

Mar 18 2013

The Internet Post-Dubai

Blog Editor



Jonathan Liebenau [participated](#) at a high-level workshop in Rome on 8 March hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and *Alleanza per Internet*. Read **Jonathan Liebenau's** reflections on the workshop and his own contributions to the debate.

On March 8 2013, around 130 dignitaries from various stakeholders in the digital economy gathered to hear International Telecommunications Union Secretary General [Hamadoun Touré reflect on the theme](#): “Beyond Dubai: A New Global Agenda for the Internet” and to respond with their views on the agenda ahead. This was the first public appearance of Secretary General Touré following the World Conference on International Telecommunications [WCIT-12] in Dubai last December and he used the occasion to express his views on the achievements in drafting the International Telecommunications Regulations [ITRs] and the problems experienced by the ITU and various negotiators in working towards [the production of a new treaty](#).

Secretary General Touré expressed his exasperation at the difficulties in revising the existing 1988 treaty and emphasized the need and seemingly uncontroversial appropriateness of most of the ITRs such as those concerning emergency number calling, accessibility and unsolicited bulk electronic communications. He excoriated the inappropriateness of tactics to radically politicize the treaty process and restated his oft-voiced claim that the ITU has no intention of regulating the internet. To emphasize this point he summarized the treaty text and expressed his hope that more countries will eventually join the existing 89 signatories to the treaty. He also expressed his desire to improve the consultation and advisory process for the ITU and, separately, for internet governance, and explicitly invited participation from academics, naming the LSE as an exemplary contributor to underlying evidence gathering and analysis.

The opening and welcome speeches were followed by a [position statement from ETNO](#) Executive Board Chair, Luigi Gambardella who emphasized the significance of the WCIT in bringing to the fore discussions of international internet governance and the role that the ITU can have in telecommunications and internet policy debates.

I then presented the [keynote speech](#) in which I [explained](#) research showing that the change in business practices associated with the digital economy could be seen through analyses of network traffic characteristics. These changes hold specific implications for European network economy businesses and policy, and I pointed out how changes in architecture and competition should lead to realignments among regulators, businesses and European industrial policy. I also spoke about the realities of regional differences in the internet and the importance of abandoning the fiction of a “global, flat and neutral” internet. These are all themes addressed in recent blogs on this site (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

The meeting then heard contributions from numerous stakeholders, including from operators, ICANN, Facebook, Skype, Verizon, and specialist institutes of internet studies. Following these contributions, Prof. Eli Noam of Columbia University appeared, via a Skype video connection, and offered his views. He was blunt in stating that a “new cold war” had arrived, contrary to the claims of Secretary General Touré, and that this was inevitable. Prof. Noam spoke about the ways we can come to terms with the fragmentation and differing priorities of countries and regions and outlined how we might find common purpose nonetheless.

Meetings of this sort are rare in the telecommunications and internet community although they do echo both the mix and contributions that characterize the events of the [LSE Network Economy Forum](#). Despite Eli Noam’s use of cold war rhetoric, the prevailing mood is one of optimism where executives of network operators, internet multi-stakeholder organizations, digital economy companies such as Microsoft and Facebook, national and international policy makers and regulators can engage in constructive dialogue.

This article gives the views of the author and not the position of the London School of Economics.

See also:

<http://www.alleanzaperinternet.it>

<http://www.key4biz.it>

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About the author



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Dr Jonathan Liebenau is a Reader in Technology Management, LSE. He Specializes in fundamental concepts of information, and the problems and prospects of ICT in economic development. Previously worked in academic administration, technology policy, and the economic history of science-based industry, all positions in which he has emphasised the use of information in organizations. He is the author or editor of a dozen books and over 70 other major publications. He has provided consultancy services to leading companies and strategic government agencies, including Dell, BT, IBM, Microsoft, TCS, Nortel, EDS, Lloyd Thompson, and in the UK Government, the Office of Science and Innovation, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Home Office.

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