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The CCITT Plenary and WATTC

During the past decade a veritable technical revolution has been taking place in telecommunications. There has been a massive change-over to digital techniques and the formerly quite separate domains of computers and communications are now inextricably bound together. Long-distance transmission capacity has not only been multiplied by high-capacity submarine cables and satellites but also made much less costly.

This technical revolution has had, and continues to have, an overwhelming influence on the services provided. A panoply of new services are offered to the public and even "traditional services" are being upgraded using new techniques which improve quality. The new techniques have also engendered considerable changes in the economics of service provision; the cost of services is no longer as distance-dependent as before and this in turn has led to pressure to bring tariffs more in line with real costs.

Most of these changes could not have been adequately harnessed for practical application and use without the invaluable work of international standardization which is the responsibility of the ITU's International Consultative Committees. To permit the rapid application of the new technology on a world-wide basis, and also to respond to users' demands for connectivity, there has been a corresponding increase in the requirements for international standards adopted through the Plenary Assemblies of the Consultative Committees. For example, in the International Telegraph and Telephone Consultative Committee (CCITT), the total volume of standards has increased five-fold* over the last 12 years.

It was against this background that the CCITT IXth Plenary Assembly recognized that significant changes to the CCITT standardization process were necessary if the standards body were to maintain its past record of achievement. This concern was expressed in a Resolution, entitled "Pre-eminence of CCITT in world-wide telecommunications standardization", which calls for the forthcoming Plenipotentiary Conference "to consider what changes may be needed to enable the CCITT to do what is necessary in a timely way to maintain its pre-eminent position". A similar requirement is also evident for the International Radio Consultative Committee (CCIR).

The IXth Plenary Assembly also adopted for immediate application:

- an accelerated procedure for the approval of new and revised Recommendations, with their publication to follow as soon as practicable;
- new rules of procedure for the preparation and conduct of meetings, the preparation of reports and the submission and processing of contributions, with a view to increasing speed and efficiency.

The CCITT Plenary Assembly has helped to provide a concrete technological and operational foundation for the orderly development of the network while the World Administrative Telegraph and Telephone Conference (WATTC-88) provided a regulatory framework appropriate for the diverse technological, operational and national policy environments which are so rapidly evolving today.

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* *Orange Book*: 3980 pages; *Yellow Book*: 6132 pages; *Red Book*: 11 380 pages; *Blue Book*: 19 000 pages (approximately).

Enhancing connectivity has always been a primary objective underlying the work of the Union. Because of the increasing blurring of boundaries among services and networks, the consequence of digital technologies, new uses of telecommunications, and the evolution of diverse national policies, the mere continued reliance on the 1973 Regulations would not have been a viable alternative. What was clearly needed for the environment on the move towards the 21st century was a set of basic provisions allowing for interconnectivity among diverse telecommunication systems and networks.

Interconnectivity has achieved such prominence today for many reasons, the most compelling being that technology and its implementation have made an unprecedented level of interconnectivity possible. Furthermore, countries and users are demanding it. As was so clearly evident at WATTC–everyone needs connectivity.

But interconnectivity does not just happen. It requires awareness, agreements, arrangements and institutions to:

- define and ensure stable interfaces between the monopoly and competitive elements of the various sectors;
- establish and evolve networks which ensure efficient international connectivity;
- define adequate services to be widely provided to the public;
- specify the equipment standards needed to deliver those services efficiently.

This is difficult enough to achieve within national boundaries. Doing it on a global basis among diverse jurisdictions is much more difficult. This is why WATTC was difficult, and why global institutions like the ITU, and its legislative bodies like administrative conferences together with the CCIs, and the other permanent organs of the ITU–in this instance the General Secretariat–are so important. They provide the mechanisms to facilitate interconnectivity.

At the opening of WATTC it was not surprising that delegations held divergent positions based on individual national perceptions of the integrated global instrument they had the task of creating. The challenge, therefore, was of finding unity in diversity.

As the days went by, however, and with the exchange of views, it soon became apparent that interests overlapped and that the usual alignment of interests was not applicable in this new unfolding environment which we are now facing. Hard-line interests thus began to converge, common ground was found, and a balanced alternative text began to see the light of day. In the end, the product of WATTC, the International Telecommunication Regulations together with the Final Protocol and associated Resolutions, Recommendations and Opinion, accommodated well the varied perspectives of the participants.

The general principles established for the operation and use of all types of telecommunication services, including advanced services, should allow for the harmonious development of international telecommunication services of all kinds, while at the same time allowing each Member country to choose the policy and technological approaches best suited to itself.

WATTC adopted the world's first treaty for integrated international telecommunication services and networks. The significance of this should not escape us. What has been created is an instrument which will enable the harmonious and innovative growth of international telecommunications world-wide and which sets out the responsibilities of all parties for co-operation in the establishment of international services, systems and networks and related obligations to users, large or small.

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