

A political will at planetary level

Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger at the plenary session of the World Summit on the Information Society

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Ten days ago, we did not agree.

In theory, we all wanted to overcome the digital divide, we all respected human rights.

But when it came to committing principles to paper, our differences seemed insurmountable.

Today, I am happy. We have found some good compromises, even if they have not met all expectations. We have laid down rules and principles. Without them, solidarity is just a word, equality of opportunity no more than a philosophical concept.

Many of us warned against a Summit which would speak of nothing but technology.

This call has been heard. In fact, the Information Summit in Geneva expresses a genuine political will, its participants share a common project: bridging the digital divide, strengthening cultural diversity, respecting freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

However, let us beware. We have merely taken the first steps towards a better and fairer information society. The road is a long one and it will be full of pitfalls.

Access to the internet will have to be financed even in the most disadvantaged regions. But to surf the net, you have to be able to read. We therefore have to support literacy campaigns.

The web has to be accessible to everyone. But not everyone understands English. It is up to us to ensure that the web is woven in all languages.

Information must be disseminated quickly and everywhere. But what good is an information superhighway if it carries nothing but propaganda? We must ensure that freedom of expression is respected; we must insist on the independent role of journalists and the media.

In short, we have to live according to our principles.

Switzerland – permit me this digression – would perhaps not respect its four national languages, would not live its cultural diversity, if they remained pure ideals.

An example. In my country, each linguistic group has its own public television channels and radio stations. The most populous region – German-speaking Switzerland – finances the channels and stations in the other languages.

If this solidarity exists between Swiss who speak French, German, Italian and Romansch, it is because there was, at the beginning, a will. A political will, inscribed in the Constitution and enshrined in the law. A will which resembles, in its own small way, that which the Summit is expressing today.

But if this solidarity continues to exist – in my country and others – it is also because we, the international community, are resisting the law of the strongest.

And it is also because, throughout the world, there are citizens who are convinced that a democratic state which distributes riches is the best guarantor of a fraternal society.

Distributing riches means distributing the means to access high-quality information, but also the means to process and disseminate it. And finally to understand it.

What is at stake is the cohesion of this world, what is at stake is our ideal of peace.

We have two years to realise the plan adopted here in Geneva.

We shall be judged by our performance. Otherwise, solidarity is just a word, equality of opportunity no more than a philosophical concept.