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Oleg Demidov reports from Moscow:

BRICS IN THE GLOBAL INTERNET GOVERNANCE AGENDA:

TIME FOR A STEP FORWARD?

АННОТАЦИЯ

Today the BRICS states have become one of the most massive and rapidly growing segments of the global internet community. In 2013 total number of internet users in BRICS states exceeded 900 mln (which accounted for 38% of the world's internet audience) while still experiencing a meteor growth ranging from 10% to 41%. The total contribution of the internet sector to BRICS economies in 2013 topped 500 bln U.S. dollars, and yet the forecasts say it will double by 2015. In the nearest future BRICS will represent the most numerous and active part of the XXI century's digital society.

At the say time, the BRICS states remain underrepresented in the field of global internet governance and discussing its key trends: developing countries mostly contribute to respective agenda-shaping as secondary actors which support the positions of some key stakeholders like Russia, USA, or the EU. The same is true for the involvement of the BRICS states in the process of forging and revision of technological principles and foundations of the Global Net.

Yet, exactly now, in the period of ongoing transformations in the field, there exists a window of opportunities for the developing world to smooth these disproportions and to leverage non-Western participation in the global internet governance to a new level, as Oleg Demidov, head of the PIR Center Program on International Information Security and Global Internet Governance, believes. In the expert's opinion, the global internet governance might and should become a new joint agenda for the BRICS countries.

In recent months the global debates on internet governance have gained new dynamics and have become accompanied with a certain intrigue with regard to two major developments.

The **first** one is related to the recent statement by an agency in the structure of the U.S. Department of Commerce - National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). On March 14, 2014 the agency announced the intent to launch «transition of the key functions of the domain names to the global stakeholder community». In more details, the statement urges the start of transition of the oversight responsibilities of the U.S. Government with regard to the functions of Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA). These critical functions including the management and maintenance of the DNS work are currently performed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in the framework of its contract with the NTIA.

Realization of the NTIA intents which completely fall in line with the interests of the ICANN itself, would imply ultimate establishment of the *multistakeholder* approach to internet governance in the form it was designed even before the foundation of ICANN in 1998 - i.e. without being oversight by any particular state. However, for the moment no one knows what exactly the new *multistakeholder* mechanism of IANA functions oversight might look like. Concrete proposals on that issue are now in high demand, including those from governments as stakeholders.

Second key plot is related to the forthcoming Global Stakeholder Meeting on the Future on Internet Governance (*NETmundial*) which will take place in Sao Paulo on 23-24 April 2014. At the Meeting which was organized upon the initiative of the President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff and the President of ICANN Fadi Chehade the stakeholders plan to discuss and elaborate key principles and legal mechanisms of global internet and cyber governance which would reflect all recent developments in that area - from *Stuxnet* to Snowden and IANA functions oversight transition.

So now the stakeholders have a window of opportunities concerning the development of the global internet governance mechanism and establishment of their new roles in that field. A real chance emerges to summarize and reflect the developments that took place since the elaboration and adoption of the latest document of similar scope and level - the 2005 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.

We believe that among key beneficiaries of this opportunities one should mention BRICS states.

WHY BRICS AND WHY NOW?

Today the BRICS states have become one of the most massive and at the same time the most rapidly growing segments of the global internet community. Enough to mention is that in 2013 total number of internet users in BRICS states exceeded 900 mln (which accounted for 38% of the world's internet audience) while still experiencing a meteor growth ranging from 10% to 41%. The total contribution of the internet sector to BRICS economies in 2013 topped 500 bln U.S. dollars, and yet the forecasts say it will double by 2015. In the nearest future BRICS will represent the most numerous and active part of the XXI century's *digital society*.

Internet User Statistics and Key Demographic Indicators in BRICS States

Country	Population as of March 2014 (thousands)	Number of internet users as of July 2013 (thousands)	World rank by number of internet users	Internet penetration rate, %	Share of world's internet audience, %
Brazil	201,032	99,358	5	49,4	4,13
India	1,242,580	151,599	3	12,2	6,30
China	1,363,780	568,192	1	41,7	23,62
Russia	143,666	75,926	6	52,8	3,16
South Africa	52,981	20,012	25	37,8	0,83
BRICS	3,004,039	915, 087	---	38,8	38,01

Source: PIR Center (Calculations based on data from official website of the U.S. Census Bureau, website of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, Indiastat.com Website run by Datanet India Pvt. Ltd., official websites of National Bureau of Statistics of China, of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, of Statistics Service of South Africa)

At the say time, the BRICS states remain underrepresented and passive in the field of global internet governance and discussing its key trends including transformation of the global internet governance architecture. The debates conducted at the World Conference on International Telecommunications of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in December 2012 in Dubai, UAE proved that the developing countries mostly contribute to the agenda-shaping as secondary actors which support the positions of some key stakeholders - Russia, USA, or the EU. But even more important is that the *rising giants* from BRICS and the developing world still share a disproportionally small degree of participation in the process of forging and revision of technological principles and foundations of the global internet governance - and the Global Net itself. Now, using the aforementioned *window of opportunities* the emerging leaders of developing world have a chance to smooth these disproportions and to leverage non-Western participation in the global internet governance to a new level.

That is why it is now a potentially favorable moment for Russia, its BRICS partners and other stakeholders representing the countries of the Forum, for promoting globally their ideas and proposals in the field of Internet governance. Besides, it is not only about the NETmundial, but also about specific issues that can be discussed on other venues.

INTERNET GOVERNANCE: TODAY'S AGENDA FOR BRICS

So what points would appear relevant for governments and other stakeholders in the BRICS countries, and the world in general?

✓ *Probably, the core premise here is that today the state of global internet governance debates brings to birth the need for establishing an institutionalized global and multistakeholder framework which would be able to function in a permanent format. In this regard, the mechanism and mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) might be developed and transformed in order to establish a permanent IGF Secretariat which would work on a multistakeholder basis on the key goals and issues of the global internet governance agenda.*

The BRICS states could not only provide full diplomatic support for this initiative and promote it at the coming global internet governance debates (such as High-Level Meetings in the framework of the *WSIS [World Summit on the Information Society] +10* Process) or the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of the Internet Governance in Sao Paulo, Brazil) but also take a leading role in technical and administrative work on establishment of the Secretariat. Moreover, they might bring up the initiative of hosting it on a permanent basis - e.g. in Brazil, South Africa or Russia, which might be a proper reflection of the rising powers' increasing role in the ICT and internet governance agenda.

The key goal of such Permanent IGF Secretariat in a short and middle term prospect might include elaborating a Set of Principles of Global Internet Governance. It should be perceived as a milestone document summarizing the updated vision of all stakeholders on the global internet governance agenda and reflecting the major changes in this area since the adoption of the 2000 Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society.

However, unlike the Okinawa Charter, the new Set of Principles should be perceived as a new and unprecedented step in this field - a codification of the principles of internet governance which might be adopted in the form of the UN Convention or a Treaty. Thus, the idea is to negotiate and state the core principles of the global stakeholder interaction in the form of a legally binding act - which makes a great distance from the declarative status of the Okinawa Charter. The document would acknowledge and inherit already existing and widely accepted basic principles like the multi-stakeholder approach, network neutrality, openness, integrity, universality of the internet, etc. Not going beyond far determination and postulation of key universally acknowledged principles of global internet governance the document might be regarded as a loose analogue of the *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies* adopted on 19 December 1966.

Of course, BRICS states can't and should not be the only initiators and conveyers of this process since it is obviously a global initiative requiring contribution from all stakeholders including all members of the UN. However, the BRICS leaders - including Russia, China, Brazil, India and China - might take the lead of this process, thus making it more oriented towards the developing world and stressing the changes in the global composition of stakeholders since the adoption of the Okinawa Charter and past WSIS Agendas.

One BRICS member state should be specifically mentioned here, and that is Russia. With its huge experience in global debates on the internet governance and cyber security issues which goes back to 1998 Russia has much to share with its BRICS partners and might lead them with regard to implementing this initiative.

✓ **Another big issue which should be included in the mandate and Strategic Plan of the Permanent IGF Secretariat is determination of the roots and reasons behind the massive governmental surveillance in the internet. Revelations made by Edward Snowden in 2013 made the global technical internet community and policymakers face a fundamental question: is systemic and global governmental surveillance in the Net a bug, or a feature of the existing global internet governance model?**

Acknowledging massive e-surveillance a direct consequence of systemic malfunction of the internet architecture in its present form might imply far-reaching consequences on the technical layer. This conclusion might trigger significant revision and update of the technical backbones of the internet. This includes the work of basic internet protocols (HTTP, TCP/IP) and traffic encryption standards. Such ideas already were announced at the recent meeting of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) which took place in November 2013 in Vancouver, Canada.

BRICS states could facilitate the establishment and work of a *Research Committee on Fundamental Vulnerabilities and Risks of the Internet Governance Architecture* in the framework of the IGF Permanent Secretariat - or some other UN-based multistakeholder framework. The work of the Committee should be aimed at production and discussion of a Report with recommendations to international policy makers and the global technical internet community (Internet Society (ISOC), IETF, ICANN, Internet Architecture Board (IAB), etc.).

BRICS Forum has already been involved in the discussion on overcoming of the *Digital Divide* and development of the global internet infrastructure. BRICS states have already accumulated enough experience, technological background, financial resources and political leadership to move this agenda forward in a more dynamic way. Support of the BRICS Internet Cable project aimed at diversification of the global network of backbone transcontinental fiber-optic cables might be a good step to start with. The project of the 32 000 km cable connecting Russian Vladivostok with Brazilian Fortaleza through Indian and Chinese hubs could and should be realized in the near future. All countries of the Forum, including Russia, are interested in its fast implementation due to both security concerns and economic incentives.

✓ **Also, if we go back to the thesis about underrepresentation of BRICS states in the global technical community and the internet governance policy-shaping process, we can't help mention the need to nurture technical experts and internet governance leaders in the BRICS countries. In this regard, BRICS needs its own non-governmental Expert Council on Technical Issues of Internet Governance which would bring together technical experts from BRICS states and bridge them with such bodies as IETF, IAB, ISOC and others.**

An even more important task is to launch training and educational programs on internet governance, which would incorporate not only technical but also legal and political aspects of this agenda. Such courses should be not only supported with money and expertise, but also incorporated into the academic programs of state universities and other institutions of higher education. In the middle-term and strategic prospect, this will contribute to a greater participation and a louder voice of BRICS experts in the work of IETF, IAB and other organizations shaping the future of the Net on technological level.

✓ ***Strengthening the BRICS-ICANN cooperation is another perspective step in this direction.***

In fact, the process has already been started: the first steps were made with the decision to hold the *NETMundial* Global Meeting in San Paolo. Even before that ICANN launched dialogue on strategic cooperation with China and announced opening of its regional office in Beijing in 2012. In February 2014 ICANN President also made a three-day visit to China where his negotiations with three Chinese Ministers further strengthened this strategic dialogue and cooperation. Russia now looks a *missed link* in this chain of emerging cooperation between ICANN and BRICS states, and the BRICS format might become an optimal framework for Moscow to advance its level of dialogue with ICANN.

✓ ***Finally, in anticipation of the year 2015, one might think about launching a regional analogue of the Internet governance forum for BRICS states which would bring together experts from BRICS and bridge them with such bodies as ICANN, ISOC and other structures of the global Internet society, as well as contribute to the rapprochement of positions of BRICS states on the issues of Internet governance.***

It is also important to promote inclusive and open character of activities in the field of exploring the internet governance architecture and its potential drawbacks. They should incorporate or at least take into account both the outcomes of the Global Multistakeholder Meeting in Brazil and the activities of the two-year Global Commission on Internet Governance established in the end of 2013 and chaired by Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt.

CONCLUSION

BRICS neither pretends nor has capacity for becoming a panacea for key issues in the field of global internet governance. Neither should the global internet governance be considered to be a future backbone of the BRICS format. However, the ICT agenda might significantly strengthen the added value of the Forum in one of the most topical areas of international relations and at the same time strengthen BRICS identity and integrity. The transborder nature of the Internet makes the BRICS format free of its most serious weaknesses such as clash of regional interests and mismatch of geographically determined agendas. Instead, the Net brings BRICS states and stakeholders together in its digital reality, and this is a chance not to be missed.

Being a leader among BRICS states in terms of internet penetration and one of the most active contributors to the global internet governance discussions, it is Russia that might most benefit from implementation of the aforementioned initiatives.

The author of this article is Oleg Demidov, head of the PIR Center Program on
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Best regards

Dmitry Polikanov
Chairman
Trialogue Club International

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