

*Le Monde – Blogs*

## **The War of Rhetoric over the Internet Governance<sup>1</sup>**

*Dominique Lacroix, September 23, 2014*



**Original picture:** IGF 2014, Istanbul, 2 septembre 2014, Rashid Ismailov, Russie. Cliché Dom Lacroix

No, that is not the word "war", which appears in this picture, behind Rashid **Ismailov**. The display shows the live transcript of the English translation of his speech at the plenary opening ceremony of the Internet Governance Forum in Istanbul on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014. Speaking in Russian, after highlighting the extensive development of Russian Internet and announcing that by 2018 about 97% of the Russian population has access to broadband Internet, the Deputy Minister of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation then stressed this message: "We are working on a transition to eGovernment and building up arrays of open data for greater openness".

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an English translation of the original publication: **Lacroix**, Dominique. La guerre rhétorique de la gouvernance Internet. Blog, Le Monde. September 19, 2014. <http://reseaux.blog.lemonde.fr/2014/09/19/guerre-rhetorique-gouvernance-internet/> (last retrieved on September 29, 2014).

The translation of the text from French to English was kindly performed by Leonid **Todorov**, Deputy Director for governmental relations at Coordination Center for TLDs .RU/.PФ.

But the *war rhetoric* was fierce in Istanbul, as usual. Mr. Ismailov also called for “enhanced cooperation” among states to find the right balance between security and protection of human rights. He then stated: "The protection of citizens' personal data is the sovereign right and responsibility of the government. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the multi-stakeholder model to reality, strengthen the role of States and all stakeholders including the private sector”.

Specifically, the United States has warned it will not let them control of ICANN end of 2015 as promised so might impose an intergovernmental solution.

### ***Multi-stakeholder, the Rubik's cube of Internet governance***

The *war rhetoric* is about the famous “multistakeholder model”. The term has become *a must*, and almost everyone refers to it at the international Internet governance meetings. However, the term functions as a *portmanteau word*, which only allows you to sit together around the table.

Who has the legitimacy to represent the people?

Who holds sovereign power over the network infrastructure?

Under what procedures do we conduct "open and inclusive" global conversations that must lead to decisions? Vote or consensus? Who decides that there is consensus on what?

How to agree? by meetings with innovative formats where the Anglo-Saxon experts swim like fish in the water – or under an international treaty?

What are the legitimate international bodies to decide on Internet governance? An instance to build from an improved ICANN or an agency of the United Nations as the International Telecommunications Union?

In the game called Rubik's cube, there is a solution, although it may be difficult to find...

### ***A troubling paradox***

The amazing thing in this world political imbroglio is that these are countries with the most authoritarian regimes in terms of Westerners who have become the most ardent defenders of democratic demands: reputation protection for Edward Snowden (who revealed massive espionage in the Net), transparency, respect for dissenting views, etc.

The strangest scene of the NETmundial in São Paulo was to see the representative of the Russian government explaining that the São Paulo framework was failing to take into account minority views and those divergent. See below for the last shot.

Rashid Ismailov reminded Istanbul that his government considers that there has been no consensus at the NETmundial meeting:

"We understand that Brazil had to be flexible as the host of this meeting. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the final documents of NETmundial cannot be considered as an alternative to the ITU (International Telecommunication Union, editor). In addition, it should be noted that the outcome of São Paulo summit was adopted without consensus. I want to say that Russia is ready to discuss ideas to help the international community to create a safe and effective model of Internet governance based on international standards used in international forums”.

One may wonder whether this proposal solves the puzzle of the multi-stakeholder model. Are there really clear, effective and legitimate international standards to meet the needs of Internet governance? Moreover, even if the ITU is the source of many Internet-related standards, I have never heard of this agency to claim its leadership to support the Internet governance.

*Back image on the NETmundial*



**Original picture:** NetMundial, São Paulo, 24 avril 2014. Intervention de Kavouss Arasteh, pour le gouvernement de l'Iran. Derrière lui, les délégués chinois et russe. Cliché Dom Lacroix.

Very friendly and diplomatic Kavouss **Arasteh**, speaking in English for the government of Iran, was interviewed at the beginning of the debate, saying something like this: "I wonder how the meeting will be able to take account all views and prepare a synthesis. For me it is very mysterious".



**Original picture:** NetMundial, São Paulo, 24 avril 2014. Intervention de Zhao Zeliang, pour le gouvernement de la Chine. Cliché Dom Lacroix.

Zhao **Zeliang**, Chinese government representative, spoke in Chinese. He first made the assembly laugh and was applauded after announcing that it was his birthday. Then he explained the importance of Internet developments in his country, which now has no less than 600 million Internet users and 350 million websites. For the rest, it is essentially pronounced for respect for the sovereignty of States:

“We are very concerned about the governance of the Internet. we believe that governance must be set by a UN resolution and as principles of international relations. We must respect the sovereignty of nations within the Internet community. Each country should make its decisions based on its own situation, ideas of his people, and his idea of happiness to rule on its Internet policy and according to his rights. And each country must also be able to monitor and enforce its own laws to build its own infrastructure and promote its own activities on the Internet and have their own laws to monitor and ensure their freedom and right”.

He concluded on respect for human rights and privacy.



**Original publication:** NetMundial, São Paulo, 24 avril 2014. Intervention de Róbert Shlégel, pour le gouvernement de la Russie. Cliché Dom Lacroix.

In forms exquisitely polite, Róbert **Schlegel**, a member of the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, spoke Russian. He clearly and vigorously contested the outcomes of the NETmundial with regard to the principles of transparency and consensus. He explained that the contribution of the Russian Federation have not been retained in the integral contributions nor taken into account in the synthesis. Mr. Schlegel concluded by recalling the case of Edward Snowden.

Echeberria **Raul**, member of one of the most prominent American associations of Internet governance for Latin American executives, responded to this: "Our goal should be that the final document does not include things unlivable; our objections are so strong that we cannot agree to include this element in the document. [...] Then of course, there will be many views that do not appear in the document, but it's not the end of the process".

This debate is far from over, indeed!

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*Link to the original publication:* <http://reseaux.blog.lemonde.fr/2014/09/19/guerre-rhetorique-gouvernance-internet/>.