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Scribe for Session 1 of the Strategic Dialogue: "Building our Broadband Future"
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. I have the honour to be assigned the role of Scribe for the first Session of the WTPF Strategic Dialogue yesterday afternoon, "Building out Broadband". And the panel was made up of five distinguished members, all represented in the short video: Mr. Moez Chakchouk, from the Tunisian Internet Agency; Mr. Matthias Kurth, Executive Director of Cable Europe; Ms. St. Amour of the Internet Society, ISOC; His Excellency, Mr. Diego Molano Vega, of Colombia; and last but not least, Her Excellency, Ms. Magdalena Gaj of the Electronic Communications Office of Poland. And of course the panel was very skillfully moderated by Mr. Raffaele Barberio.

First, the panel addressed the nature of broadband Internet as a basic need, a public utility, fundamental right or privilege? And the second overall question was what are the right conditions for stimulating build-out of broadband and the Internet services?

On the nature of broadband as a right or a privilege, let me just tell you that the founder of Ericsson, Mr. Lars Magnus Ericsson, an entrepreneur in the 20th Century, said that communications is a basic human need. And listening to the distinguished panelists, there seemed to be a more or less common view that access to Internet and access to broadband is indeed a basic human need or, as some would put it, a fundamental right.

The questions then are, what does this mean? Firstly, for level of ambition and secondly what does it mean regarding the tools? And what are the policies to achieve this? So, for example, if we should say that access to broadband Internet should be on par with the right of access to water or electricity, it may be seen as not ambitious enough, because a quick glance at the numbers shows that probably only 80% of the world's population have access to electricity and between 40-80% of the world's people – depending upon the definitions – actually have access to water. So, as Matthias Kurth said, stating the right by itself will not change anything. Also, I think that there is an agreement that we should be more ambitious than that when it comes to broadband Internet access.

There is room for optimism, realistic optimism based upon the rapid expansion and build-out of broadband infrastructure of the past two years. According to Ericsson data, from our Traffic Mobility Report published twice a year, in the next five years, up to 2018, fixed broadband will grow to reach close to 1 billion subscriptions. However, mobile broadband will grow from today's 1.5 billion to reach 6.5 billion, five years from now, by 2018, registering an annual growth of some 30% on average. So mobile broadband, 3G/4G looks set to be "the" technology that will connect the majority of the world's citizens with a rapid uptick of increasingly smarter smart phones playing an important role here. As His Excellency Mr. Molano says, the world seems to be solving this.

So regarding the ambition level, we should set our ambitions high. It's realistic that all people on this planet can get broadband Internet access in the near future. But, then, regarding the means, what are the best tools the best policies to reach this objective? We need to look at the supply side. And we, of course, also have to look at the demand side on the content side. So, looking at supply side, from our panelists, we heard quite a range of advice when it comes to building out networks.

On regulation itself, we heard from Magdalena Gaj that regulation should be balanced, should be predictable and not too strict. And we heard from Matthias Kurth that we need to foster competitive environment. And we of course, as many of the panelists stressed, we need to allocate spectrum. We need to work from a technology neutrality point of view.

It was strongly emphasized by Matthias Kurth and Minister Molano and others that we need to promote private investments, and not necessarily through universal service obligations. Investment happens when there are returns.

Also, from Matthias Kurth, it was emphasized the importance of sharing best practices. Something surprising that some countries are very successful here and there's a lot to be learned from them.

Also, as Magdalena Gaj emphasized, it is extremely important to stimulate cooperation as she highlighted from Poland, they're working with local governments and local entrepreneurs to create that competition that will spur investments.

So moving on to the demand side and on the Internet and content side, on the Internet itself, we heard from Lynn St. Amour, CEO of ISOC, that we need to distinguish between Internet and broadband. They are different. Broadband being the pipe and Internet being sort of the content flowing through that pipe. So, broadband is necessary, but not sufficient. She also highlighted the importance of safeguarding the multistakeholder model and keeping the Internet open.

And on that subject, we also heard from Moez Chakchouk of the Tunisian Internet Agency, a fascinating story where he told the challenges of transitioning from an agency that he described as a censorship machine to an agency that is promoting the open Internet. And Mr. Chakchouk also referred to the high level of the Tunisian governments when it comes to stressing importance of Human Rights on the Internet in international fora. He also highlighted the importance of content and developing partnerships.

Finally, on content, we heard from His Excellency Minister Molano, that it's extremely important to develop local content. That is really what the citizens are asking for. And developing the local ecosystems that will provide that. But, of course, governments themselves also will play a very important role when it comes to delivering content, not least through e-government services.

To sum up, I think it was very interesting panel. There were some very clear and crisp messages from the panelists. And as the Secretary-General said in his opening speech yesterday, broadband will change the world and broadband will affect everything we do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.