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ORB(1): guaranteeing equitable access to the orbit

On 15 September 1985, after five and a half weeks of intensive discussions and negotiations, the First Session of the World Administrative Radio Conference on the use of the geostationary-satellite orbit and the planning of the space services utilizing it—ORB(1) concluded its work with the signature of Final Acts providing for the incorporation of the Region 2* Broadcasting Satellite Service Plan (12 GHz band) into the Radio Regulations and the establishment of the Report to the Second Session.

A critical issue and challenge facing the Conference was how to find an acceptable way of guaranteeing in practice to all countries equitable access to the geostationary-satellite orbit and the frequency bands allocated to the space radiocommunication services, whilst reconciling that objective with the efficient and economic use of these natural resources; in other words, to find the means of translating the basic principles of Article

33 of the International Telecommunication Convention into appropriate planning and regulatory provisions to meet the new requirements. To this extent, the Conference must surely be recognized in the history of the Union as one, not only of unique character and complexity, but also involving an unprecedented range of issues.

The adoption of a novel and dual approach, with allotment planning for certain bands and planning through improved procedures for certain other bands, again highlights the pragmatic way in which the ITU can come to grips with issues that need to be settled in negotiations between its Members. Much attention was focused on the fixed satellite service. We should not however overlook the substantial contribution of this Conference to the recognition of new technical criteria as well as the simplification of procedures associated with all other space services.

This simplification includes the possible use of improved calculation methods that would permit more precise identification of affected networks, thereby reducing the number of cases requiring co-ordination. Detailed con-

* For the purposes of Administrative Conferences, the world is divided into three regions: Region 1 covers Europe (including the whole of the territory of the USSR) and Africa; Region 2 covers the Americas and Region 3 covers Asia and Australasia.

sideration was also given to new technical measures for harmonization of system interactions that would enable co-ordination to be achieved more readily.

Inter-service sharing questions were also addressed, with particular emphasis on existing sharing criteria to be reviewed or revised and on possible new sharing criteria to be developed.

In reviewing the Regional Broadcasting Satellite Service Plan and the associated decisions made in the 1983 Region 2 Conference, problems relating to potential inter-regional and intraregional interferences were settled. Thus, the signing of the Final Acts brings to fruition the objectives foreseen at the Plenipotentiary Conference of Malaga-Torremolinos in 1973, namely, the establishment of a definitive World Agreement for the Broadcasting Satellite Service in the 12 GHz band.

Placing the Conference within its historical context, ORB(1) is the logical development of a whole series of measures taken by the ITU in this domain, starting with the initial step to regulate the use of the radiofrequency spectrum for space activities in 1959 at the Ordinary Administrative Radio Conference. However, in a sense, the Union's involvement in regulating the use of space for radiocommunications goes back even further than this, at least as far as 1927, with its work on the use of the ionosphere for high frequency radiocommunication systems.

Like so many of the ITU's activities, the Conference is a reflection of and a response to technological developments in space communications including the steadily declining costs involved in providing telecommunication services via satellite.

The fact that space systems are now providing on a competitive basis many services formerly routed over terrestrial systems, combined with the well-known advantages of flexibility, multipoint distribution capability and distance-independent costs and quality of service, have naturally led to a marked growth in demand from all countries for the use of space systems. Hence the interest in ensuring in practice equitable access, a principle that was established by the Space Conference of 1971 and reiterated by the World Administrative Radio Conference of 1979. The Conference provided a way to fulfilling this aspiration for guaranteed access, consistent with the expansion of Member countries needs.

In conclusion, an historic step has been taken towards satisfying objectives for equitable access to the geostationary-satellite orbit and the appropriate planning mechanisms for radiocommunication services utilizing it. The next step will be the intersessional work to be carried out both by the Members of the Union and by the permanent organs in Geneva, which will be brought to fruition at the Second Session of the Conference scheduled to take place in 1988.

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