20ᵗʰ Global Symposium for Regulators (Virtual Event, 2020)

The Regulatory Wheel of Change: Regulation for Digital Transformation

<u>Opening Speech</u>

Launch of the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-20) Celebrations
Virtual meeting 30 June 2020

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

What a pleasure it is to be able to join you today for the very first event on the programme of our 20th anniversary edition of the Global Symposium for Regulators.

I am very proud to have been one of the co-founders of that event, two decades ago.

Back then, it was a different world.

I had just given birth to my 1st child, and she is now off in university… only half of our members had set up regulators, there were more fixed lines than mobile, 12% of the world had a mobile phone, and a mere 6% were online.

At that time, we recognized the urgent need for a global gathering where telecoms regulators – as they were known, back then – could meet to exchange experiences and put their heads together to develop effective strategies to regulate what was becoming a complex and rapidly evolving sector, increasingly critical to every nation's economy.

I am pleased, too, that we had the foresight, 20 years ago, to recognize the importance of collaboration to the continued growth of the ICT sector.

But it's also true that none of us, back then, really understood just how critical access to digital technologies would become, and how profoundly they would reshape our whole world.

In the relatively short space of time since that very first GSR, we've seen mobile overtake fixed; we've seen data overtake voice; we've seen OTT platforms overtake national telcos in user base, revenues, and reach. We've seen ICT players morph into broadcasters, booking agencies, boutiques, and banks.

Digital goods and services continue to evolve at breakneck speed.

As 21st century policy makers, we've had to reconcile ourselves to the fact that, despite our best efforts, we are destined to always lag behind industry innovation.

A perpetual struggle to adapt regulatory ecosystems to unforeseen challenges is the landscape we all live in.

And with the COVID crisis once again resetting the dial and throwing digital technologies sharply into the spotlight, we'll be playing an instrumental role in defining the "new normal" for a post-COVID world.

To be effective in such a dynamic and unpredictable environment, our plans and processes need to be fit-for-purpose, allowing us to respond as rapidly as possible, yet in a considered and coherent manner.

And in this post-digital age, we bear an even greater weight on our shoulders, because it's no longer just about the technology.

The ICT sector now underpins every other economic activity.

Dear colleagues,

When GSR first opened its doors to 200-or-so experts from 85 countries, only half of the ITU membership had telecoms regulatory agencies worldwide and many of them had just been newly created.

Today, close to 90% of countries worldwide have a separate ICT regulator, managing vital issues like spectrum allocation, operator licensing, and national network development.

For two decades, the GSR has played a central role in helping regulators get to grips with the burning issues that keep them awake at night – issues such as infrastructure sharing strategies, consumer trust issues, the blurring of demarcation lines between content development and network operation, network investment issues, and digital inclusion.

In the wake of the COVID crisis, with digital connectivity now at the top of every nation's agenda, the GSR is more relevant than ever. And getting the policy mix right to enable rapid growth in networks and services has never been so crucial, nor so urgent.

ICT policy and regulatory frameworks need to be up-to-date, flexible, incentive-based and market-driven to support digital transformation across sectors, and across geographical regions.

Fifth generation collaborative ICT regulatory measures and tools are the new frontier for regulators and policy makers, as they work towards maximizing the opportunity afforded by digital transformation.

Employing these measures and tools will help ensure that more people in more countries can reap the benefits of the digital economy, improving people's lives at a pace and scale never seen before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To kick of the 20th anniversary edition of GSR, we are proud today to announce the forthcoming launch, of our brand new Digital Regulation Handbook and online platform.

The fruit of a collaborative effort between ITU and the World Bank, these two complementary new tools have been developed for a post-COVID world, recognizing that regulators will come under more pressure than ever to extend digital networks and services to unconnected and marginalized communities.

Our new handbook and online platform will provide concrete, relevant regulatory guidance to policy makers as they navigate the digital transformation process and strive to bring affordable, safe, secure, and trusted connectivity to people everywhere.

To the many, many long-standing colleagues and partners who have been with us from the very beginning, and also to the new partners (whose young organizations are the products of this exciting global digital transformation), thank you for joining us today.

I am looking forward to a stimulating debate this afternoon, so for now it gives me enormous pleasure to hand over to this year's distinguished GSR Chair, Mr Daniel Sjöblom, Director-General of the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority, and Chair of BEREC.