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Commission européenne/Europese Commissie
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Wien, 3. August 2022

Comments to the Public consultation on the draft RSPG Opinion on the ITU-R World Radiocommunication Conference 2023

Dear Sirs,

The Austrian Communications Authority ("KommAustria") is established in order to administer and carry out regulatory tasks relating to electronic audio media, electronic audio-visual media, including supervision of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation and its subsidiaries, and certain types of digital platforms. Administering and carrying out the regulatory tasks comprises in particular the allocation and licensing proceedings pursuant to the Private Radio Broadcasting Act and the Audiovisual Media Services Act, proceedings for the joint use of transmission facilities pursuant to § 8 of the Austrian Public Broadcasting Corporation Act, preparation, introduction and further development of digital broadcasting and award of authorizations for operating the technical equipment required for broadcasting and frequency administration pursuant to the Telecommunications Act 2021.

KommAustria as the independent Austrian Media Regulatory Authority welcomes the opportunity to comment on the:

"Draft RSPG Opinion on the ITU-R World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 in particular on Agenda Item 1.5 (UHF Review)"

The Agenda Item 1.5 deals with the UHF frequency band 470 to 694 MHz, which is extensively used by terrestrial television broadcasting on nationwide HPHT DVB-T2 broadcast networks in Austria. Six DVB-T2 multiplex platforms are deployed and about 60 TV programs including HD programs are provided on the national multiplexes via DVB-T2 broadcast systems. Ten local multiplex operators provide additional broadcasting programs with local content on DVB-T or DVB-T2 broadcast systems using a few small transmitter sites.

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After Digital Dividends I and II, based on decisions at WRC-07, WRC-12 and WRC-15, the only remaining spectrum for terrestrial TV distribution is the band 470 – 694 MHz, which is under consideration for further regulatory decisions on the Agenda Item 1.5 of WRC-23.

In this regard, KommAustria would like to draw the attention of the RSPG to the fact that currently there is a promising new technology based on the 5G-Broadcasting standard for mobile TV under development.

Provided international developments prove in the upcoming years that this system is mature enough for deployment and the required user equipment will be available on the market, then this system is intended to be used in the UHF band 470 MHz to 694 MHz to offer linear terrestrial TV services for mobile devices.

With the capabilities of this worldwide broadcasting standard, developed within 3GPP and with its further expected evolutions, 5G-Broadcast can provide TV broadcasting programs and down-link-only content to large audiences especially in mobile reception environment.

Independent of how large the audiences are, there is no overloading of the system possible. This standard is based on requirements of broadcast program providers and supports social inclusion with low barriers to access, high QoS, low transmission costs and free to air reception anytime and anywhere for all citizens.

Test transmissions for this standard are carried out in many places around the world (field trials). Also, in Vienna the broadcast network operator ORS takes part in the further development of services and eco-systems for this new transmission technology, including developing specifications for user equipment.

5G-Broadcast has the potential to provide linear TV services directly to mobile devices in a flexible manner and can use the valuable frequency resources in the UHF band efficiently for media distribution, provided the user equipment supports the “5G-Broadcasting-Interface”. In addition, 5G-Broadcast has the potential to be used in combination with 5G-Broadband to build a hybrid use case to benefit from both distribution pathways with off-loading advantages for Mobile/Fixed Communication Networks and for Content Delivering Networks.

It is still unclear how media consumption will develop in the longer term. For the near future, the changes are visible, but according to current research results, they are rather slow. Linear TV consumption in Austria still accounts for 2/3 of the market share of the total market for video-on-demand and linear broadcasting consumption as shown in the study “Bewegtbildstudie 2022” carried out by RTR and AGTT.

In our view, the UHF spectrum in the band 470 to 694 MHz, utilised with 5G-Broadcast in a dedicated broadcast mode, could be the best solution for increased mobile consumption of linear TV in the future.

Stationary TV reception on large screens in the living rooms for linear TV can still be delivered with traditional terrestrial TV, but may be provided in the mid and long-term primarily by other platforms like satellite, cable TV or fixed broadband. It can be expected that this transformation process would get momentum after successful introduction of 5G-Broadcast.

Today, it is difficult to foresee whether or when or if the importance of terrestrial broadcasting in Europe will be negligible in the future or even switched off to a large extent. For the time being, KommAustria believes that it would be disproportionate to make a decision towards a co-primary allocation of 470 – 694 MHz in ITU Region 1 already at WRC-23. It might be at this stage received as a wrong signal to the market, to regulators, and the overall implications of such a strong signal are risky and unpredictable.

Arguing that Europe should already decide in favour of a co-primary allocation at WRC-23 in order to have the flexibility for a final decision solely within the European community, e.g., in 2030 or whenever it is desirable in the future, could be misleading as it gives the impression that anything can be done in this frequency range immediately after WRC-23. This could lead to fragmented use of spectrum and result in cross-border issues, which are difficult to manage.

Therefore, KommAustria pleads for a harmonised common approach within Europe, taking into account overall trends on a large scale, and to be very clear when it comes to decisions and the communication to the stakeholders, who are interested in that part of the spectrum.

The wishes and needs for those countries, which already have reduced their broadcasting transmissions in the UHF band, can be dealt within the EU Decision (EU) 2017/899, which allows for flexible use and can further be developed within the framework of RSPG as discussions already started in the relevant subgroup of RSPG.

It is desirable that RSPG increases its efforts to further develop the current strategy in the UHF band at a pan-European level, taking into account the stakeholders of linear and non-linear media distribution for the benefit of European citizens, in order to create a harmonised approach, which can be used on a large mass market where distribution platforms can be rolled out and user equipment is also available on large scale.

Conclusions:

KommAustria supports the further development of the implementation activities of 5G-Broadcast for providing linear TV to the mass-market for mobile devices. Developments are expected in the relevant standardisation bodies, which will provide the basis for consumer equipment on a large scale (fixed and mobile reception like smartphones, tablets etc.)

KommAustria is of the opinion that a co-primary allocation of the frequency band (470 to 694 MHz) or parts thereof at WRC-23 for mobile use could be premature and

jeopardise the further development of the promising mobile TV standard as described above.

The predicted situation beyond 2030 in terms of technological developments, trends in consumer behaviour etc. as outlined in the Opinion on a long-term strategy for the future use of the UHF band from 2015 is not firm enough yet to make such a far-reaching decision for a co-primary allocation at WRC-23.

Therefore, KommAustria supports to postpone the decision on Agenda Item 1.5. of WRC-23 to a future WRC, as set out in the draft opinion, taking into account the technological developments, the trends in media distribution on a large scale and the development of a harmonised approach in Europe as well as the development of user equipment on a large scale. Viable solutions should provide a good basis to be coordinated within the European Union and between EU-MS, where the GE-06 Agreement still provides the basis for the successful coordination of frequencies in this particular frequency band.

The Decision (EU) 2017/899 is providing priority to broadcasting and PMSE usage at least until the end of 2030 and already offers possibilities for the use of mobile services in this band. The flexibility of the usage of the concerned band as elaborated in the Decision (EU) 2017/899 should be further developed in Europe.

As a next important step and based on the developments within Decision (EU) 2017/899, the situation in the remaining UHF band should be evaluated and assessed again in 2025. The results should be the basis for further decisions and the course of action on the EU-level in following WRCs in the timeframe after 2025.

With best regards

Austrian Communications Authority
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Mag. Michael Ogris
(Vorsitzender)

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