

GSR13 Consultation

Contribution from the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) Egypt

The Status Quo

Today's digital world is changing immensely. With the evolvement of high-speed internet, the availability of information is only a click away. With the rising role of over the top providers the current regulatory approaches must be reconsidered.

Traditional international communications have changed, where services such as fixed telephony have been transformed into new forms including VoIP. New services like mobile telephony and IP communications are today of overwhelming significance and are different from the old days. The network structure and network interconnection arrangements have changed completely.

Today the Internet is creating a large community of 2 billion subscribers of all ages and much of the mobile telephony business as we know it today will fall into the same business model as the Internet, and which characteristics include lack of regulation/taxation, and free market. The Internet has become the critical infrastructure for our economic and social lives. Although these major technological innovations should be welcomed to replace the existing networks, their economic impact should be carefully considered.

The creation and delivery of services increasingly occur across national borders. Service providers in the IP era are able to operate independently of the physical constraints imposed by the network infrastructure on which the services themselves run. The development of cloud services is an obvious example.

Although the current regulatory frameworks makes some attempt to accommodate trans-national markets, but treats them as the exception rather than the rule. The ability of national regulators to enforce regulations against IP service providers who operate beyond national borders is also very limited. Any new regulatory proposals will need to confront these issues.

Regulatory Coherence and Adaption

Regulatory bodies need to keep in mind that an effective modification of the regulatory framework that addresses the needs of today and tomorrow requires an interlinked solution that addresses all key areas. Moreover, these changes to one area will affect other areas.

Thus, Egypt believes that in today's digital world, the regulator should be flexible enough to further encourage future growth and sustainable development of the telecom market, services and technological innovation. Regulators should continue to respect private sector leadership and commercial agreements. They should ensure a sustainable development of the telecom sector, essential for the necessary investments in the global telecom infrastructure.

Regulators must ensure the highest level of transparency, openness and multi-stakeholder discussion on issues that are essential for the development of today's digital society, in the interest of all stakeholders of the digital value chain.

Regulators must facilitate more affordable access to broadband, as well as access to content, applications and services. Not only must access be affordable, but a satisfactory quality of service must be guaranteed.

This cannot be achieved without effective dialogue between the different stakeholders, and without unnecessary restrictions on operators and content providers. A new ecosystem must be developed that guarantees a healthy relationship between operators and OTT providers, in which both parties can mutually benefit economically from the relationship. In such world, the regulator should play the role as a facilitator to achieve this new ecosystem.

Final Thoughts

Below is an attempt to propose a way forward to the current arrangements, considering the status quo and the development speed of different technologies involved:

- There is a need to redefine the role of national telecoms regulators in a world in which services are increasingly supplied by one set of players on a trans-national basis and networks are run by another set of players on a national or sub-national basis.
- National regulators must focus on the reach availability and quality of access to the Internet offered in their national market, instead of infrastructure competition as a primary goal of regulation.
- Regulators should consider how the future regulations tackling consumer protection, privacy and security will be enforced against Internet service providers operating trans-nationally.
- Regulatory reform should be adapted in conjunction with spectrum reform. It is important to pay attention to improving the availability and use of spectrum having recognized that this was a key input for the industry.
- The future role of standardization bodies in developing many of the core global technologies on which the industry relies must be empowered.
- In an Internet protocol (IP) services environment, regulators should think seriously about what 'interoperability' means in and how it would be achieved.