

Global Symposium for Regulators 2009

New strategies to boost tomorrow's networks and services

The ninth Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) ended with the adoption of best practice guidelines to boost future networks and services. It took place under the chairmanship of Kamal Shehadi, Chairman and CEO of Lebanon's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. Participants spoke of the pressing need for governments to open markets to greater competition and use incentives to stimulate investment in the broadband networks that are fast becoming the lifeblood of the knowledge economy.

Industry views taken on board

The one-day Global Industry Leaders' Forum (see pages 28–29) made recommendations that formed the Forum Chairman's report to GSR. Participants in the Forum stressed the need for predictable, stable regulation, improved regional harmonization of regulatory frameworks, more efficient management of the radio-frequency spectrum, and a "light touch" by regulators to allow markets to evolve naturally. They also advocated technology-neutral regulation, and urged regulators to make provision for the ongoing development of converged services by ensuring sufficient spectrum is available to support future growth.

Regional Regulatory Associations

GSR also heard a report from regional regulatory associations. Regulators no longer operate solely within their historical markets and geographical

barriers, but must act and react at a global level. For this reason, an informal meeting was held on 9 November 2009 for regional regulatory associations to share experience, discuss pressing issues and build bridges for better and more active cooperation.

The meeting was chaired by Abdulrahman Bin Ahmed Al-Jaafari, Governor of the Communications and Information Technology Commission of Saudi Arabia and President of the Arab Regulators Network. It was moderated by the Chairman of the Association of Communications and Telecommunications Regulators of the Portuguese Speaking Countries David Gomez, who is also Director General of Cape Verde's Agência Nacional das Comunicações. It attracted participants from seven regional regulators' associations: AREGNET; ARCTEL; ARCTAC; EACO; FRATEL; Latin American Forum of Telecom Regulators, and the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators' Association.

Participants agreed to organize annual meetings in parallel with GSR, and to establish a Regional Association Secretariat Network in collaboration with ITU. BDT Director Sami Al Basheer Al Morshid said that ITU welcomed these initiatives. Presenting the meeting's report to GSR, Mr Gomez said the associations noted that they have common problems and share the same goals, and all seek greater harmonization and regional cooperation.

The financial crisis

One of the key topics of discussion at GSR was the financial crisis. The economic downturn has mostly spared the ICT sector, which continues to grow, although more slowly. This was the view of a GSR session on the impact of the financial crisis on regulation, moderated by the Chairman of the United States Federal Communications Commission Julius Genachowski.

Participants noted that many developed countries and nearly all member countries of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have put in place packages to stimulate demand in the short term, injecting cash into their economies to protect jobs. Although affected by the financial crisis, developing countries (with the exception of a few such as Malaysia and Mexico) have not developed stimulus plans.

However, the April 2009 meeting of the G20 allocated to multilateral development banks USD 100 billion of the global package worth USD 1.1 trillion to support lending to developing countries. Some participants at GSR said that the G20 funds, as well as unallocated universal service funds, should be used for ICT projects in developing countries. Others, noting the low penetration of broadband in the developing world, stressed that availability of spectrum would do most to improve the situation.

Other topics

GSR also covered such topics as effective regulation in a converged world; consumer protection; universal access policies in the 21st century; Internet protocol (IP) and traditional telecommunication (voice) interconnection; mobile termination rates; the challenges facing new market entrants; and voice over IP. Discussion Papers on these topics were presented and will be featured in future issues of *ITU News*.

Best practice guidelines offer a way forward

The Symposium developed a new set of best practice guidelines to help regulators develop innovative strategies to meet the needs of a converged environment. The guidelines focus on four key areas: promoting convergence; building stronger, more effective national regulatory institutions; using regulation to stimulate investment, and promoting new services to help connect the unconnected.

Convergence, the guidelines say, is most likely to thrive in an environment that allows competition among broadband networks and service providers. They stress the importance of appropriate interconnection arrangements; the benefits of next-generation network technologies; the need for flexible numbering, assignment and reservation regimes; the advantages of technology neutrality; the need to promote the roll-out of broadband, and the growing importance of environmental considerations when deploying and using ICT.

They also emphasize the key role of governments and regulators in stimulating demand for ICT services, and in overcoming such challenges as threats to cybersecurity, lack of local content, and insufficient availability of low-cost access devices. The guidelines encourage public-private partnerships and the use of universal service mechanisms to connect underserved areas. They also say that governments should consider using public funds to finance infrastructure in areas where private-sector investment is insufficient.

The full text of the "Best Practice Guidelines on innovative regulatory approaches in a converged world to strengthen the foundation of a global Information Society" is at www.itu.int/ITU-D/treg/Events/Seminars/GSR/GSR09/consultation_contributions/GSR09_BestPractice_E.pdf