

РОЛЬ ООН В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ИНФОРМАЦИОННО-КОММУНИКАЦИОННОГО ПОРЯДКА В КОНТЕКСТЕ ПРОЦЕССА РАЗВИТИЯ В 1990-е гг.

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В статье рассматривается деятельность по формированию инструментов управляющего воздействия на международный информационно-коммуникационный порядок (МИКП) в главных и вспомогательных органах ООН в рамках усилий универсальной международной организации по содействию процессу развития в 1990-е гг. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о непрерывно возрастающем внимании в данных органах к информационно-коммуникационным технологиям (ИКТ) как фактору развития. Оно проявилось в увеличении числа органов ООН, которых интересовали вопросы ИКТ, повышение уровня данных органов и должностных лиц, а также рост событий, связанных с рассмотрением ИКТ как фактора процесса развития. Временной рубеж 1995 – 1997 гг. разделил период, когда в ООН лишь в целом подчеркивалось возрастающее значение ИКТ в процессе развития, рассматривались и получали поддержку инициативы других организаций системы ООН, от периода, когда в ООН была инициирована проработка инструментов управляющего воздействия на МИКП. Фактический вклад ООН в становление МИКП в рассматриваемое десятилетие в наибольшей степени относился к утверждению среди международного сообщества понимания необходимости проведения активной политики в области ИКТ на национальном, региональном и международном уровнях. В меньшей степени он способствовал формированию общего видения приоритетов данной политики и наименьшей степени – ее инструментов, особенно в отношении минимизации неравенства между Севером и Югом в отношении возможности использования потенциала ИКТ в целях развития.

Ключевые слова: международный порядок; международный информационно-коммуникационный порядок; ООН; информационно-коммуникационные технологии.

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THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN BUILDING UP THE WORLD INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ORDER AS A PART OF THE EFFORTS ON FACILITATING THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THE 90S

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The role of the information and communication technologies (ICT) in the UN development agenda used to grow continuously throughout the 90s. For the first time in the Belarusian historiography of international relations the article exposes the significant events which relate to the UN involvement in the ICT theme in the context of the global development process.

The main outcomes of such events which relate to the world information and communication order (WICO) are analyzed therein. The research reveals that in the decade under consideration the UN mainly made preparations on the expert level for governing influence on WICO than really exercised such influence.

This preparatory activity manifested itself in issuing from 1997 to 2000 of six reports which were fully or to considerable extent devoted to the enhancement of the ICT role in the development process. The recommendations made at the UN contributed to the world-wide recognition of the importance of carrying out active policy in the ICT sphere at national, regional and international levels, some basic instruments of such policies and the urgency of tackling the problem of bridging the digital divide. There existed the general consensus in the UN about this policy based on the belief in the positive nature of the governed globalization but the difference between the views of the industrialized countries and the majority of the developing countries about preferable remedies of bridging the digital divide used to preserve throughout the decade.

Key words: world order; world information and communication order; the United Nations; information and communication technologies.

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Introduction. 2023 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which fixed ICT in the list of the primary factors of the global development process¹. Its outcomes upraised the weight of the world information and communication order (WICO) as a world order component².

WSIS has given rise to the international platform aiming at bridging the digital divide, the WSIS Forum, which is still in existence in 2022 in spite of the hardest ever shock which beats practically all segments of the UN global cooperation ecosystem. Even if some day the UN is going to be superseded by another instrument to get care about the world development it seems of particular importance that the latter inherits the UN considerable achievements in supporting the development. To this end the UN history studying is a tool for finding and inheriting such achievements. As far as WSIS was the outcome of the long-term efforts of the UN bodies and agencies, the author takes this opportunity to carry

¹ For the purpose of this scientific paper the term “development” is referred to according to the definition proclaimed in the Declaration on the Right to Development, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 41/128 on 4 December 1986.

² For the purpose of this scientific paper the author applies his definition of the term “World information and communication order” referred to as the dynamical conformity of the regulators outlining the behavior of the actors with the opportunities provided by the generally available means of information collection, storage, processing, packaging and transfer subordinate to common goals of the actors.

out historic analysis of the UN activities ensuring the building up of the WICO development sub-system which finally paved the way to WSIS.

The timeframe of this scientific paper incorporates mainly the 90s and is demarcated by the events on one hand when harnessing ICT began to enter the broad development agenda and on the other hand when ICT turned out to be in the focus of the majority of the UN pro-development activities that occurred in 1999 – 2000. The scope of the analysis swallows the related activities of the UN and its subordinate bodies, putting aside the UN specialized agencies, thus dealing with the WICO issues on the general political level, without touching the level of narrow-specialized international cooperation. The main objective of this scientific paper is to reconstruct the overall picture of the UN involvement in promoting ICT as a global development force in the 90s.

Research methods. The examination of this scientific research subject is carried out by means of the description and analysis of the events which set up landmarks in the UN contribution to the building up of WICO. Such method is supposed preferable for this research as it provides the opportunity to better demonstrate the increase of such events' number and scope from the beginning to the end of the decade.

Literature review. The UN activities in the face of the changing world order in the 90s have been highlighted in at least 25 monographs. Their (co)authorship belongs to P. Baehr and L. Gordenker [1], B. Chakraborty [2], C. Kincaid [3], M. Mazover [4], L. Peters [5], A. Sayward [6], R. Thakur and T. Weiss [7]. The overwhelming majority of the related monographs were written in the same 90s and for this reason belonged to recent political rather than historical research sphere. They are peculiar for various shades of optimism in assessing the UN chances to facilitate the global development after the end of the cold war. Those few monographs which have appeared soon after 2000 and until now examine the UN pro-development efforts from the historical perspective demonstrating criticism about the multilateral organization's efficiency in overcoming the major actors' egoism in favor of the development goals' achievement. Various aspects of the evolution of phenomenon named the information society on world policy and economy are examined in the monographs by R. Methnani [8], S. Volodenkov [9].

The effects of the progress ICT on the UN activities have been highlighted in the works by Y. Denisov [10], C. Hamelink [11], T. Schhors [12]. However, they mainly deal with either with the UN public information policies or with mass media support, i.e., the information content and the flow of the latter, while there is a lack in scientific papers summing up and analyzing these activities specifically from the development perspective.

Research results. The consideration of the WICO issues continued in the 90s at the UN Committee on Information and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. The year 1990 at the former body was peculiar for

reaching the consensus among the members on the draft text of the UN General Assembly resolutions under the common title “Questions relating to information” wherein the resolution entitled “Information in the service of humanity” contained some provisions on the information and communication infrastructures. These provisions remained the same in the course of the entire decade and the General Assembly used to approve them without a single amendment. They contributed to the confirmation in WICO of the necessity to enhance efforts for the improvement of such infrastructures in the developing countries with the help of the cooperation between the developing countries themselves and between the developed and developing countries, including the facilitation of the access by the latter group to advanced technology available in the open market, the establishment of telecommunications links connecting the developing countries with the rest of the world. In the meantime, no new instruments for the implementation of such efforts other than the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication were referred to in the resolution’s texts.

They are also worth mentioning for the acknowledgement of the developing countries right to develop their information and communication policies freely and independently^{3,4}. The general consensus among the members of the Committee did not preclude the calls expressed on behalf of the delegations representing the group of the developing nations for more wide-scale assistance in favor of the new, more just and more effective information and communication order.

The agenda of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space included on a constant basis the issues of the remote sensing of the Earth by satellites, the utilization of the geostationary orbit and quite regularly also space-based communication [13, pp. 443–444]. The suspense of the cold war did not bring changes to the list of these items due to their highly professional nature but the debates at the Committee around them were not restricted only to technical nuances. The developing nations represented in the latter’s membership expressed the requirements for the wider access to the spatial technologies, the scarce resources inevitable in their application and the data generated in the course of this application. These requirements were reflected in the provisions of the declaration adopted at the Third United Nations

³ United Nations Committee on Information. Report on the twenty-second session (1-12 May 2000). General Assembly Official Records Fifty-fifth session. Supplement No. 21 (A/55/21) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/473/98/PDF/N0047398.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 15.07.2022).

⁴ United Nations General Assembly. Fifty-fifth session Agenda item 87. 55/136 Questions relating to information [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/567/55/PDF/N0056755.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 15.07.2022).

Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, held in Vienna in July 1999. However, the opportunities for the implementation of the UNISPACE III recommendations were crucially dependent upon the willingness to provide voluntary funding of the related activities⁵.

In 1989 – 1991 the Economic and Social Council referred for the first time after 1978 to the consideration of the impact of informatics on the economic development having called the UN member states to promote the expansion of their populations' endogenous skills in the field informatics and having expressed support to the related activity of the UN specialized agencies (UNESCO, UNIDO, ITU)⁶.

In 1992 the telecommunications sector's critical role in the development of a services economy and the call for the improvement of information networks and access thereto were mentioned in par. 178, 180 and 181 of document entitled "A new partnership for development: the Cartagena commitment" adopted in the aftermath of the eighth session of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in February of the year above mentioned⁷. Just for comparison, in Final Act of the previous session of UNCTAD in 1987 ICT development was considered crucial only in relation to the developments in financial services⁸.

Later on, in the same year the increasing attention to ICT as a factor of development was reflected in Agenda 21, the result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (June 1992, Rio de Janeiro)⁹, which was succeeded by the final acts of six world conferences on various aspects of economic and social development summoned during the term in office of Secretary-General B. Boutros-Ghali. These global fora were as followed: Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Islands Developing States (April – May 1994, Bridgetown, Barbados), World

⁵The Space Millennium: Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unoosa.org/pdf/reports/unispace/viennadecle.pdf> (accessed: 16.07.2022).

⁶Economic and Social Council Official Records, 1991. Supplement No. 1A. Resolutions and Decisions of the Economic and Social Council, Second regular session of 1991, Geneva, 3-26 July 1991. New York: United Nations, 1992, 54 p.

⁷United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Eighth session. Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Agenda item 8. A new partnership for development: the Cartagena commitment [Electronic resource]. URL: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdviiiimisc4_en.pdf (accessed: 18.07.2022).

⁸Proceedings of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Seventh session. Geneva, 9 July – 3 August 1987. Volume I. Report and Annexes. New York: United Nations, 1989, 140 p.

⁹United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992, Agenda 21. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf> (accessed: 18.07.2022).

Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (May 1994, Yokohama), International Conference on Population and Development (September 1994, Cairo), World Summit for Social Development (March 1995, Copenhagen), Fourth World Conference on Women (September 1995, Beijing), United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (June 1996, Istanbul). The most evident contribution of their final acts' provisions to WICO may be formulated as the acknowledgement of the need for the governmental as well as regional and international actors' active role in ensuring the comprehensive availability of the telecommunications and information technologies (IT), primarily for vulnerable social groups.

Several important decisions related to WICO were approved at the ECOSOC substantive session of 1993 on the bases of the drafts prepared at the first session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. In particular, the need for ensuring in all countries widespread and affordable access for national science and technology communities to global and regional information networks was stressed. Furthermore, the preparations on the selection of IT as a substantive theme for inter-session period 1995 – 1997 of the Commission on Science and Technology were initiated thereat¹. The presentation of issues note “Information Technologies for Development” by the UNCTAD secretariat to the second session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in May 1995 marked the step made towards the UN own vision of evolving WICO and the instruments of governing influence thereon. However, this vision contained evident external input originated in the conceptions of information superhighways and global information infrastructure (GII) which used to be vigorously promoted by the then USA Administration. The note mentioned gave the overview of the inequality existed between three groups of countries divided according to their production and application abilities in the IT sphere. It abstained from ready-made political recommendations and limited itself to enumerating issues for further consideration at national levels².

The second session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development gave unanimous support for the selection of IT and their implications for development as the main substantive theme during the inter-session period 1995 – 1997. In draft resolution “Science and technology for development”, approved by the ECOSOC substantive session of 1995 and supported without vote by the Fiftieth session of the General Assembly, it chose

¹Economic and Social Council. Official Records, 1993. Supplement No. 1. New York: United Nations, 1994, 128 p.

²United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Distr. general. E/CN.16/1995/9 16 March 1995. Original: English. Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Second session. Geneva, 15 May 1995. Item 4 of the provisional agenda. Information technologies for development. An issues note. Note by the UNCTAD secretariat.

the non-exhaustive list of issues for analysis and recommendations to be prepared by experts' panel or working group. Such issues included the elaboration of internal political recommendations favoring IT diffusion and application as well as international efforts primarily in the form of improved coordination inside the UN system^{3, 4, 5}.

The ECOSOC substantive session of 1995 also gave start to the ad-hoc open-ended working group on the harmonization and improvement of UN information systems which was endowed with the task of making recommendations on specific measures that various bodies of the UN systems were to take in order to help the member states to benefit from the informatics revolution⁶.

"Partnership for Growth and Development", the final document of the ninth session of UNCTAD (April – May 1996) confirmed that ensuring access to information networks was one of the target directions for providing assistance to developing countries in improving the favorable environment for foreign direct investments (par. 78, 82). It also called for assessing trade implications of the GII emergence (par. 94)⁷. The ninth session of UNCTAD was immediately followed in the same venue by the Information Society and Development Conference (formally outside the UNCTAD forum) which was strongly influenced by the outcomes of the G7 Ministerial conference on the global information society that had been held in Brussels in February 1995.

The Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies for Development which had been summoned in accordance with the above-mentioned decisions taken in 1995 carried out the bulk of its activities in 1996 and produced its conclusions and proposals in March 1997. The extent to which the world community should appeal to the WICO instruments of governing influence in order to ensure the comprehensive access to the benefits of the global information society used to be a navel of the debate in the WG between

³United Nations. Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Report of the second session (15 – 24 May 1995). Economic and Social Council. Official records, 1995. Supplement No. 11 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N95/182/95/PDF/N9518295.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 26.07.2022).

⁴Economic and Social Council. Official records, 1995. Supplement No. 1. New York: United Nations, 1996, 96 p.

⁵United Nations. General Assembly. Distr. General. A/Res/50/101. 9 February 1996. Fiftieth session. Agenda item 95 (d). Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly [on the report of the Second Committee]. 50/101. Science and technology for development [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N96/764/71/PDF/N9676471.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 26.07.2022).

⁶See 13.

⁷United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Ninth session. Midrand, 27 April 1996. Midrand Declaration and a Partnership for Growth and Development Adopted by the United Nations on Trade and Development at its ninth session [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/u9d377.en.pdf> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

the laissez-faire advocates and supporters of compensatory and corrective measures taming the free market whirlpool. However, on no account the WG rejected the need of the connection of the countries' national information infrastructures to the GII. The latter approach predominated in the WG's report (with 18 out of 26 members represented developing countries and countries with economies in transition) though it had failed to reach definite consensus on many aspects of the debate. This report is to be considered the first UN document that initiated the official use of abbreviation "ICT" at the UN.

The WG's contribution to WICO resulted from its recommendation for all countries, especially developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to have national ICT strategies to be elaborated by commissions or task forces established by national governments. This recommendation was complemented with guidelines for such strategies drafting. The recommendation implementation by national government was to be reviewed by the fourth session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in 1999. Separate recommendations were addressed to the agencies of the UN system on the establishment of new forms of partnerships designed to help developing countries and countries with economies in transition to provide the aid in compiling and carrying out national ICT strategies⁸.

The WG report was discussed at the third session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in May 1997 with some developing countries having expressed the anxiety about the lack of resources required for the implementation of the WG recommendations thereat. After all these recommendations were incorporated in draft resolution "Science and technology for development" supported by ECOSOC at its substantive session of 1997 and the Fifty-second session of the General Assembly^{9, 10, 11}.

⁸United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Distr. General. E/CN.16/1997/4. 7 March 1997. Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Third session. Geneva, 12 May 1997. Item 2 of the provisional agenda. Substantive Theme: Information and Communication Technologies for Development. Report of the Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies for Development [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/233314?ln=ru> (accessed: 28.07.2022).

⁹United Nations. Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Report of the third session (12 – 26 May 1997). Economic and Social Council. Official records, 1997. Supplement No. 11 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.un.org/esa/documents/ecosoc/docs/1997/e1997-31.htm> (accessed: 28.07.2022).

¹⁰Economic and Social Council. Official records, 1997. Supplement No. 1. New York: United Nations, 1999, 167 p.

¹¹United Nations. General Assembly. Distr. General. A/Res/52/184. 4 February 1999. Fifty-second session. Agenda item 95 (c). Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly [on the report of the Second Committee]. 52/184. Science and technology for development [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N98/765/61/PDF/N9876561.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 28.07.2022).

The conclusions and proposals of the WG on Information and Communication Technologies for Development were further backed by research “Knowledge Societies: Information Technology for Sustainable Development” prepared for the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development by a group of academics from Western countries and discussed by the member states at the fourth session of the latter in 1999. It aimed at helping the member states by providing fundamentals for the national ICT strategies drawing up¹².

The adoption in 1997 by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) of the statement on universal access to basic communication and information services which was brought to the attention of the Fifty-second session of the General Assembly aimed at the acknowledgement of ICT as an integral element of the priority efforts by the entire UN system to promote the sustainable human development. It outlined the areas for the joint efforts to be taken by the organizations of the UN system, governments, private sector and NGOs in order to bridge the information gap between industrialized and developing nations, including indicative areas for possible pilot projects. This statement originated from the project of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and was ambitiously called the advancement of the right to communicate¹³. The structure of the document gives the grounds for us to consider it the first step towards the final acts of WSIS. It was ACC which initiated the broad consideration of the ITU initiative on summoning WSIS within the UN system at its first regular session of 1999¹⁴.

In the course of year 1999 three papers which were able to make impact on the pro-WICO activities were issued at the UN. Human Development Report 1999 gave special attention to new ICT as a driving force of globalization and, having taken into account successful national experiences of several developing countries, pointed at national policy directions which could allow to benefit from globalization¹⁵.

¹²United Nations. Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Report of the third session (17 – 21 May 1999). Economic and Social Council. Official records, 1999. Supplement No. 11 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ecn16s4d9.pdf> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

¹³United Nations System. Administrative Committee on Coordination. ACC/1997/4. Summary of Conclusions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its First Regular Session of 1997 (Geneva, 10 – 11 April 1997) [Electronic resource]. URL: https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/Content/Reports/REP_CEB_199704_ACC19974_0.pdf (assessed: 03.08.2022).

¹⁴United Nations System. Administrative Committee on Coordination. ACC/1999/4. Summary of Conclusions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its First Regular Session of 1999 (Geneva, 9–10 April 1999) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/276837> (assessed: 03.08.2022).

¹⁵Human Development Report 1999 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1999> (assessed: 03.08.2022).

Report of the Secretary-General “Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence” contained the recommendation on investing in IT infrastructure as a priority for any country in withholding the widening IT development gap. Most provisions in the report referred to addressing the task of widening the international assistance to developing countries. They called for the enhancement of such assistance from two main to six main areas, including the aid in the policy formulation and implementation, and proceeded from the hope for more active involvement of the international business community. Due to the general view on the positive potential of liberalization spread in the report, the integration in the emerging global information network was regarded as the supreme goals of the measures proposed therein¹⁶.

Both two papers established the basis for several provisions of resolution “Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence” adopted without vote by the Fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. It emphasized the need for improving the transfer of ICT and corresponding knowledge as well as for new capacity-building programs of the UN system with a view to full and effective integration into the global information network. The related proposals were to be worked out at a high-level panel of experts on ICT to be convened by Secretary-General¹⁷.

The third paper mentioned under the title of was prepared at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development by prominent academician in the sphere of communications professor Cees Hamelink and contained the view on the international community’s pro-WICO efforts from the civil society’s perspective. The paper was dominated by the idea of ensuring the interest of the world population at large through promoting ICT via balancing the market forces and public governing influence, stronger policy coordination between the nations of the South, enforcing good governance principles at international organizations, the establishment of unofficial cross-border situational coalitions representing the civil society and the introduction of well-designed ICT education. It reflected the optimism born by the considerable part

¹⁶ General Assembly. Fifty-fourth session. Agenda item 104. Globalization and interdependence. Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence. Report of the Secretary-General [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/268/69/PDF/N9926869.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 04.08.2022).

¹⁷ United Nations. General Assembly. Distr. General. A/Res/54/231. 22 February 2000. Fifty-fourth session. Agenda item 104. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly [on the report of the Second Committee]. 54/231. Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/282/00/PDF/N0028200.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 03.08.2022).

of the academic community of that time in the possibility of achieving the forms of government that were able to promote the widest possible accessibility of ICT infrastructure and services [14].

The UN reference to electronic commerce as a consistent point of the trade and development agenda may be dated back to resolution 52/182 “International Trade and Development” adopted without vote at the Fifty-second session of the General Assembly in 1997. It urged the assistance, primarily at UNCTAD, in facilitating the application of e-commerce by developing countries and countries with economies in transition¹⁸. The wordings of the UN General Assembly resolutions on e-commerce steadily expanded year after year from 1998 to 2000. Sufficient attention was devoted to e-commerce at the tenth session of UNCTAD in Bangkok in February 2000. The Plan of Action approved thereat acknowledged e-commerce a priority along with six political enablers of the e-commerce benefits. They related to ensuring the affordability of the access to Internet, creating relevant skills, facilitating the Internet local content development, preparing the favorable regulatory framework, incl. the financial and fiscal regulations, carrying out national Internet governance¹⁹.

Apart from the tenth session of UNCTAD the first half of 2000 was marked by issuing of two reports which were aimed at policy makers both at country and international levels. The first one in March 2000 was report by Secretary-General for the Millennium Assembly of the UN entitled “We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century” with sub-paragraph “Building of digital bridges”. The second report was produced in May 2000 by the high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology. Both papers were the first UN documents to apply term “digital divide” with regard to the global availability of ICT and both were optimistic about the possibility of bridging it. They shared the idea of the urgency for national governments for carrying out active policy in the ICT sphere. The latter report proposed the list of 11 target areas for this policy and four basic recommendations on the essence of national political contents. This report was remarkable for the attempt to define several concrete ambitious goals to be reached by the international community to be attained within the short-term perspective having related to ensuring the comprehensive affordability of the Internet and increasing the number of PCs in developing countries as well as to find sources for the related aid to be provided via strategic

¹⁸ General Assembly. Distr. General. A/Res/52/182. Fifty-second session. Agenda item 95 (b). Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly [on the report of the Second Committee]. 52/182. International Trade and Development [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N98/771/79/PDF/N9877179.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 11.08.2022).

¹⁹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Tenth session. Bangkok, 12–19 February 2000. Plan of Action [Electronic resource]. URL: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/408271?ln=zh_CN (accessed: 08.08.2022).

alliance between the UN, the private sector and financial institutions. The hopes of the panel of experts to turn its proposals to life were linked to the waited proclamation at the Millennium Assembly of the right of universal access to information and communication services, incl. the Internet, as a new component of the UN principles and conventions on human rights and development^{20 21}.

High-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session of 2000 held on July 5 – 7 under theme “Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy” turned out to be the first meeting of a UN principal organ which was entirely devoted to WICO issues. In spite of visible difference of views between the industrialized countries group on hand and the majority of developing countries supported by several countries with economies in transition on the role of international aid in bridging digital divide in the emerging knowledge-based economy and the global economy general regulation approaches, the high-level segment participants managed to agree the final Ministerial Declaration.

The Ministerial Declaration provisions’ contribution to WICO was in reaffirming at higher level than previously that unless access and use of ICT was broadened, the majority of people particularly in the developing countries would not enjoy the benefits of the knowledge-based economy, in making more precise the priority areas for concerted actions at the national, regional and international levels by the governments, multilateral development institutions, bilateral donors, the private sector and civil society in order to supersede the digital divide with the digital opportunity, in defining the functions of the UN system on the expansion of the development impact of ICT and, last but not least, in setting practical tasks for the international community. However, the Declaration avoided the approval of any quantitative measures proposed in the high-level panel's report mentioned above²².

²⁰ General Assembly. Fifty-fourth session. Agenda item 49 (b). The Millennium Assembly of the United Nations. We the peoples: the role of the United nations in the twenty-first century. Report of the Secretary-General [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/388/97/IMG/N0038897.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 11.08.2022).

²¹ General Assembly. Fifty-fifth session. Item 102 of the preliminary list. Globalization and Interdependence. Economic and Social Council. Substantive session of 2000. Item 2 of the provisional agenda. Development and International Cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/417544> (accessed: 11.08.2022).

²² General Assembly. Official Records. Fifty-fifth session. Supplement No. 3 (A/55/3/Rev.1). Report of the Economic and Social Council for 2000 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/219/43/IMG/N0121943.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: 12.08.2022).

According to our review of the statements made in the course of the Millennium Summit held within the framework of the Fifty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly on September 6 – 8, around 40 out of a hundred and a half national leaders referred to the theme of the digital revolution and ICT application, mainly in the context of the globalization processes and economic development. Contrary to the expectations of the high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology the text of the United Nations Millennium Declaration with regard to pro-WICO plans limited to mentioning the provisions of the Ministerial Declaration of ECOSOC substantive session of 2000 high-level the need to ensure that of the benefits of new technologies, especially ICTs, were to be made available to all²³.

In 2000 ACC returned to reviewing the WICO issues. At the first annual regular session the Council considered the provisions of the report on IT by a group of Executive Heads. The conclusions of the group acknowledged under evident influence of UNESCO that the development of knowledge-sharing and learning culture were even more important for the UN system than facilitation of the investments in the IT itself, stressed the urgency of IT application in all domains of the economic, social and cultural development, outlined once again key principles of the UN system activities in the IT sphere²⁴.

The ACC second regular session of 2000 assessed the preparatory activities carried out by ITU on convening the World Summit on the Information Society. Those activities allowed to define 2003 as the year for the summit summoning. The information presented by Secretary-General of ITU included the proposal on the convening it under the auspices of the UN and ensured the ACC session participants that its outcome was going to be a concrete action program, including as a follow-up of the ECOSOC high-level segment of 2000²⁵.

Referring to the involvement of Belarus in the UN pro-WICO activities throughout the 90s we suppose that initially it possessed not bad scientific and technologic potential if compared with the majority of countries with the economies in transition. It had been in November 1991, more than five years

²³ General Assembly. Distr. General. A/Res/55/2. Fifty-fifth session. Agenda item 60 (b). Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly [without reference to a Main Committee]. 55/2. United Nations Millennium Declaration [Electronic resource]. URL: [https:// www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_55_2.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_55_2.pdf) (accessed: 15.08.2022).

²⁴ United Nations System. Administrative Committee on Coordination. ACC/2000/4. Summary of Conclusions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its First Regular Session of 2000 (World Food Programme headquarters, 6 – 7 April 2000).

²⁵ United Nations System. Administrative Committee on Coordination. ACC/2000/20. Summary of Conclusions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its Second Regular Session of 2000 (Headquarters, New York, 27 – 28 October 2000) [Electronic resource]. URL: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/431870/files/ACC_2000_20-EN.pdf (assessed: 15.08.2022).

before the UN issued the first recommendations on working out national strategies on IT and ICT development when the Council of Ministers had adopted the Program of Informatization of the Republic of Belarus for the period from 1991 to 1995 and further until 2000. Member of the Republic of Belarus to the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus Vladimir Labunov was elected one of the 22 members of WG on Information and Communication Technologies for Development and the only expert having represented the CIS region²⁶. Thus in 1995 – 1997 Belarus directly contributed to working out of the UN first guidelines for national governments and the UN system on the facilitation of the ICT development. Though the state made use of the UN fora such as Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and High-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session of 2000 for distribution of the data on the Belarusian ICT policy and achievements therein, it did not try to put forward political initiatives which could interconnect the national expertise with the resources available via the UN, thus having restricted its participation in the related fora mainly to the foreign-policy propaganda purposes.

Conclusions. Chronologically we differentiate two periods in the UN activities in building up WICO as a facilitator of the comprehensive economic development in 90s with year 1995 as the borderline. Before that year the UN gave general support to the use of IT for the purposes of economic development, reviewed and endorsed the related activities of other members of the UN system. The selection of IT and their implications for development as the main substantive theme for the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the establishment by ECOSOC of ad-hoc open-ended working group on the harmonization and improvement of UN information systems gave the start for working out of the UN own approaches. The acknowledgment at the UN of importance of information and telecommunications factor in the economic development grew gradually and culminated at the very end of the decade in 2000. We can agree with the point of view of Jurij Denisov who asserted that as of the beginning of the 90s the consensus between all UN member states was respected with regard to the principal issues of the international relations in the information and communications sphere [10, p. 104]. We suppose that the comprehensive opposition exercised by the international community represented at the UN to what was used to be named market fundamentalism constituted the basis of this consensus. However, it did not preclude the difference in views between the industrialized countries and developing countries in their vision of preferable

²⁶ See 17.

remedies of tackling the problem which was initially named the information gap and later on the digital divide. While the former gave the priority to capacity-building in the ICT area via the universalization of good governance principles the latter insisted on the importance of the direct international aid. The UN contribution to WICO was more much more visible in the process which was characterized by C. Hamelink as a strong tendency toward consolidation of governance issues [14]. Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session of 2000, the ACC statement on universal access to basic communication and information services, six reports issued under the auspices of the UN not only grounded the importance of carrying out the active policy in the ICT sphere at the national, regional and international levels but helped the policy makers to define the key targets and instruments. The UN evident achievements in providing the framework for capacity-building in developing countries and countries with economies in transition did not go further than stipulating the urgency for the related activities in final documents of international fora and elaborating recommendations for the UN system bodies. Far-going proposals contained in the report of high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology issued in May 2000, which somehow corresponded with report “Many Voices, One World” of 1980, became part neither of the Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session of 2000 nor of the Millennium Declaration. As of 2000 the international communities’ expectations on the concrete steps towards bridging the digital divide were associated with convening WSIS by the UN Secretary-General in 2003.

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