

Digital Single Market

WRC - setting the world's radio spectrum rules

The World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC), held every 3-4 years, is the main mechanism for updating the ITU Radio Regulations - the global agreement on how to define, allocate and use our airwaves.

The job of the World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC) is to review, and when necessary revise, the international Radio Regulation treaty governing the use of the radio spectrum and both geostationary and non-geostationary satellite orbits.

Revisions are made on the basis of an agenda determined by the Council of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), taking into account recommendations made by previous WRCs. The general scope of the agenda is established four to six years in advance, with the final agenda set by ITU Council two years before each conference following general agreement with a majority of ITU member states. The last WRC was in 2012, the next in 2015.

Under the ITU constitution, the WRC can:

- Revise the Radio Regulations and any associated frequency assignment and allotment plans
- Address any relevant global radiocommunication issue
- Instruct the Radio Regulations Board and the Radiocommunication Bureau (both parts of the ITU structure) and review their activities
- Determine questions for study by the Radiocommunication Assembly (usually associated with WRC meetings) and its Study Groups in preparation for future WRCs.

Although there is no legal compulsion to do so, the results of a WRC are subsequently ratified and enacted at national level by the ITU members, in order to ensure that the benefits of international coordination are achieved.

Latest news

The Commission Communication on the World Radiocommunication Conference 2012

On 6 April 2011, the Commission adopted a Communication to the Council and European Parliament proposing common policy objectives for the World Radiocommunication Conference 2012. The text

highlights the importance of promoting the EU's approach to the digital dividend, Galileo and the Single European Sky air traffic management system, to ensure the necessary spectrum was coordinated and protected at the international level.

Other important issues to be considered were spectrum for communications satellites, unmanned aerial systems, software defined and cognitive radio, short-range devices, spectrum for scientific research and combating climate change and electronic news gathering, as well as the issue of flexibility in the international framework. The Communication also highlighted the need to maintain unity of action of the Member States and the EU, and proposed a coordinated approach to ensure this.

[Full text of the Communication in English](#) [1]

Commission role

WRC negotiations are often complex with high technical content and the potential to make a large impact on political and industrial policy in Europe.

The Commission participates in the WRC as a non-voting ITU sector delegation, but coordinates negotiations led by Member States (who are also ITU voting members) on issues relating to Community policies. These policies are based on European common policies and rely on the technical work undertaken by the CEPT.

The Commission's role at WRC is to support decisions that are compliant with relevant Community policies and reflect the commercial and general interest of the European Union.

RSPG contribution

Prior to a WRC the Commission requests the Radio Spectrum Policy Group (RSPG) to provide it with an advisory Opinion on the policy priorities and objectives to be pursued by the European Union at the conference.

The aim of this exercise is to ensure that European preparation for the event is accompanied by a political process that would reflect Community interests and objectives across all relevant policy areas. Relevant Community policies that are affected by regulatory decisions at WRC include the fields of information society, transport, space, audiovisual, environment and research and development.

Joint European Commission-CEPT workshops are organised prior to the conferences to discuss European policy objectives for the WRC, assist the Commission's preparation for the conference and to ensure all stakeholders in the process have an opportunity to express their views.

The RSPG adopted its Opinion on common policy objectives for WRC-12 on 10 February 2011. The Opinion is available [here](#) [2].

WRC-12

The last WRC, the culmination of several years of preparatory work, was held in Geneva from 23rd January to 17th February 2012. The agenda for this meeting was effectively set at the WRC-07 meeting. This means that initiatives that support European Union policy requirements need to be included on the agenda well in advance.

At WRC-07 the Commission together with Member States looked to include agenda items for WRC-12

that supported the need for more flexibility in the global radio spectrum regulatory framework.

Most WRC decisions have an impact over a long timeframe – often 10 to 20 years after the conference. This means that agendas and decisions need to be “future proofed” and able to address spectrum requirements of important policies and trends.

The Commission considers that critical items for future consideration are:

- Sustainable development and climate change
- Pan-European networks and services in transport and electronic communications – for example spectrum requirements for the next generation European Air Traffic Management System
- Overcoming the “digital divide” – especially in rural areas, and for the elderly, the disabled and other disadvantaged communities.

Public workshop on the European preparations for the ITU WRC-12 conference

On June 10 2010 in Brussels, the European Commission and the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT) held a public workshop on the European preparations for the ITU WRC-12 conference.

The main objective of this workshop was to debate specific conference issues relating to EU policies in order to:

- assist the Commission's preparation of its multi-annual Radio Spectrum Policy Programme as well as a Communication to the Council of Ministers and to the European Parliament on common EU policy objectives for WRC-12;
- inform the work of the Radio Spectrum Policy Group on WRC-12;
- provide an input to CEPT in the finalisation of the European Common Proposals to the WRC-12.

The [agenda](#) [3] and the [presentations](#) [4] displayed during the workshop can be found here.

More information

- European Parliament [resolution](#) [5] on the European Union’s policy approach to the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference 2012 (WRC-12) - 07.09.2011
- Council [conclusions](#) [5] on the World Radiocommunication Conference 2012 (WRC-12) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) - 27.05.2011
- [World Radiocommunication Conference](#) [6]
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