different players.

One conspicuous trend of modern technological development and Internet is their great dynamism. We witness that technologies are moving faster than social reaction. Technology is factually changing the social reality we are immersed in and responses to consequences are often delayed. In this respect what our societies need is a common ground for action. The UN report states the principles that can ensure this common ground and may serve as a basis to address the diverse impacts of digital technologies "in order to maximize their benefits and minimize their harms". At the core of this approach is cooperation. In its report UN tries to put forward a new meaning of cooperation that reflects novel situation. Thus it wishes to create a common playing field for all states, societies, communities and individuals in the digital age, to achieve equality of opportunities, to stop fragmentation, increase digital dividends and cope effectively with digital divides of all sorts. It is an ambitious strategy, more visionary than real at the moment, but it leads us in the right direction. The point about individuals' inclusion and participation is of extreme importance here - individuals with their knowledge, capacity and skills are fundamental in driving the process forward and no one should be left behind.

The definition of cooperation we consider the first step towards the realization of this vast global strategy that should be followed by other steps. Such definition should reflect complex development and be understood a living one and amended from time to time. The definition should also underline the goals that should be pursued at a given stage. At this point we would suggest better differentiation to be made between multilateralism and multistakeholderism, what is their genuine value and how they relate to cooperation. It will not be redundant definitions of multistakeholderism and multilateralism, even preliminary and open like the one about cooperation, to be included to serve as guidance for

states and entities especially in CEE where in my view such notions remain hollow words only. CEE societies need also guidance how practically to implement cooperation, multilateralism and multistakeholderism in digital conditions. We wonder whether multidisciplinary can be clarified and included among the principles and approaches for action. In addition we would suggest these principles to be elucidated and to be demonstrated how they fit within different areas – digital economy, institutional organization, human rights and human capital, etc.

Another point we wish to raise is about the organizational mechanisms that can assure advanced cooperation. Improvement and better concretization of these mechanisms need (theoretical and practical) efforts on the basis of multistakeholderism, multilateralism and multidisciplinary. It is worth to be added that all countries are not equally active in the international processes. I would say that there are states that only nominally take part in international fora without any added value. Special organizational tools for better inclusion and substantial work should be envisaged. Our opinion is that mechanisms are sketched in the report only and necessitate further elaboration. We consider international fora on IG and other related issues as high profile diplomatic events but they should be imbued with real activities. There have to be not minutes, messages or communications as an outcome of these meetings but action plans with clearcut deadlines. Participation of developing and new democratic societies should become more meaningful. Renowned intellectuals and committed individuals from various countries and with different backgrounds can also invigorate these events. They can state their specific perspective and share valuable experience. If individuals are at the core, let us give opportunities to individuals to spread ideas that can bring cooperation activities forward. There should be follow up events and what is of utmost significance predominantly at a local level. Global fora seem to be too far away from regional and local life. Besides at such meetings some states are active while others are passive – how can we make silent states speak up? How can we understand the difficulties they face? Another problem is that states tend to be selective and announce positive results at the expense of real hurdles at high level events, often they are not completely honest about the situation in their countries – how can international community be aware of the different circumstances in various societies, give advice and help them? These are some of the topics that novel cooperation mechanisms should tackle.

Another issue we would stress is about the role of the third sector. Non- governmental organizations can make their own valuable contribution to international cooperation. Their activities could also be a corrective to the measures taken by states. We would support more thorough direct involvement of NGOs, local NGOs in particular, that can provide a bottom up perspective and assure the fragile link between the international high level cooperation and local endeavours. Various projects and their pursuits are intermingled with the efforts of the third sector. There should be a better understanding what these projects have achieved and how international cooperation can benefit of their results. We would suggest a special site to be created where information about projects and initiatives at various levels and of different scope can be found. Information is very much fragmented and dispersed on the net at the time being. Such step can underpin political efforts towards better cooperation and boost media literacy. In the same vein we would propose also as an evolving project a glossary of digital cooperation in the age of interdependence to be created. It should incorporate different basic terms

through which digital society and its problems can be depicted. Harmonization of actions should go hand in hand with unification of terminology about digital society. We should know in what kind of society we are destined to live in.

This UN report, very much forward looking, should be complemented with another, not less challenging, report. Such report may dwell on the impact of global cooperation in the age of interdependence and interconnectedness on regulation and regulatory instruments that should be put in force at a global and national level. For instance, national regulatory efforts, as we understand, should support and facilitate global cooperation. What we see today is how states unilaterally produce more and more regulation and impose it without any coordination among themselves and this leads to overregulation and serious cross border conflicts. Such approach can be detrimental to our interdependent future. If specific approaches how states can act best under the conditions of digital interdependence are outlined in a report similar to the one we discuss, this can be very helpful to enlighten policy makers and legislators what is appropriate to be done in the digital environment.