

Address by Hon Censu Galea at the
Workshop on "Market Mechanisms for Spectrum Management"
"Challenges and Opportunities: What Lies Ahead for Radio Spectrum
Management?" Geneva, Switzerland, 23rd January 2007

Ladies & Gentlemen,

During the last two decades we have witnessed unprecedented developments in electronic communications, many of which requiring the use of radio spectrum. We see this trend as continuing unabated long into the future – a trend that is beneficial to consumers and to business. The proliferation of these wireless technologies at the same time serves to remind us of our precious reliance on radio spectrum and the need for us to allocate and manage this diligently. In order to do so, it is incumbent on governments to ensure that appropriate policies are in place reflecting these dynamics and serving to maximise utilisation of this precious commodity – radio spectrum. Such policies should be forward-looking and as far as possible anticipative, thus avoiding the possible predicament that sector regulation may inhibit technological change and innovations. Such policies also need to factor-in economic interests which are seeking the commoditisation of spectrum and weight in all this, also in light of national and broader social and cultural development implications.

An added minefield in the formulation of policy are legacy issues which need addressing in order to ensure equity and fairness of access to radio spectrum.

Policies should also reflect the fact that, as a trade-able resource with an economic value, spectrum directly or indirectly serves to facilitate the achievement of social and cultural objectives.

In order to achieve these objectives, which occasionally may be conflicting, we need to strike a balance by charting an optimal course that takes into account the need for governments to:

- ensure that the requirements of all radio-communication services are met;
- maximise the social and cultural benefits arising from the use of radio-communications; for example, in relation to broadcasting, public safety, national security and health care; and
- enhance national competitiveness by ensuring that adequate spectrum is allocated and assigned for applications that derive the highest economic and social value from it.

Achieving this balance requires a regulatory process that is flexible and responsive to changes in technologies, demand, markets and public policy objectives.

In order to be flexible and responsive, we need a willingness and an ability to apply different spectrum management approaches in different circumstances. This enables us to align spectrum management policies with public policy goals. In the course of this it is recognised that we may need to sacrifice technical and economic efficiencies in the interest of provision of certain public services such as national security, defence and public broadcasting services.

Not only must individual states be flexible and responsive in developing spectrum management mechanisms, but so must supranational organisations having responsibilities for spectrum harmonisation, coordination and allocation. We recognise that achieving this responsiveness is difficult even at a national level, let alone at the global level. However, it is a goal towards which we must continuously strive.

Moreover, signatories to international agreements must all respect the rules of the game. All parties to such agreements carry a heavy responsibility.

They must ensure that their spectrum management policies do not create spill-over effects that impact their neighbours negatively. The management of spectrum in the cross-border areas is of particular importance. In the absence of this, the efforts of individual states, in ensuring the most effective use of their spectrum resource can be severely thwarted.

In small states such as Malta, spectrum interference has implications at a national level, and not only in the border regions.

The implications are, however, not limited to the level of individual state, as they also impact negatively on the effectiveness and in the longer term the credibility of institutions such as the ITU. Therefore, at this level we should also be considering how to change the spectrum management processes to ensure effective compliance with international agreements. In the absence of these measures, it is conceivable that individual states may have to resort to actions in order to protect their legitimate and sovereign right to spectrum. It is understood, therefore, that the success factor underpinning such agreements remains the goodwill and the spirit of collaboration that individual states are willing to invest in this process, complemented by appropriate coordinative measures of multi-lateral agencies such as ITU, CEPT and the European Commission.

I encourage the ITU to seek to actively address these issues. This workshop demonstrates that the ITU acknowledges the need for change. On our part we will continue to strive to adopt spectrum management policies that are forward-looking and aimed at maximising spectrum utilisation, in accordance with international agreements.