



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

"POLICY AND REGULATION INITIATIVE FOR DIGITAL AFRICA"

"PRIDA"

ITU Kick Off and Technical Committee meeting

29/05/2019, AVANI Gaborone Resort & Casino

Opening remarks by H.E. Mr Jan SADEK,

Ambassador of the European Union to Botswana and SADC

- Check against delivery -

Mr Martin Mokgware, Chief Executive of the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA),
Mr. Andrew Rugege, ITU Regional Director Africa,
Distinguished representatives of the AUC, ITU and other distinguished organisations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to you all and for those coming from abroad, welcome to Gaborone!

1. On behalf of the European Union, I first would like to express our gratitude to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) for organising this meeting, to the African Union as the other key partner of this initiative and to you all for taking part in this kick-off meeting.
2. In my opening remarks, I would like to take the opportunity to share three main messages:
 - First, to give you the European Union perspective of what brings us here today,
 - Second, to recall the extraordinary potential of digital technologies for development,
 - And third, to stress that digital transformation is on top of the agenda of the EU-AU cooperation.

I. What brings us here today?

3. The initiative that brings us together is the "PRIDA", which stands for "**Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa**". If this is the first time you hear about it, I promise you, you will hear a lot more about it in the future. PRIDA is a **joint initiative of the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**, and it will be further explained in the next session. As you know, we in the EU like figures, so I cannot but mention the resources made available for this initiative, which reach an amount of around 10.5 Mo€ for the period 2018-2022, under the EU-funded Pan African Programme.
4. Today we will focus on one specific component of the PRIDA, **the radio spectrum management**, for which the EU signed an agreement with ITU. There is no need to preach to the converted and I will not dare to try and explain to you, the specialists, how important the management of the radio spectrum is... You all know it: **radio spectrum waves are the basis and a key resource for a tremendous range of communications and applications** such as Wi-Fi, mobile phones and other wireless communications devices and services¹.
5. **Spectrum coordination is therefore indispensable for better and proper connectivity**. This will also be key for coping for instance with the development of the Internet of Things (IoT).
6. The exponential spread and scale-up of digital technologies and services has profound global implications, creating **great opportunities for sustainable development and inclusive growth**, but at the same time bringing **new threats and challenges**. This brings me to my second message:

II. The potential of digital technologies for development,

7. Digital technologies and services have a key role to play in **improving lives in societies all over the world**, for example by empowering women and girls, enhancing democratic governance and transparency, boosting productivity and job creation, and unlocking new pathways.

¹ broadcasting, public safety (police, fire brigades), research (radio astronomy), transport (ships, airplanes), environmental protection (monitoring the Earth's surface and atmosphere) or energy (smart grids)...

8. Africa has a combined population of over 1.2 billion people. **Digital transformation has a great potential to change the trajectory of the continent** and provide much-needed jobs to the millions of young people who enter the workforce each year.
9. **Africa is already progressing rapidly in digital adoption.** Over the past ten years, the continent has for instance recorded the highest growth globally in **internet access** from 2.1% in 2005 to 24.4% in 2018. **Mobile telephone** penetration has also increased in Africa from 12% in 2006 to 80% in 2017: **this is just impressive!** Three technologies – Smart-phones, Internet, and social media – have generated/are generating a rapid transformation of life in Africa.
10. **Nonetheless, Africa is very far from achieving the potential of the digital economy to benefit its population.** A lack of enabling environment for instance diminishes the incentives for private operators to invest. This lack of investment in combination with heavy taxation and red tape, result in unaffordable prices for citizens. Inequalities are also significant: between countries and within countries, urban areas having more than twice the number of digital users than rural ones.

According to ITU findings in 2016, the cost of a monthly fixed broadband package was 1.7% of the average income in developed countries, compared with 64% in Africa. The quality and stability of internet connections in Africa are generally lower than those found in the rest of the world and the continent also has the lowest international connectivity in the globe, with half the bandwidth of Asia and the Pacific and 20 times less than that in Europe. Amazing... but this is still the sad reality of the digital divide!

11. In the increasingly digital and data driven economy, rules that generate **trust, data protection** and **security** across the entire value chain also become critical. The recent past saw an increased number of **cybersecurity incidents** that can cause major economic damage to the global economy and security. The European Union strongly believes that we need to work together at all levels, and we invest in international cyber cooperation in parallel with our internal efforts for cybersecurity.

In February, I participated together with the Botswana government in the launching of the EU supported Cyber for Development Project here in Botswana. The project seeks to deliver value through aligned policy and organisational and technical measures, and thereby increases cyber resilience of the beneficiary countries.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This brings me to my third and last message:

III. Digital transformation is on top of the agenda of the EU-AU cooperation

12. The **5th and last AU-EU Summit** that took place in November 2017 in Abidjan emphasised strongly the **importance of "*unlocking the potential of the digital economy for Africa and Europe in the creation of jobs, skills and economic development for the youth*"**. We are therefore working on a number of initiatives strengthening and enhancing our cooperation in the digital sector.
13. You might have heard about the ambitious 3-pillar European External Investment Plan (EIP) to encourage investment in our partner countries in Africa. I will not go into the details of the EIP but just wish to stress that **"Digital for Development" features prominently in the EIP and is the subject of a specific Investment window.**
14. Let me also highlight the **new "Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs"** adopted by the European Commission on 12 September 2018. In the scope of this Alliance, a **High Level Digital Economy Task Force** between the African Union and European Union was launched in December 2018. It provides a good example of the new approach to development questions, by taking on board a broad variety of actors from public institutions, private firms, International Financial Institutions, Development Agencies of Member States, and civil society coming from both continents.
15. This work is also **complementary to the work done by our Delegations in Africa at the various levels**, with the Regional Economic Communities and with the African countries.
16. **Exchange of experience is also important.** On the EU side, we are pursuing an ambitious plan, the **Digital Single Market Strategy**, to make sure that Europe is in the best possible position to attract investments, foster creativity and innovation, provide top-class public services and protect our citizens. Important efforts are also deployed to pave the way towards truly harmonised spectrum allocation throughout the EU. This experience can also certainly benefit to Africa.

17. **We the European Union are strong supporters of Africa's integration.** We are very much hoping to contribute to a powerful integration momentum in Africa that would bring a number of positive synergies also in Europe, for instance in the scope of the African Continental Free Trade Area "AfCFTA". This also includes **bridging the digital divide!**

Conclusion:

18. And this brings me back to where I started: **appropriate policies and strategies are essential to make ICTs available, affordable and accessible.** In this context, all African countries have to take measures to address the important issues of radio frequency spectrum, its timely assignment, harmonization of its use and its availability to promote the adoption and deployment of mobile broadband. Regulations should be transparent, predictable and stable. Forward-looking regulatory frameworks are essential to encourage private investments in networks and e-Services. **This is the core of our cooperation with ITU and the AUC in the scope of the PRIDA initiative, and this is what brings us here together today.**

19. With these words, let me again thank our host and the organisers, and I wish again to stress that the EU and its Delegations are fully committed to our cooperation and to making the digital transformation a success.

I wish you a fruitful meeting and useful deliberations. Thank you