The role of ITU-T in the ICT standardization landscape
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The Federal Association for Information Technology, Telecommunications and New Media (BITKOM) represents more than 1,700 companies in Germany. Its 1,200 direct members generate an annual sales volume of 135 billion Euros annually and employ 700,000 people. They include providers of software and IT services, telecommunications and Internet services, manufacturers of hardware and consumer electronics, and digital media businesses. BITKOM campaigns in particular for a modernization of the education system, for an innovative economic policy and a future-oriented Internet policy.

In the field of information and communication technologies (ICT), ITU-T has a unique position compared to other organizations. ITU (International Telecommunication Union) is a specialized agency of the United Nations. The specialized agencies are autonomous organizations cooperating at an interstate level through the coordination mechanism of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and at the level of their secretariats through the Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) with the United Nations and with each other. All the other relevant standardization organizations are private organizations. This applies to ISO and IEC as well as to formally not acknowledged global standardization organizations.

It is important to differentiate between the sub-organizations ITU-R, ITU-D and ITU-T. ITU-R and ITU-D are important and acknowledged sectors. Topics such as spectrum allocation and support for developing countries are top-level issues which continue to be successfully dealt with by ITU-R and ITU-D.

ITU-T was very successful in the past and an important sector for global standardization in telecommunications. The work of ITU-T was characterized by the structures of public telephone network operators such as the former Federal Post Office (Bundespost) and the related Federal Ministry in Germany.

However, this role of ITU-T has changed considerably due to the global liberalization of the telecommunications market. As a consequence of these changed framework conditions, ITU-T is undergoing a process of structural change with respect to both its role in the global standardization landscape and its structures. While some of the decision making structures have been adapted, e.g. by means of the Alternative Approval Process (AAP) and the mechanism for new work areas by the introduction of focus groups, there is an ongoing potential for improvement. Especially in the field of governance and at the organizational level it is primarily the governments who have the power of decision.

On the other hand, industry as a key player in standardization, has little say and decision-making power although the companies as sector members carry out the major part of the technical work.

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The situation is different with the development of technical recommendations. For some time, technical recommendations have been prepared by using the Alternative Approval Process (AAP) and monitored and controlled by the sector members.

However, the process of change that ITU-T is undergoing is not only structural but also in content. Over the last few years, many new topics have been taken up which, although they are of topical interest, are not genuinely part of the telecommunications sector. Examples include M2M, IoT, ITS, Security, Cloud Computing and Smart Anything. In this context, ITU-T is faced with allegations that it competes with other standardization organizations, especially with ISO/IEC JTC 1, but also with globally operating forums and consortia such as IETF, OASIS and W3C. Such a competitive environment should be avoided, if possible, in formal international standardization. The tools created in ITU-T to prevent this, should therefore be used consistently. What should be mentioned in this context is the new Strategic Review Committee established at WTSA-12 and the new Cooperation and Coordination Group set up in TSAG. These tools should be used to make sure that the ITU-T projects are clearly defined and remain within the scope of telecommunications standardization. To avoid any duplication of work or even competing projects, active cooperation should be insisted on in all fields where points of contact exist with other organizations.

The fact that industry has increasingly turned away from the ITU-T may be the result of changes entailed by the conversion and transformation process. The fundamental advantages of the ITU are not being exploited in the ITU-T core business: For example regulatory issues such as lawful interception are not adequately being dealt with. Relevant technical work is still carried out by the technical Study Groups SG5 (Environment and climate change), SG15 (Transport, Access and Home) and SG16 (Multimedia). A great number of other issues are dealt with by ITU-T Focus Groups and Study Groups which do not elaborate standards but which, in line with their duties, select topics for work. The results are published for example as White Papers.

In summary the following can be said: Within ITU, ITU-T is undergoing a process of change which was initiated essentially by the liberalization of the telecommunications market. This process is characterized by the fact that ITU-T does an excellent job in some areas while it still needs to find its place in other areas, especially in new fields of technology. This has led to the initiation of projects overlapping to a certain extent with projects in other standardization organizations. This requires significantly closer cooperation than previously necessary to permanently avoid competing activities and unnecessary duplication of work.