

A Tribute To Those Who Made It Happen

Daniel Stauffacher

Ambassador and Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council for the WSIS

When the Swiss Government appointed me to be their chief representative in the hosting process of the WSIS, the project was by no means completely mapped out. Here I pay a personal homage to those who, in my opinion, really helped design the phase 1 and whose contributions were instrumental in forging a fruitful outcome. These are people who I met personally, and collaborated with along the way, so I have chosen to recount our meetings and work chronologically. My goal is also to describe the kind of planning and creative thinking required from the representatives of the host country of a United Nations world summit or of any international conference of political nature.

I heard about the idea of a world summit on the topic of “Information Society” for the first time in Spring 1999, while I was working as Ambassador of Switzerland on the organization of the World Summit for Social Development, a follow-up conference (Copenhagen plus 5) to take place in June 2000 in Geneva. It was there that I met Mr. Mohammed Harbi, Chief of Staff of ITU Secretary General, Pekka Tarjanne and then Yoshio Utsumi. When Mr. Harbi asked me if Switzerland would be interested in becoming a candidate to host the WSIS, I immediately forwarded his inquiry to my Government in Bern. Indeed, Mr. Harbi had participated in laying the foundations for the WSIS concept, formally introduced by Tunisia at the Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis in 1989. Mr. Harbi proceeded to escort and shelter this proposal through the decision-making process of both the ITU and United Nations. He naturally became, after his retirement from the ITU, the first acting Executive Director of the WSIS Executive Secretariat.

Preparations for candidacy

The official response from the Swiss Government came the following year, in August 2000. Marc Furrer and Charlotte Sgier, Deputy Head of International Affairs of the Swiss Federal

Office of Communications (OFCOM) asked me if I would be interested in helping to prepare and manage the application of Switzerland to host the WSIS, and later to participate in its organization. Of course I was honored to accept this challenge. Ms. Sgier ultimately became an instrumental figure as the personal Assistant to Adama Samassékou, the WSIS Prepcom Chairman, and a key staff member of the WSIS Executive Secretariat. The preparation of the Swiss candidacy as WSIS host country would have been utterly impossible without a group of dedicated individuals. These were from my Secretariat, Bruno Romazzotti, Isabelle Caccia, Gabrielle Bucher and André Collomb, the former Deputy Secretary General of the City of Geneva as well as Robert Hensler, the Chancellor, and Jérôme Koechlin, Chief of Protocol of the Canton of Geneva at the time.

During the fall of 2000, we proposed an initial budget to be reviewed by the Swiss Government; in September 2000, I prepared the formal submission to the ITU of the Swiss application for the hosting of the WSIS in Geneva. Then Guy-Olivier Segond, State Councilor of the Canton of Geneva, Swiss Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Francois Nordmann, Ambassador Erwin Hofer in Bern and I embarked on our promotion campaign. We had to convince not only the ITU and other United Nations Agencies in Geneva, Rome and Vienna, but also the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the all-powerful and influential “38th floor” in New York and the Council of ITU to promote Geneva as a host for the WSIS.

Laying the conceptual foundations of the WSIS

In June 2001, as soon as Mr. Utsumi and the ITU Council had taken the decision to hold the WSIS in Geneva and Tunis, I prepared the strategic concept note for the Geneva Summit. This founding document described key success criteria, general prerequisites and implementation conditions as well as management issues and milestones. In October 2001, I presented some of these key elements to the first High-Level Summit Organizing Committee held at the United Nations in New York under the Chairmanship of Mr. Utsumi.

It soon became apparent that the vision and the scope of this Summit were dramatically different from stakeholder to stakeholder: the expectations of the civil society and the business sector were far from those of many Governments and international organizations. This is why we took the crucial step of inviting roughly 45 experts of the Information Society to a two days brainstorming session to reflect on the various aspects, issues and potential content areas of the WSIS.

In organizing this major endeavor, known as the “Coppet Meeting”, I appreciated the full commitment of Art Levin and Mohammed Harbi of the ITU and the great organizational and moderating skills of Hilary Bowker, a former CNN anchor with whom I had worked for

the Social Summit. The famous “flower of Coppet” bloomed there: it was designed as a graphical metaphor showing one core, the Summit, with six petals representing the potential areas of content and side events. The credit for the flower of Coppet belongs to the working group chaired by Ms. Lyndall Shope-Mafole, including among others, Ridha Guellouz, Tunisia, Walter Fust, Head of the Swiss Development Cooperation, and Paul Verhoef of the EU Commission, both initiators of the idea.¹ With Walter Fust, we also further developed the concept of “ICT4D” as an integral part of the side events, by then called the “Summit Events” and coordinated by Bruno Romazzotti of the Swiss Executive Secretariat and Pierre Gagné, Executive Director of the WSIS Executive Secretariat. Gerolf Weigel, from the Swiss Development Cooperation office, with the support of Otto Frei and his team took the lead in implementing the “ICT4D” Platform, thereby contributing significantly to the success of the Geneva Summit.

Connecting to the Summit content

Given the eminent role that UNESCO and the media, both traditional and electronic media, but also schools, universities, libraries and archives have played in shaping the emerging information society – a fact that was confirmed in Coppet – it was clear that the original concept, limited to technical issues such as Internet access, was incomplete.

In fall 2001, I had the chance to recruit Alain Modoux, former Assistant Director-General of UNESCO. His role was to develop the relations with the media and include them in the WSIS process. Upon his recommendation, I invited Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations in Spring 2002 to organize the 2003 World Electronic Media Forum as part of the “Summit Events” of WSIS in December 2003 in Geneva. Abdul Waheed Khan, the present Assistant Director-General of UNESCO – with whom I participated in many regional and thematic preparatory meetings of WSIS – also played a major role in broadening the understanding of the Information Society and defining the conditions and prerequisites to make it happen.

The second element missing in the original concept was the development dimension of the Information Society and its connection with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Therefore, in addition to the ICT for Development Platform with its over 30,000 visitors launched as one of the “Summit Events”, we welcomed the World Bank, represented by Bruno Lanvin with whom the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs organized the Infodev Symposium. The Swedish Ambassador and IT for Development specialist Astrid Dufborg was an ardent defender of the development dimension, along with UNDP

¹ Coppet Diagram “*A Network Series of Events*” at http://www.wsisgeneva2003.org/pdf/Coppet_Diagram.pdf and Coppet Workshop Report at http://www.wsisgeneva2003.org/pdf/coppet_workshop_report.pdf

Administrator Mark Malloch Brown. She also chaired the Prepcom working group on financing of ICT for Development on several occasions.

Shaping an identity and forming an operational team

The evocative logotype of the WSIS, designed by Johann Terretaz from the Geneva agency Twice2, was chosen by ballot by all the staff of both WSIS and Swiss Executive Secretariats. Mohammed Harbi assisted me in selecting the event management company MCI Group. Their team was to become crucial for the organization at the PalExpo site in Geneva: Richard Torriani, the lead manager for logistical planning and preparation also supervised the implementation. He was a fully integrated team member in the Swiss Executive Secretariat (SES) while Roger Tondeur, MCI's CEO was always available and supportive. Also Bruno Lurati, CEO of PalExpo, with his staff, as well as Mr. Lagraña and Ms. Elaine Baron and Patricia Janin from ITU, played an essential role in planning and executing the logistics of the WSIS, which meant to host nearly 50 heads of states, over 11,000 participants and 30,000 visitors to the ICT4D Platform.

Diplomacy at work during the preparatory phases

Soon after the announcement of the selection of Tunis and Geneva summit locations, Mr. Utsumi, Secretary General of the ITU asked me and the Tunisian Ambassador Hatem Ben Salem (now Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs) as well as Minister counselor Mr. Koubaa to launch the diplomatic process in Geneva and New York.

With Mr. Koubaa and Art Levin, we wrote the very first draft of the first General Assembly Resolution regarding WSIS in 2001, and with Mr. Koubaa I co-chaired the informal working group on rules and procedures for the Prepcom and the Summit. I was subsequently elected Chairman of Subcommittee I of the Prepcom in June 2000. With Ambassador Ben Salem, I co-chaired the informal Bureau of the Prepcom from fall 2001 to June 2002. By then, former Minister of Education Adama Samassékou had been elected Chairman of the Prepcom and Ambassador Ben Salem and myself became the Vice-Chairs of the Bureau.

During Prepcom I, I had to chair some of the lengthiest, most difficult and politically sensitive negotiations regarding the rules and procedures on the participation in the WSIS of the Civil Society, the business sector and the international organizations.

I remember Ambassador Bernard Kessedjian from France, Minister Anneli Vuorinen from Finland, Ambassador Sha Zukang from China, Ambassador Pablo Macedo from Mexico (who was also the first Chairman of Subcommittee II dealing with the content of WSIS), US Ambassador David Gross and Dick Beard, Deputy US Coordinator for International

Communications and Information Policy, Counselor Kumar Ramanathan of India and Counselor Roushdy Alaa el Din of Egypt as key actors in designing a globally acceptable solution. Charles Geiger, who became Executive Director of the WSIS Executive Secretariat in the second phase of WSIS, was extremely helpful as Secretary of Subcommittee II along with J  el Desaulles, member of the WSIS Executive Secretariat.

A series of meetings with the Ambassadors and Missions in Geneva was organized with the goal of mobilizing and assisting Governments in preparation of the Prepcom process. Mr. Alain Modoux of my Secretariat took the lead in organizing the first informal information session hosted by the two host countries, Switzerland and Tunisia, in April 2002 to provide the Permanent Missions of Geneva with an overview of the many issues related to the Information Society. We were able to invite such eminent speakers as Elmar Brok, member of the European Parliament, Emanuel N. Ole Kambaine from Tanzania, V. Ranjit Khosla from India and Paul Saffo from the USA.

Aiming high and achieving commitment

The WSIS process was connected to the highest political level of the United Nations in New York and linked to the MDG process thanks to the efforts of the United Nations ICT Task Force, under the leadership of Jos  -Maria Figueres and Sarbuland Khan of DESA. The United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, under whose patronage the Summit was held, created a Steering Group for the WSIS in New York, formed under Deputy-Secretary-General Louise Fr  chette with Nitin Desai, Mark Malloch Brown and Shashi Tharoor. Later on he appointed former Under-Secretary-General Nitin Desai as his Special Representative for WSIS, while the Swiss Government appointed former Swiss President Adolf Ogi and Maurice Strong as his special advisors. The Director-General of United Nations Office in Geneva Sergei Ordzhonikidze also made an invaluable contribution by making available his facilities and his highly qualified staff in the field of protocol, security, information and administration. Thanks to Professor Klaus Schwab, Jose-Maria Figueres and Sarbuland Khan of the United Nations ICT Task Force, we were also able to organize information sessions and discussion groups during the World Economic Forum meetings in New York and Davos. Julianne Lee from the United Nations ICT Task Force Secretariat was seconded to my Secretariat for the organization of the "Presidential Couchepin-Schwab WSIS-Roundtables": these four informal discussion groups brought together, at the beginning of the Summit, forty Heads of State, presidents, CEOs of companies and leaders of international organizations, representatives of universities, of the civil society and of the media.

The forging of the Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action

Drawing a common vision of an emerging information society, accepted by all Governments, and with the support of all stakeholders in the shape of the Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action was not an easy task. This process started in Bamako at the Regional Preparatory Conference for Africa, with the production of the first elements for the work begun under Prepcom I, in June 2002 and continued in the September meeting on content and themes under the able Chairmanship of Ambassador Pablo Macedo.

Defining the topics and issues to be included proved exceedingly difficult and controversial. In December 2002, I was asked to organize the so-called “Glion I” workshop with President Samassékou, the Executive Director for the first phase of WSIS and Executive Director of the WSIS Executive Secretariat, Pierre Gagné. Under his able Chairmanship, this informal brainstorming session with experts from all regions and all walks of life produced a first comprehensive outline and initial examples of wording for a political declaration. Mr. Waheed Khan from UNESCO, Mr. Pape from ITU, Bruno Lanvin from the World Bank, Dennis Gilhooly from UNDP and Faryel Beji from Tunisia were among those who most actively contributed to the resulting Chairman’s paper.

This document was not accepted as the formal basis for negotiations by Prepcom II, but many of its parts and text elements were introduced by delegations to build the structure and nurture the content of the final declaration of Geneva. Romania played a very active role in defining the content and scope of the WSIS under the leadership of Minister Dan Nica and Ambassador Anda Filip who also played a very active and helpful role on the Geneva diplomatic front. I collaborated with them as ex-officio member of the Bureau for the preparation of the Bucharest Regional Preparatory Conference for Europe, where again important building blocks for the final document were made.

The Regional Conferences for Latin America and Asia Pacific held in the Dominican Republic and in Japan were equally enriching; they brought to light the various regional differences and perspectives. Ambassadors Shotaro Oshima and Ruben Nunez assisted by Counselor Isabel Padilla, played a key role in preparing these conferences with the diplomatic community in Geneva. The Regional Conference in Tokyo was memorable, as it probably best managed to involve the Civil Society in the deliberations and the drafting of its documents.

For procedural reasons the Member States could not agree on President Samassékou’s Chairman paper as a basis for negotiations – even though it was originally thought to be an informal paper, with the simple intention to assist all stakeholders in developing a common vision of the WSIS. Numerous difficult and lengthy Bureau Meetings followed Prepcom 2,

trying to find ways and means to bridge the gap between opposing views both on the process and the expected outcomes.

During the “Paris meeting” at UNESCO between Prepcom 2 and Prepcom 3 from 15-18 July 2003, in Paris under the able Chairmanship of Lyndall Shope-Mafole from South Africa, we started to negotiate and draft texts, together with members of the civil society. Based on this excellent work Ambassador Asko Numminen from Finland, Chair of the Subcommittee II was able to lay the groundwork of the Geneva text as we know it today. Thanks to Minister Anneli Vuorinen of the Finnish Mission in Geneva and his deep knowledge of United Nations affairs, the multilateral system and the content of previous summits linked to the MDGs, a small and informal “steering group”, including President Samassékou, Secretary General Utsumi, Ambassador Habib Mansour, Pierre Gagné, Minister Koubaa, Charlotte Sgier, Tim Kelly and myself was able to move the text along with the Member States. This serious and renewed interest of the Member States, taking control of the process, was understandably not appreciated by the civil society groups, but we were running out of time.

The host country’s ultimate intervention

As it is customary in summits and large political conferences, the Host Government would be asked in the final stages of negotiations – in particular when these are blocked or running in circles – to take the role of mediator and moderator of the negotiations. To anticipate the moment when the WSIS Prepcom Bureau would ask Switzerland to take over, I was defining the major hurdles in each area of interest of the countries, and starting to map out a space in which a compromise package could eventually be designed. This was done during the September Prepcom 3 meeting in Geneva with key and active delegations. The main areas of concern included Internet governance, financing of ICT for development, human rights, the role of the media, intellectual property rights and network security.

I was then asked by my Government to activate the network of about 25 key Ambassadors and Minister-Counselors of the Geneva diplomatic community, the “Friends of the Host”, which was instrumental in the success of the final negotiations under the leadership of Marc Furrer. We coordinated the overall package of the negotiations, and I had the privilege to moderate some of the most sensitive political issues linked to the development of the Information Society. Along with Marc Furrer, Markus Kummer of the Swiss Foreign Office and Frédéric Riehl of OFCOM, we constituted the Swiss negotiating team for the final negotiations. With regard to those negotiations, over which I presided, the constructiveness and professionalism of the United States, Cuban, Iranian, European Union, Canadian and Egyptian Delegations remains memorable to me. I would like to thank the following fellow

Ambassadors and colleagues who participated in numerous meetings, working dinners or lunches over a period of two years and thus contributed so much to the final success of WSIS: Ambassadors Mohamed-Salah Dembri, Algeria; Michael Steiner, Germany; Toufiq Ali, Bangladesh; Felipe de Seixas Correa and Carlos Antonio da Rocha Parahnos, Brazil; Jorge Ivan Mora Godoy, Cuba; Joaquín Pérez-Villanueva y Tovar, Spain; Kevin Moley, David Gross and Richard Beaird, Sally Shipman, USA; Leonid Skotnikov, Andrey Pirogov and Yuri Grin, Asko Numminen, Anneli Vuorinen, Finland; Bernard Kessedjian, Michel Peissik, Marc Giacomini, Martine Baranger, France; Tassos Kriekoukis, George Papadatos, Greece; Hardeep Singh Puri, Ramanathan Kumar, Mohammad Reza Alborzi, Peiman Seadat, Mohsen Esper, Iran; Mary Whelan, Ireland, Yaakov Levy, Israel, Paolo Bruni, Valentino Simonetti, Italy; Mme Najat Al-Hajjaji, Lybia, Shotaro Oshima, Yasuhito Tamada, Japan; Mme Amina C. Mohamed, Kenya; Janis Karklins, Latvia; Norbert Frick, Lichtenstein, Mme Rajmah Hussain, Malaysia; Sinaly Coulibaly, Sékou Kassé, Mali; Omar Hilale, Morocco; Gustavo Albin, Pablo Macedo, Enrique Ochoa, Karla Tatiana Ornelas Loera, Mexico; Pius Ikpefuan Ayewoh, Nigeria; Thoralf Stenvold, Norway; Shaukat Umer, Abdul Basit, Qazi Khalilullah, Baloch Mumtaz Zahra, Pakistan; Mrs. Anda Filip, Petru Dimitriu, Romania, Ousmane Camara, Daouda Maliguèye Sene, Senegal; Astrid Dufborg, Sweden; Jean-Marc Boulgaris, Amadeo Perez, Francis Gruber, Danielle Werthmueller, Switzerland, Habib Mansour, Samir Koubaa, Khaled Khiari, Tunisia; Ms. Ileana di Giovan Battista, Enrice Vaca Narvaja, Argentina; Love Mtesa, Zambia, Siphon George Nene, South Africa; Christopher Westdal, Canada; Miguel Alcaine, El Salvador; Maria Teresa Lepatan, Philippines; Alda Fernandes, Portugal; Ivana Milovanovic, Serbia and Montenegro; Mohd Hamid Mohd Jaafar, Dk Mazlilah Pg Hj Mahalee, Brunei; Sha Zukang, Yin Chen, Xiaolei Zhang and Yang Xiaokun, China.

A success to share with many

Thanks to a strong Declaration and Plan of Action, combined with more than 300 effective and diversified Summit events, including the ICT4D Platform, the Geneva Summit was a true success, politically, but also in terms of logistics, protocol and security.

This success would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts and willingness to collaborate of key people at the ITU and the United Nations in New York and UNOG Geneva, of people from the Canton of Geneva and from the Swiss Government at federal level. The event management company MCI was a key partner, which played a critical role and with whom we can share the success of the WSIS.

In my function as co-chair of the Security Group together with the Chief of Staff of the Geneva Police Raphael Rebord and as Chair of the Protocol and Logistics Group of the

WSIS preparations, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Mehmet Ulkumen, Chief of UNOG Protocol; Roland de Stickere, Drew Donovan, Chief and Deputy of Security of UNOG; Hamid Radjy (ITU); Mehmet Ulkumen, Chief of UNOG Protocol; Maingwarnen Paratian, Chief of ITU Protocol; Markus Schneider, Fedpol; Colonel Gaillard, Swiss Army; Lieutenant-Colonel Alain Brenneisen, Swiss Border Guard; Simone Niati, Airport Protocol Services; Jean-Luc Chopard, Chief of Protocol of the Canton of Geneva; and last but not least Robert Hensler, Chancellor of the Canton of Geneva.

Also I would like to thank my own team, above all my assistant Gabrielle Bucher, then Alain Modoux, Bruno Romazzotti, Christi Dufour, Barbara Erskine Favre, Marianne Kopf, Damien Marti, Juan Pekmez, Pascale Morand, Roberto Rivola and Mary Rotondo. A special thanks goes to Richard Torriani of MCI, who planned, prepared and executed all the physical, logistical and human and financial resources aspects of the Summit, as well as to the Palexpo team under the leadership of Bruno Lurati. From the ITU and WSIS Executive Secretariat, I would like to mention, of course, Pierre Gagné, the head of the Executive Secretariat, as well as his able staff, Milda Hedblom, Juan Luis Castro, Marie Thorndahl, Mehdy Davary, Louise Lassonde and Toru Nakaya.

Finally I would like to mention three individuals who made a great contribution to the overall success of the Summit in giving advice, providing leadership or just being present when things got really rough: former Swiss President Adolf Ogi, Maurice Strong and Nitin Desai.