

**ITU DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM FOR REGULATORS**  
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**Asean Telecommunications Regulators Council (ATRC)**  
*A Regional Forum for Regulators*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper is to introduce to *the ITU Development Symposium for Regulators*, the Asean Telecommunications Regulators Council (ATRC), a Regional Telecommunication Forum for Regulators for South East Asian Region. The paper outlines the ATRC's main objectives and activities, its members and its future goals in the development of the communications sector in the Asean Region

## **2. Background**

The ATRC is an independent grouping formed in July 1995 by the Asean telecommunications regulators when they first met formally during the ATRC's inaugural meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was formed after the disbandment of Asean POSTEL (Committee for Post and Telecommunications), which was a committee under the Asean Secretariat. It has no formal link between the ATRC and the ASEAN organization itself. Asean, which means Association of South East Asian Nation, is the Intergovernmental Organization of ten South East Asia Nations formed by the leaders of the founding nations with the objectives of shaping the future of the member nations in this region. The ten Asean member nations are: Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao People Democratic Republic, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

## **3. Objectives and Functions of the ATRC**

The formation of ATRC was initiated as a result of the recognition of the dynamic global telecommunication environment within which the Asean nations operate as well as the importance of telecommunication as a fundamental infrastructure upon which the vision of an Asean Free Trade Area can be realized

The ATRC was formed to provide the telecommunications regulators and authorities within the Asean organization the opportunities to work together in the spirit of cooperation and action. The role of the regulators is to effectively facilitate the development of the telecommunication industry, serve consumers and accelerate the growth and development of the industry. The three main functions of the ATRC are:

- 3.1 The Council shall be responsible for the discussion and coordination of all policy, strategic and regulatory issues in telecommunications which are of mutual interest to the telecommunications administrations of the Asean nations

- 3.2 These issues shall include but shall not be limited to radio frequency coordination, standards, regulatory trends and issues, strategies for telecommunications development and international affairs
- 3.3 The council shall also identify and promote areas of potential cooperation in telecommunications amongst Asean nations and facilitate the exchange of information in these areas through activities such as seminars, training and workshops

#### **4. Organization of the ATRC**

- 4.1. The ATRC membership consists of the Director General or the Regulators of the Telecommunications Administration of the Asean member countries. There are now ten members representing the ten nations of Asean. New members may join when other nations become members of Asean
- 4.2. The Chairman of the ATRC is selected on the basis of the member of the Administration hosting the Council Meeting and the Chairman shall hold office only for the period to the next Council Meeting. The Chairmanship shall then pass to the member from the host country of the next meeting
- 4.3. There is no permanent Secretariat for the ATRC. The host country shall act as the Secretariat for the Meeting. The Secretariat is responsible for the preparation of the Agenda, notification and organization of the meeting including recording of the meeting proceeding. The Secretariat may also play the role of a coordinator, to furnish meeting decisions or extract of the minutes of the meeting to Asean Secretariat or to any other organizations to enable follow-up activities that are considered necessary for the benefits of the members
- 4.4. The ATRC meets at least once a year or at any other intervals that are considered appropriate by members and these meetings are hosted on rotational basis based on consensus that may be determined by the Meeting

#### **5. Activities of the ATRC**

**5.1. Key Activities:** The key activities that the ATRC is focusing are in the following five areas:

- i. Harmonization of frequency spectrum allocation and use within the Asean region, such as for mobile cellular and radio paging services to enhance mobility and convenience of users;
- ii. Harmonization of technical compliance processes and standards for telecommunications equipment to support the effort of Asean manufacturers and suppliers to market their products in one another's market and to enhance the range and availability of these equipment for users;
- iii. Intensification of cooperation on international issues by joint coordination of a common position to ensure that at any for a such as ITU and APT, Asean countries show leaderships and initiatives commensurate with their economic status;
- iv. Promotion of the development, interconnectivity and interoperability of the National Information Infrastructure of Asean countries through harmonization

of broadband multimedia networks standards with a view to assist all Asean members to develop NII plans and the needs for balanced development of such infrastructure within Asean

- v. The development of human resource expertise to support the growing needs of the region telecommunication sector. This is envisaged to be done through the establishment of linkages amongst members to facilitate skill training and enhancement in telecommunications fields

**5.2 Setting up of Working Groups:** In implementing its activities, the ATRC may set up working groups or study groups to study specific issues that are considered of importance to the members

## **6. Past, Present and Future Activities – typical activities**

6.1. Since its inception in 1994, the ATRC has played its important role as the coordinating arms for the regional telecommunications regulators in the areas as mentioned above. Typically the ATRC has continued to hold its dialogue through its annual gathering, the 6<sup>th</sup> ATRC Meeting was recently held in Brunei Darussalam. During the past six years the ATRC has deliberated and pursued amongst others the following key areas:

### **6.1.1 Intra-Asean Cooperation in Regulatory, Policy and Strategic Issues:**

**i). Exchange of information on policy and regulations amongst Asean countries:** This has greatly assisted members in the understanding of other members' regulatory and policy solutions in their effort to develop and enhance policy and regulatory rules relevant to their countries, to enable the telecommunications sector to move forward faster.

**ii). Improving Intra-Asean cooperation and interconnectivity:** there are many areas that the ATRC has deliberated amongst its members, examples are:

- ❖ **Several areas of standardization and cooperation have been pursued** – e.g. the study on type-approval cooperation has now led to the formulation of Mutual Framework for Type Approval Arrangement (MRA for Telecommunications Equipment). The ATRC members have agreed on this MRA during its 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting in October 2000. The MRA is targeted to be implemented in 2001 once it is endorsed by the Meeting of the Asean Ministers of Telecommunications,
- ❖ **Harmonization of standards** eg. Alphanumeric Telephone Keypad Standard
- ❖ **Common Asean frequency bands** for paging, cellular, trunked radio
- ❖ **Enhancing regional information infrastructure:** The ATRC has agreed to a collective step towards Asean-wide broadband interconnectivity and interoperability. A Working Group on this matter has also been set up
- ❖ **Development of Regional Growth Areas:** this program is a part of the Asean private sector initiatives in conjunction with the respect Government in the overall economic development and growth of specific regional areas within Asean. There are now three regional areas being developed through this agenda, namely the BIMP-EAGA (Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asia Growth Area), IMT-GT (Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle) and the IMS-GT (Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle)

- ❖ **ATRC Training Programme in Info-communications:** This is a new programme being developed in order to maximize the resources in capacity building in particular the availability of competent persons in the field of telecommunications
- ❖ **Asean Electronic Commerce Cooperation:** this is a part of the broader Asean E-Commerce development program initiated by the Asean Secretariat. The Asean Coordinating Committee on E-Commerce is tasked to draft the Asean Framework on E-Commerce

**6.1.2 International Issues:** deliberation on this area includes the subject of:

- ❖ International Charging Arrangement for Internet
- ❖ ICANN activities
- ❖ Multilateral reform of the International Settlement Rate
- ❖ Developments within the ITU, APEC, APT and other international and regional Organizations. In this area the ATRC has always invited the ITU and the APT to participate in its meeting. By this way there is direct communications built to address areas of interest to all parties involved and in particular the Asean member countries themselves

**6.1.3 Other issues include:** Asean Secretariat and the ATRC linkage, the Asean initiatives affecting the role of ATRC such as the Hanoi Action Plan and the e-Asean initiatives, and the impending convergence of technology and services resulting in the re-structuring of the communications sector.

## **7. Future Roles of ATRC**

During its 6<sup>th</sup> ATRC Meeting held in Brunei 16-18 October 2000, members of ATRC have agreed that there is an urgent need to address the future roles of ATRC in view of the fast changing developments of the communications sector in the region. The traditional role of regulating the telecommunications sector based on current policy, legal and regulatory rules, technology and services has to be re-visited. Regulators are reminded and have now to view their roles from convergence perspectives in order to ensure they are kept abreast and ahead in dealing with the new digital market expectations. The role of ATRC as a regional forum should be tailored towards this environment

## **8. Conclusion**

The ATRC as a regional forum for telecommunication regulators has blazed the trail for a more exciting future in facilitating the development of this fast moving communications sector within Asean. It has shown that smart partnership in dealing with the communications sector will benefit all its members. Even though it is only six years, ATRC has matured and become a respectable Regional Forum in the Asean and the Asia Pacific and hopefully throughout the world. ATRC looks forward towards smart partnership with the ITU, and other Regional Forum for Telecommunications Regulators

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