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Subject: ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, Bucharest, 26 September to 14 October
2022
EU lines to take
- (18 July 2022)

Delegations will find in the annex the EU lines to take for the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference taking place in Bucharest on 26 September to 14 October 2022, as approved by the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) in its 3890th meeting on 18 July 2022.

ITU Plenipotentiary, Bucharest, 26 September to 14 October 2022

EU lines to take

ITU's role and positioning in a fast-changing technological landscape

1. Since its creation ITU has developed a strong reputation as a global telecommunications/ICT international organisation, building on the expertise of its three sectors (radio-communication, standardisation, development) and relying on the inputs of all its members, including the industry, and academia.
2. With the recent acceleration of technological change there has been an overall tendency for all organisations acting in the digital field, including ITU, to reflect on associated technologies in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing or the Internet of Things.
3. New technological developments raise important challenges and opportunities for ITU like for all other international organisations involved in digital issues and that require adequate policy responses. The EU and its Member States believe, however, that ITU should focus on the international telecommunications/ICT aspects of such technologies that fall within ITU's existing and agreed mandate. The EU and its Member States believe that by focusing its resources on agreed priorities, ITU can deliver the best added-value to its members.
4. In particular, ITU should continue to focus its work on expanding connectivity, taking into account all digital technologies as they relate to telecommunications/ICT, and through ambitious capacity-building actions for developing countries. ITU should also seek to expand its partnerships and develop synergies with other organisations in order to avoid duplication and ensure complementarity.

ITU's contribution to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will depend on its capacity to develop new partnerships

5. With less than 10 years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the EU and its Member States believe ITU has a very important role to play on the international stage and its priority should be to increase worldwide connectivity, facilitate the development of digital infrastructure and bridge the digital divide.

6. In doing so, ITU can make a substantial contribution to tackling critical issues such as climate change, digital inclusiveness and digital literacy. Accelerating connectivity where it is most needed should be ITU's core mission, including by ensuring equitable access to and efficient use of natural resources of the spectrum and orbits and by empowering recipient communities with the necessary skills to fully embrace digital tools.

7. Particular attention should be paid by ITU to the specific needs of the least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and more generally of the most vulnerable groups.

8. It is crucial that ITU play its role in helping tackle climate change. ITU should contribute to the development of standards, guidelines and best practices in order to help the ICT industry to reduce its share of total global emissions and support industry in ensuring that it plays its rightful role in the broader sustainability agenda. ITU should promote the use of network technologies, services and equipment with low energy consumption.

9. Although ITU is best positioned as a UN organisation to achieve such objectives, it is important that it does not act alone but seeks to expand its partnerships and develop synergies with other organisations in areas where complementarities can be found, with a view to pooling resources and developing more impactful joint projects.

10. A stronger involvement of stakeholders (industry, academia, civil society organisations) in ITU will also contribute to enriching its work and responding to the needs of societies worldwide, while making sure that ITU keeps pace with the latest innovation trends.

Upholding a multi-stakeholder governance model for the Internet

11. The EU and its Member States are committed to promoting the multi-stakeholder governance model based on an inclusive Internet governance structure that refers to the development and applications by governments, the private sector, civil society, international organisations and the technical community, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.

12. In addition, the EU and its Member States see the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as the leading multi-stakeholder forum for promoting international cooperation on the Internet, and support current efforts by the UN Secretary General to reinforce the role of the IGF.

13. The EU and its Member States support proposals to continue to improve the transparency and openness of ITU activities, notably related to Internet governance, including proposals to open the ITU Council Working Group on Internet to all stakeholders (considering that existing open consultations are not enough to ensure the active involvement of all stakeholders, beyond ITU members).

14. This is particularly important in the current context where we have seen repeated attempts to promote top-down approaches to Internet governance and Internet architecture that might undermine the open and inclusive features of the Internet and Internet Governance.

Supporting ITU's existing role in capacity building and facilitating international cooperation in the field of cybersecurity

15. Cybersecurity is an evolving challenge and ongoing efforts are needed to address it. The EU and its Member States stress the importance of a global, open, free, stable and secure cyberspace where human rights and the rule of law fully apply, and where innovation and economic growth are fostered.

16. The EU and its Member States support the existing role of ITU in terms of cybersecurity, keeping in mind that many of the relevant issues are already dealt with elsewhere in other fora, such as the UN and the OSCE, and should continue. At this moment, the ITU already plays an appropriate role under existing resolutions in promoting international and multi-stakeholder cooperation, confidence and security in the use of ICTs, also reflecting the fact that certain important aspects of cybersecurity are matters of national sovereignty for ITU members.

17. The EU and its Member States do not believe that ITU should work towards the development of a new international legal instrument on cybersecurity. The EU and its Member States strongly support ongoing efforts regarding the application of existing international law; the development and implementation of universal norms of responsible state behaviour; and regional confidence-building measures between States. The EU and its Member States support ITU's existing role in capacity building and facilitating international cooperation in the field of cybersecurity.

Promoting the EU's vision and European values in the digital transformation

18. The EU and its Member States should seek every opportunity during the Plenipotentiary to promote and defend a vision for digital transformation that puts people at the centre and empowers individuals. It should encompass openness, inclusion, equality, sustainability, resilience, security, trust, improving quality of life, respect of human rights and aspirations and should contribute to a dynamic, resource-efficient and fair economy and society in full respect of democracy. At the core of this vision, we find the human rights, the right to privacy and to the protection of personal data.

19. As a member of the UN family, ITU should, in its work, uphold the highest standards of protection of human rights. Some recent proposals in ITU-T study groups raised serious concerns from an EU data protection perspective and human rights in general. In particular, the EU and its Member States are concerned that remote biometric recognition technologies such as facial recognition technologies (often coupled with AI) on a large scale would put the rights of individuals at very high risk.

20. While the protection of privacy and personal data is of general concern to ITU members, the EU and its Member States do not consider that it is ITU's role to develop or assist its members in the elaboration of legal or regulatory frameworks in the field of privacy and personal data.

21. Developing awareness, particularly in developing countries, on the need to preserve privacy and protect the integrity of personal data should, however, be encouraged.

Building on existing processes instead of working on a new International Telecommunications Regulation (ITR)

22. Since the 2014 Plenipotentiary called for its creation, the ITU Expert Group on the International Telecommunication Regulations (EG-ITRs) has not proven the existence of any significant problems for either ITU members or operators related to the existence of two treaties. It remains unclear therefore what benefits a new treaty would bring.

23. Negotiating a new ITR treaty would almost certainly prove divisive while being unlikely to result in any consensual outcome. The significant resources involved in preparing for a future World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) risks diverting valuable ITU resources away from the implementation of ITU's core mission of developing international telecommunications, digital technologies and bridging the digital divide.

24. The EU and its Member States do not support holding another WCIT or ongoing review of the ITRs. The EU and its Member States encourage instead focussing our collective efforts to build capacities and advance globally on existing processes. The EU and its Member States see these activities as important and have therefore expanded their support for capacity building and awareness raising.

25. The EU and its Member States will pay special attention to the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine. They will continue to uphold the need for ITU to support the rebuilding of Ukraine's telecommunications infrastructure according to ITU Council Resolution 1408 adopted this spring. They will also support the need for all countries to respect their commitments according to the Radio Regulations and the international numbering plans.

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