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The HF broadcasting service

The signature of the Final Acts of the HF Broadcasting Conference (HFBC-87), which closed earlier this year, marked a further step on the way towards the realization of the objectives fixed by previous competent conferences related to the HF broadcasting service in the bands exclusively allocated to it. Although the concept of such a complex process has been reviewed on various occasions in the last four decades, never before has there been such a profound examination of the best ways to achieve improved and equitable solutions to satisfy the aspirations and interests of all ITU Member countries.

The history of such conferences held in Mexico City (1948-49), Rapallo (1950), Geneva (1951 and 1959) provides ample evidence of the complexities and the challenges to the international community working within the ITU. They are many, but I will not dwell on them except to say that the resolution of all the issues can only be settled progressively and realistically by taking advantage of:

- applicable technology advances, and
- the availability of modern tools for efficient frequency spectrum planning and management.

The basis for common action must be the full understanding of the aspirations of the individual countries' service operations and environment—not the least of which is economic—that presently necessitate such extensive use of the HF bands for national services.

The Final Acts signed on 8 March reflect the results of the Conference's consideration of those matters and mark an important step in the evolution towards more efficient planning arrangements in the future.

The Conference fully recognized the interdependence and diversity which exist in the communication process and which make the planning of HF broadcasting particularly complex.

The partial revision of the Radio Regulations and the accompanying Resolutions and Recommendations represent further progress in a process which has been recognized as needing short-, medium- and long-term actions. Such actions may take us well into the 21st century.

Planning principles, as now enshrined in the Radio Regulations, will be the basis for short-term action. The need for improved planning of the HF broadcasting service has been agreed and provided for through the dual approach adopted by the Conference for assuring future access to the frequency spectrum.

A programme of work has been drawn up for the permanent organs of the Union and particularly for the IFRB to further develop the appreciation of one of the planning approaches identified in the global compromise reached by the Conference. I refer to the further development of the HFBC system and the related software adaptation. Work and progress are also required on the improved consultation procedure as the other part of the dual approach.

Medium-term objectives, as laid down in the programme of action in Resolution PL/1 of the Final Acts, will be met by a future World Administrative Radio Conference in 1992. This will be another significant event in the application of a strategy for the improved planning of the HFBC bands and services.

Finally, the established parameters for single-sideband operations should provide the necessary stimulus to industry for the manufacture of transmitters and for the development of low-cost receivers for the public.

As a long-term strategy, a time schedule has been proposed for the gradual changeover to single-sideband working after a certain period of technical coexistence between SSB and DSB operation. Today, it would seem reasonable to expect the complete conversion of HF broadcasting to SSB operation by the end of the year 2015. This schedule will be reviewed in the light of technical progress.

All these perspectives and the associated preparation for the next round of definitive decisions in 1992 will necessitate very substantive work by the IFRB and its Specialized Secretariat supported by the computer services within the General Secretariat.

In addition there will be continuing work by the CCIR.

The programme of work entails substantive resources with consequent budgetary implications. Such expenditure should be considered against the background of all the services interests and investments which are involved in the establishment and operation of effective broadcasting services.

The HFBC-87 Conference has once again shown that, notwithstanding the complexities of the broadcasting service and the very diverse national and international considerations, the ITU community continues to find practical results and orientations for the attainment of the noble objectives laid down in the International Telecommunication Convention.

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