Richard Delmas, President Semantis, is very active at the regular WSIS events (World Summit on the Information Society) in Geneva. The WSIS Forum represents the world’s largest annual gathering of the ‘ICT for development’ community. The WSIS Forum is co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD.

**Ongoing discussions at WSIS about Local interventions, global impacts, Internet disruptions, encryption and data flows:**

- While there is increasing awareness of potential unintended impacts of Internet shutdowns, they continue to happen around the world. Shutdowns may affect the exercise of human rights, have economic implications, and may lead to the fragmentation of the Internet (as they often have cross-border effects).
- The motivations behind Internet shutdowns vary, they may be legitimate, but sometimes blocking is used to address problems that could be solved by using the Internet. It is important to have a process in place that ensures: transparency, adequate oversight, and redress mechanisms.
- Encryption helps promote public security, and allows a better protection of human rights (such as those of activists, journalists, and minorities). It should not be seen as a by-default security threat. Countries that consider bans on encryption should understand the limitations and impacts of such a ban (e.g. cross-border effects, undermining the security of citizens, challenging the human rights of groups or minorities, and determining companies to move to other jurisdictions where such bans are not in place). Tools developed or employed to undermine encryption can come into the hands of those with illegal or criminal purposes. Governments and industry should cooperate and Identified vulnerabilities in encryption/encrypted products should be reported to the vendors.
- Stakeholders should work together on achieving an appropriate balance between the interests of citizens and entities to secure their data and the needs of law enforcement agencies, while not undermining the fundamentals of the technology.
- Data is an important asset in the digital era, due to its multiple uses. As governments and private companies collect and process large amounts of data, there is a need for more transparency and accountability in these processes. Users should be educated on how their data may be used and how to protect it.
- The digital economy depends on the free flow of data, but this should be balanced with data protection. Governments, private companies, and civil society should work together on basic sets of rules that allow data aggregation and data flows, while also protecting the integrity of data and the privacy of individuals.
**New trends this year on:**

Digitisation can empower citizens, strengthen institutions, and promote more inclusive democratic participation and policy making. But it can also lead to information disorder, public mistrust, and the manipulation of public opinion.

- Trust in public institutions and policy making processes remains a matter of concern, and digitisation can act both as a solution and as a threat. Many emphasised that core principles – such as accountability, transparency, legitimacy, and openness – are needed to consolidate or restore trust. Digital technologies can help put these principles into practice.

- ‘Fake news’ continues to be in focus, but many noted that the term is confusing, and ‘disinformation’ or ‘misinformation’ could be used instead. While the phenomenon is not new, it now has a wider effect due to digital technologies. Governments are called upon to refrain from content regulation and censorship while there is a need to identify intermediary responsibility and the level in regulation in this regard, platforms cannot be solely responsible for countering misinformation.

- General agreement on the crucial role that education and literacy have in equipping individuals with a critical mind, and the ability to make informed choices and distinguish trustworthy information from misinformation and/or manipulation. While acknowledging the importance of education, remedies were proposed for addressing the challenges of misinformation in the digital space: strengthening quality journalism, rebalancing the relation between traditional and new media, fact checking, and providing alternative positive stories.

- Multistakeholder cooperation is key in making sure that we, as a society, use the digital space to the best of our abilities. While the digital future is characterised by uncertainties, and facing the unknown is a challenge, relying on long-term principles (such as accountability and transparency) combined with having flexibility in implementing and finding tailor-made solutions to face new challenges would be the most appropriate way forward.