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## **MEETING DOCUMENT**

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Working Party on Telecommunications and Information Society
Subject:	Presidency Report on strengthening cooperation between European Union and the International Telecommunication Union

Delegations will find in the annex the Presidency Report on strengthening cooperation between European Union and the International Telecommunication Union.

# **Presidency Report**

## **on strengthening cooperation between European Union and the International Telecommunication Union**

### **Introduction**

On 24 January 2025 the Polish Presidency organized the workshop “Brussels-Geneva Interlinks: Strengthening EU in the ITU”, engaging relevant stakeholders including the European Commission, EU Member States, the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The workshop offered a platform of dialogue to review the current coordination mechanisms within EU, CEPT and ITU in the light of ITU summits. The discussion contributed to highlight the strongest aspects of cooperation and pointed out the challenges that need to be addressed regarding main ITU summits such as the Plenipotentiary Conference (PP), the World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC), the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) and the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC). The participants shared their views on how to streamline this coordination and create synergies for both EU and ITU.

In this context, it is important to take into account the previous and ongoing work both within the Council and the CEPT:

- The Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese non-paper “Setting a coordination mechanism within the EU and strengthening the relations between the ITU and the EU”<sup>1</sup>;
- The contribution of the Hungarian Presidency – the discussions on EU-ITU cooperation both in the WP Telecom and during the TTE (Telecoms) Council;
- The growing engagement of CEPT and the significantly increasing number of European Common Proposals (ECPs) adopted during preparation process towards ITU summits.

### **State of play:**

- The ITU is essential for fostering global ICT standardisation together with development of infrastructure and services by utilising existing as well as new and emerging telecommunication/ICT services, and serves as a platform for exchange of knowledge between its Member States.
- The EU has already proven that a timely, coordinated and coherent approach led to satisfactory outcome during PP-22, WRC-23 and WTSA-24.

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<sup>1</sup> ST 9335/23

Nevertheless, the geopolitical changes require even better coordination in order to harness the European potential in ITU fora.

- EU coordination is primarily dedicated towards politically sensitive issues, while CEPT tends to focus on the technical agenda items. Both formats should support each other, which is of paramount importance in order to achieve success during negotiations with other regions and ITU Member States.
- Effective and efficient participation of the EU Member States within ITU implies the coordination with experts based in Geneva and Brussels, together with the European Commission's support.
- As digital issues gain considerable international traction, they are also inevitable parameters in Europe's competitiveness, with the potential to shift the power balance in an ever-changing geopolitical landscape.
- ITU being the UN agency related to technical aspects of telecommunications, it has also political impact and therefore requires diplomats and policy makers to follow the processes.

### **Key takeaways from the Members States, moderators, EC, ITU and CEPT**

#### **European Union approach to the ITU framework:**

- The process of EU coordination for ITU summits should involve Trio Presidencies in order to provide exchange of information and a clear strategy. There is a need to ensure good coordination between Member States' representatives in every relevant forum related to ITU events.
- Regular dialogue between relevant Working Parties and the Digital Diplomacy Network should be organised in order to maximise the flow of information on strategic topics and coordination, with the possible participation of EU digital attaches in Geneva and New York.
- The EU presence during ITU summits must be strengthened both as the Member States participation itself and at the EU institutional level. It is strongly recommended for the Member States to recognise the importance of the ITU and provide representation ensuring sufficient involvement in negotiation processes.
- Strengthening collaboration and regular information sharing between the EU Member States, the Council, and the Commission/EEAS should contribute to strategic discussions on how to fully utilise the EU's potential in acting in line with its principles and values by enabling swift and timely reactions and contributions to support capitals in view of the interventions at ITU summits.
- The EU preparatory process for the World Radiocommunication Conferences should be conducted well in advance in order to ensure that the Council Decision regarding WRC is adopted in a timely manner<sup>2</sup>. The preparatory work,

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<sup>2</sup> The reason to establish Council Decision on WRCs is that the revised Radio Regulations adopted on WRCs are binding under international law and are further capable of having legal effect in the various policy areas and the internal market.

especially with regards to the Council Decision should be based on the RSPG Opinion. The Decision should ensure the necessary level of flexibility during negotiations.

- It is recommended that the preparation for the upcoming Conference already involve incoming Presidencies<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Approach to the framework of ITU through CEPT:**

- The European contributions to the ITU framework are being studied and adopted during the dedicated sessions of CEPT that focuses on ITU summits with a more flexible approach towards other ITU initiatives. The preparatory stage needs to guarantee that solid benefits and risk assessment of critical agenda points can be done, so that the EU and CEPT would adopt their positions in a timely manner.
- Aiming to adopt European Common Proposals (ECPs) during CEPT sessions should be considered as the most effective approach, when seeking to modify, suspend or approve a Resolution or Decision at ITU summits. Within CEPT, EU Member States should act in the spirit of *Team Europe*, thus working together to safeguard common EU interest.

#### **Challenges**

- ITU resolutions and recommendations significantly shape international telecommunications regulations, yet many stakeholders are unaware of their long-term impact.
- Many EU Member States are not represented during the ITU summits. That may lead to fragmented European representation, weakening the influence of Europe's position in the ITU decision-making process.
- Participation in the ITU works requires sufficient resources in order to delegate relevant experts. Limited technical expertise in telecommunications regulations can lead to ineffective engagement and missed opportunities.
- The efforts to seek and find common ground with the rest of the world and aligned strategic visions, based on shared values and interests, rely on a timely and coordinated approach and where appropriate, in cooperation with other like-minded countries or partners. Therefore, all parties involved in the process should be aware of time limitations and adapt their plans accordingly.

### **Proposed way forward with recommendations**

#### **Recommendations for the future Presidencies**

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<sup>3</sup> Radio Spectrum Policy Group RSPG Report on the result of the ITU-R World Radiocommunication Conference 2023.

- **To debrief Member States at the beginning of each Presidency about important ITU initiatives and agenda** of the upcoming ITU summits where the EU Member States' collective action is needed. This should be done during the relevant Council working party.
- To have a clear understanding of the agenda and ensure effective discussions at the relevant working parties, delegations need to be well prepared. One way to achieve this is by ensuring that each Presidency, when setting its agenda, gives a clear indication of the objectives and expectations of the upcoming discussion (including the expected outcome) and that sufficient discussion time is allotted.
- **To allocate sufficient human resources, experts and diplomats during the ITU summits in order to be able to coordinate and support the EU engagement.**

### **Recommendations for the EU Member States**

- **To ensure effective and active participation within CEPT and ITU** in order to safeguard common European position, that will lead to strengthening cooperation between EU, CEPT and ITU in the long term.
- **To use proxy when participation in the ITU summit is not possible.**
- To consider development of **regional expert pools** where policy-makers and regulators can share technical expertise and legal insights to improve national engagement.
- To streamline interaction between Ministries of Foreign Affairs and other relevant ministries in order to provide further clarity and ensure coordinated policy-making.

### **Recommendations for the European Commission**

- To propose a **roadmap** in order to ensure that efficient coordination within the EU becomes an integral part and core component of the EU's external actions, allowing the **implementation of the EU's strategic objectives within the ITU framework.**

The roadmap should take into account but not be limited to the following:

- ensure effective EU coordination between the Presidency of the Council and the Commission, targeting matters of strategic importance;
- set strategic goals for upcoming pivotal conferences and meetings, such as the upcoming World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-25) and the Plenipotentiary Conference in 2026 (PP-26), and ensure the strongest European candidacies for management positions in the ITU;
- increase EU's engagement with the ITU that would result in enhancing European contributions on the global stage.

### **Final remarks**

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to address the challenge of strengthening cooperation between the EU and the ITU. Nevertheless, the Polish Presidency hopes that this overview will contribute to adopt a set of actions resulting in increased participation of the EU Member States within the ITU framework, further development of the collective effort to implement the Team Europe approach, and higher awareness and interest in the ITU agenda. Improving working methods is a vital aspect of finding the right balance between long-term sustainability and short-term feasibility, something which is recognised and supported by all parties involved.

Based on the takeaways from the workshop, the Polish Presidency is convinced that regular dialogue mechanism, focused on a broader perspective, could be a measure for supporting multilateralism by building regional consensus. In turn, this is expected to increase Europe’s international leadership and political ownership.