|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Logo  Description automatically generated | **Regional Preparatory Meeting  for WTDC-21 for Europe (RPM-EUR)  Virtual, 18-19 January 2021** | | A close up of a sign  Description automatically generated |
|  | |  | |
|  | | **Document** **RPM-EUR21/21-E** | |
|  | | **6 January 2021** | |
|  | | **English only** | |
| Czech Republic | | | |
| Proposal to further strengthen mutual cooperation  between ITU and sub-regional organizations | | | |
|  | | | |
| **Agenda item:**  Item 8  **Summary:**  Czechia comments on the well-proven and increasing need to improve the infrastructure development in the underserved areas, brings the examples of good practice at national level, and proposes strengthening the so-far valuable cooperation between the ITU and further organizations.  **Expected results:**  RPM-EUR is invited to examine this document and approve the proposal contained therein.  **References:**  N/A | | | |

Czechia would like to thank the ITU, and especially its Development Sector, for all the activities aiming at *connecting the unconnected*.

In the last year we have seen a highly increased need to use modern communication tools strongly depending on the availability of data connection. However, this still is not the reality even in the countries being considered as developed. Therefore, this definitely appears to be a paramount target lying ahead. This is not just an isolated opinion, it has been reiterated several times at the high-level EU meetings and we cordially believe that without proper infrastructure being available to all citizens and enterprises Europe may quickly lag behind the rest of the world. Future plans should entail at least a few areas: access of SMEs to financing, we need to focus on investments into very high capacity networks, urgent support of digital education and skills, development of reliable and transparent eGovernment solutions, bridging digital divide and, last but not least, with all possible regard to privacy and security of electronic communication networks and services.

Czechia does not only believe that *digital* should play a part in a recovery after the crisis, but rather that a recovery should be directly *driven* by the digital transformation.

The Czech administration therefore cooperates closely with many stakeholders from the sector, as well as with the academia. We can mention at least the collaboration with ESA Business Incubation Centre Prague (ESA BIC, <https://www.esa-bic.cz/incubation/>), universities such as the Czech Technical University or Technical University of Ostrava (<https://www.vsb.cz/en>) and support of the successful start-ups via the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (<https://www.tacr.cz/en/>).

We should be able to reach ambitious financial incentives for start-ups, scale-ups and SMEs. There are EU-based programmes, such as Digital Europe, Digital Innovation Hubs and new ways of financing like the ones utilizing distributed ledger technologies, which should be the key ingredients for achieving the goals. Roll up of very high capacity networks, especially in schools, hospitals and public administration, as well as in remoted areas, is also of crucial importance. Bearing all this in mind, according to the recent experience, a cooperation might prove to be more effective tool than any regulation. Either way, it is essential to emphasize a need for an evidence- and risk-based approach.

As we discuss broadly on how to invest more, we should also not forget to strive to invest more effectively. In our opinion, we need to have a clear idea how the future ecosystems should work together, considering various initiatives and structures. We also need to remember that possible infrastructure sharing may ease the investment situation, which can prove to be very useful in developing new types of networks. Moreover, it is necessary to realize that Europe will be more competitive, not less, when working together with the rest of the world, it will make our companies and countries stronger, not weaker.

According to the above-mentioned, the main Czech national strategies cover some of the crucial areas necessary to achieve the set targets – and there are new ones to come quite soon, as the situation is evolving quite rapidly. The *National Plan for the Development of Next Generation Networks* of 2017 (<https://www.mpo.cz/en/e-communications-and-postal-services/electronic-communications/concepts-and-strategies/national-ngn-development-plan/national-plan-for-the-development-of-next-generation-networks--226442/>) will be soon updated by a *National Plan for the Development of Very-High Capacity Networks*, being currently discussed and prepared, and is complemented by the *“Action Plan 2.0” to Implement Non-subsidy Measures to Support the Planning and Construction of Electronic Communication Networks* (<https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/e-komunikace-a-posta/elektronicke-komunikace/koncepce-a-strategie/narodni-plan-rozvoje-siti-nga/2020/11/AP-2-0_cs.docx>). Czechia also keeps the eye on 5G mobile network evolution, which is addressed by the document *Implementation and Development of 5G Networks in the Czech Republic* (<https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/e-komunikace-a-posta/elektronicke-komunikace/koncepce-a-strategie/narodni-plan-rozvoje-siti-nga/2020/1/Implementace-a-rozvoj-siti-5G-v-CR-EN.pdf>), approved by the government last year, as well as by the recent auction of radio spectrum in 700 MHz and 3,5 GHz bands. Czechia has also created a *5G Alliance* (<https://www.5galiance.cz/>) as a multistakeholder platform for the discussion on many issues connected with the new generation of radio-based networks. Therefore it consists of 5 working groups aiming at industry, smart cities, cyber security, misinformation and education, and transport corridors.

We therefore hope for a good future cooperation and development which will help us carry over the difficult period and create a sustainable digital environment necessary for rational existence in the coming years and decades.

Our second point is related to the necessity of human-centricity of digital technologies’ development. The COVID-19 crisis has made the importance of digital infrastructure and digital services yet even more visible, with a particular focus on safety and health, but also on minimizing disruption. Remote learning and particularly remote working, along with other digital tools, have not only helped us survive the crisis, but they are also set to drive economic recovery in the business sector. New technologies never come entirely without risks. There are valid questions, for example about cybersecurity, health or personal data privacy in relation to the rapidly expanding digital technologies. To tackle these questions and risks we first need to research and understand them. While risks require robust responses, they should not overshadow the unparalleled benefits of the new technologies. It is our duty to always search for the best ways to support progress and innovation, particularly in areas where this directly improves citizens’ life.

The development and deployment of 5G networks is a unique showcase in this. As we have stated in the document *How to Approach 5G Policies* (<https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/e-komunikace-a-posta/elektronicke-komunikace/koncepce-a-strategie/2020/6/How-to-approach-5G-POLICIES.pdf>), 5G is a major milestone not only in national communications, but also for human life and societies, with a potential to boost their prosperity, security, health, environmental sustainability and inclusiveness. Digital policies governing 5G, and related technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), must be primarily human-centric. This means that they must be driven by interests and concerns of local consumers, employees, entrepreneurs and generally all the citizens. The *How to Approach 5G Policies* document proposes several recommendations for such a human-centric approach that will allow for sustainable development of new digital technologies. We believe that this is a good start for such discussion within ITU structures.

**Proposal**

For the reasons above Czechia proposes that the RPM takes note of further strengthening the mutual cooperation between the ITU and sub-regional organizations, like – amongst others – the European Union and others, taking into account the role of such organizations in the ITU structure and recognizing the leading role of the ITU Member States.

Furthermore, Czechia recommends to ignite discussion on human-centric approach to digital technologies in order to ensure sustainable development of innovative solutions that will be accepted by the citizens. As the 5G case shows, the fears related to the new technologies are rising and – if no action is taken – in the near future these fears can create major barriers to deployment of new digital infrastructure and development of new digital services.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_