

New Space Policy a Boon?

Satellite Operators Seek EU Government Support for Aligning Telecom, ITU Rules

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The issue of whether revised EU e-communications rules should recognize the ITU's role in allocating spectrum and coordinating spectrum use continues to roil talks between the European Commission and the satellite industry, said European Satellite Operators Association Secretary General Aarti Holla-Maini in an interview. But strong lobbying by ESOA persuaded the European Parliament in September to adopt many amendments referring to the ITU, and governments could follow suit, she said. The new rules need lawmakers' and EU states' approval.

The ITU manages the process through which satellite operators get orbital slots with associated frequencies, but the EC reform proposal makes no reference to it, Holla-Maini said earlier (CD Sept 3 p8). ESOA particularly wants the EC to acknowledge that role in its revised directives in order to create an exception for satellites to the measures requirement for technological neutrality. Satellite operators need international coordination, she said.

Since the parliamentary vote, ESOA has been meeting with the EC and governments, Holla-Maini said. The EC doesn't want to align its policies with the ITU due to concern about its law's primacy, she said. But France has criticized the EC for taking too "theoretical" an approach, she said. Some states, notably the U.K., Sweden and Denmark, seem hesitant about committing strongly to aligning EC and ITU rules, but others worry about what could happen if the two collide, she said.

A Council spokeswoman could not confirm that ministers are mulling inclusion of references to the ITU in the telecom package. Work on that package is occurring within the Council of Ministers at the working party level, she said. Officials are expected to adopt a position when they meet Nov. 27 in Brussels, she said.

Last month, EU competitiveness ministers laid out their priorities for European space policy (CD Sept 29 p15). They said telecom satellites, along with global navigation system Galileo and monitoring system Kopernikus, will probably enhance global market opportunities. They directed the EU and national governments to maximize such opportunities by, among other things, making spectrum available for space applications.

Telecom reform and space policy are separate, but space ministers' recognition of satellite communications' importance could bode well for ESOA members, Holla-Maini said. She can only hope that space policy references to satellites lead to gains for operators in the e-communications package, she said.

Operators are waiting to see the private sector's role in Galileo, Inmarsat Chief Operating Office Michael Butler told us. The navigation system, begun as a public-private partnership, was taken over last year by the European Commission, which will use

Community funds to pay for its deployment (CD April 23 p7). Operators are being offered work packages, with Inmarsat eligible for some of those, Butler said. Galileo is progressing and Inmarsat is taking a "wait and see" approach, he said.

Meantime, the company is pursuing a 2 GHz spectrum license to operate pan-European mobile communications satellite services, Butler said. Bids were due Monday. Butler expects a decision in January or February, he said. -- ***Dugie Standeford***