

Putting spectrum at the heart of the EU's ICT agenda

The Radio Spectrum Policy Group (RSPG) in 2009

By Daniel Pataki, 2009 RSPG Chair

The RSPG (Radio Spectrum Policy Group) set motivated objectives for 2009 backed by an ever ambitious work program. As we reach the end of the year, we believe Member States' regulators in charge of spectrum have succeeded in ensuring a visionary approach on spectrum. We have focused on policy issues and provided clear and meaningful advices to both to the Commission and the Members States. The RSPG made key steps to return to its original role of policy making and also succeeded to make spectrum understandable for stakeholders. The Group has become a point of reference and has begun the process of turning into a stakeholder as well as a policy discussion platform this year.

Contribution to a European Digital Strategy

The RSPG's contribution to the Digital Europe Strategy was one of our key priorities this year. The RSPG has produced clear advice, solid opinion and focused position papers on both the Digital Dividend and Wireless Broadband. The group was committed to delivering high-quality input to the Commission on these issues, presented timely recommendations, urged for swift actions and advocated for an enhanced coordination on spectrum in general and a coordinated approach in the Group's opinion on Digital Dividend in particular.

By indentifying the 800 MHz band (790-862 MHz) to be used for new services other than broadcast transmission as a result of the digital switchover, RSPG has set out the underlying principles such as application of service and technology neutrality when making available the 800 MHz band, harmonisation of technical elements and Member States coordination both within the EU and with non-EU neighbouring countries. As a result, the EU's latest spectrum-related initiatives echo and were based on RSPG's positions.

RSPG also presented a position paper on wireless broadband. Wireless broadband could help the EU economy recover while overcoming the digital divide. The RSPG systematically analysed Member States' practices and provided guidance for the future orientation of spectrum policy and broadband strategy plans in Europe in relation to the potential for wireless solutions to assist in delivering Next Generation Access to European citizens and consumers.

A forward-looking and innovation-driven forum

Spectrum - as a scarce resource - is an enabler and our commitment to "spearheading innovation" has driven our work this year. One of the regulator's core objectives is to create a favourable environment for innovation and growth. In 2009, our group was determined to share its vision for the ICT sector.

We have identified cognitive technologies as a promising source of innovation resulting in a more efficient use and a more dynamic management of spectrum. RSPG's objective was to bring this issue to the European agenda as policy-makers need to be informed well in advance of the challenges they may raise for cognitive technologies to realise their full potential.

The RSPG has been pursuing its efforts towards a more finely-tuned EU approach at international forums such as the ITU Radiocommunications Conferences. The opinion on Coordination of EU spectrum interests insists on the need to enhance cooperation and strengthen dialogue within the EU and with neighbouring countries. Early preparation of international meetings, upstream agreement on EU strategic objectives and a stronger involvement of the RSPG early in the process should contribute to ensuring the EU speaks with one voice on spectrum on the international arena.

A platform for spectrum related policy discussions

Based on our in-depth knowledge of local and regional specificities, and with a clear understanding of the political environment in which the industry operates, we have successfully turned RSPG into a policy discussion platform. We have completed the ongoing work on the public use of spectrum, created a long needed toolbox, collection of best practices for assignment and pricing methods for more effective spectrum usage and entered into a meaningful dialogue with our colleagues in the European Regulators Group (ERG) on the cooperation of our respective organisations.

Translating a technical issue into a political priority and transparent communication

Spectrum remained a field restricted to regulatory experts and its essence had been failed to be captured by most observers. In 2009, the RSPG has given a recognisable face to spectrum, stressing the economic importance of radio frequencies, but also its social and political dimensions. Considerable effort was made to communicate the activities of the RSPG to the general public and the media.

The RSPG has enhanced the transparency of its work, involving stakeholders at a very early stage. We have enhanced consultation with stakeholders and organised debriefings for them at the end of each plenary session. This has not only highlighted the visibility of our work, but also resulted in an enhanced decision-making process.

All in all, the RSPG has also contributed to shaping the ICT agenda and positioned spectrum as the potential source of innovation and growth in Europe. The RSPG has also put spectrum into the focal point not only of the Commission's activity, but also of stakeholders and the media. It has created the right conditions for spectrum-driven innovation to blossom. We are confident that the RSPG will further strengthen its role to become a key reference point in the future regulatory set-up to be established as a result of the revised new regulatory framework and we all wish our next RSPG Chair, Mr. Roberto Viola, a successful chairmanship for the year 2010.