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**EaPeReg 22nd Plenary Meeting and**

**3-Lateral Workshop on "Strengthening Broadband Infrastructure and Services across the Europe Region and Beyond" between EaPeReg, EMERG and ITU**

29-30 November 2023

Tbilisi, Georgia

**REPORT**

22nd Plenary Meeting of the Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators Network (EaPeReg) and 3-Lateral Workshop on “Strengthening Broadband Infrastructure and Services across the Europe Region and Beyond” between EaPeReg, EMERG and ITU was held in Tbilisi, Georgia on 29-30 November 2023 in hybrid format. 59 participants (30 onsite and 29 online), among them the representatives of DG CONNECT and DG NEAR, EU4Digital, ITU, BEREC and BEREC Office, EMERG and IIC participated in the Plenary and the Workshop. The Plenary meeting was hosted by the Georgian National Communications Commission (ComCom), EaPeReg Chair 2023. Cecoforma, in cooperation with ComCom organised the logistics. The event was sponsored by the European Commission – DG NEAR. The Meeting was moderated by Mzia Gogilashvili, representative of EaPeReg Chair 2023 and Tom Boyce, representative of EaPeReg Vice-Chair 2023.

**Main objectives** **of the Plenary Meeting** were to:

* Assess EaPeReg work accomplished in 2023.
* Discuss and confirm EaPeReg activities for 2024.
* Discuss the activities implemented under the EU4Digital project during 2023.
* Analyse the Expert Working Groups’ (EWGs) reports on the progress achieved during 2023 and review the main plans for 2024.
* Discuss further joint efforts with BEREC, EMERG, EC, ITU and IIC supporting deepening of cooperation with these bodies thus ensuring further development of EaPeReg in 2024.
* Elect EaPeReg Chair and Vice-Chair 2024.
* Discuss other operational activities related to the Network development.

**Ekaterine Imedadze** - EaPeReg Chair 2023, **Robert Mourik** - EaPeReg Vice-Chair 2023 and **Nicholas Cendrowicz** – Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation to Georgia welcomed Plenary participants.

After welcome speeches **Andrejs Dombrovskis**, the Stream Lead of EU4Digital Facility for Telecom Rules presented a status snapshot of the work accomplished during 2023 and introduced the actions planned to be implemented during 2024 in close cooperation with the EaPeReg EWGs; namely:

* Roaming:
  + EU4Digial assisted Partner countries in the discussions on potential signing of the Regional Roaming Agreement (RRA) throughout 2023. The final position from Ukraine representatives is pending to initiate the formal consultations required before the signing the RRA;
  + During the Roaming Expert Working Group (REWG) meeting on 20 November a new potential activity on voice call termination market analysis was discussed;
  + EU4Digital assisted REWG in scoping the ToR on this new activity.
* Spectrum:
  + Summary and next steps related to implementation of 5G private networks were presented during the Spectrum Expert Working Group (SEWG) meeting on 8 November;
  + To define a list of potential initiatives, a questionnaire on as-is situation and potential areas of interest related to 5G private networks development will be shared with partner countries by 30 November;
  + EU4Digital will organise a regional workshop on EU toolbox for 5G security with all relevant stakeholders from Eastern partner countries in Q1 of 2024;
  + After collection of the inputs from questionnaires, EU4Digital will organise bilateral consultations to define a list of potential initiatives for each partner country;
  + Country-specific roadmaps/guidelines towards 5G private networks development in Eastern partner countries will be prepared in 2024.
* Independence of Regulators and Broadband Development:
  + Broadband monitoring reports based on the data collected for 2020-2022 were presented during the Independence of Regulators and Broadband Expert Working Group (IRB EWG) meeting on 26 October;
  + Based on the aligned report structure, new broadband monitoring reports will be prepared based on the data and inputs collected in 2023;
  + EU4Digital will share updated broadband data collection questionnaire for 2023 by 15 December;
  + EU4Digital proposed to organise on-demand bilateral workshops with relevant market participants by the end of 2023;
  + During IRB EWG meeting, EU4Digital presented the updated country-specific questionnaires for legislative developments monitoring of Phase I recommendations, based on the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC);
  + Country Representatives have to provide their input by 15 December; the output will be ready in Q1 2024;
  + During IRB EWG meeting, it was agreed to prepare regional market analysis report, including market analysis results from all 5 Eastern partner countries;
  + EU4Digital will prepare country-specific market analysis reports for Armenia and Azerbaijan;
  + As there are on-going market analyses in Georgia and Moldova, the results from Georgia and Moldova market analyses will be included in the regional broadband market analysis report;
  + In 2021, Ukraine market analysis report was prepared by another EU-funded project. It was agreed to include Ukraine market analysis results in the regional broadband market analysis report, to be prepared by EU4Digital.

Chairs of the EaPeReg EWGs - **Inga Popovici (Romania)**, **Roman Kurdadze (Georgia)** and **Zaruhi Stepanyan (Armenia)** - presented progress achieved by respective EWGs in 2023 and the main plans for 2024, namely:

**IRB EWG** – Independence of Regulators and Broadband Expert Working Group supports Partner countries in identification of the EU best practices appropriate to be implemented in the EaP Telecom markets as well as to reach a harmonized approach in the EaP region on the topics under the expert group mandate (regulatory governance and broadband development). The work of the expert working group focuses on: (a) identification of legislative gaps between EaP and the EU; (b) identification of best solutions for the implementation of EU framework and the EU best practices; (c) cooperation with the stakeholders on the national level; (d) supporting EaP countries in analysis of broadband markets and monitoring of the reforms in the area of IRB mandate.

The regular meetings of the expert working group were organized in May in Paris and in October in Yerevan. The main aim of the meetings were to discuss the work done by the IRB EWG in 2023 and  plan the activities for the upcoming year, to present and exchange experience on analysis of wholesale broadband access market carried out by those EaP countries that are implementing it without the support from the EU4Digital (Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) as well as to discuss the work that being carried out by the EU4Digital.

The following is defined as the further activities of the IRB EWG supported by EU4Digital:

* Report reflecting the situation of the broadband coverage in EaP – as to this report, EaP countries still have to review the aggregated data after the 3 rounds of data collection to clarify the remaining inconsistencies.
* Monitoring of the developments in each country on both independence of NRAs and broadband.
* Broadband Market Analysis in EaP region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova).

Moreover, the EWG plans to organise regular in-person meetings to assess the activities already carried out by the group and to plan the future work plan. Preferably both regular meetings to be held back-to-back with BEREC Contact Network meetings so that the IRB EWG Members have the possibility to learn from BEREC EWGs’ experience on consistent implementation of the European Electronic Communications Code and of the EU Broadband Cost Reduction Directive.

In April 2023 the expert working group organized a Multi country TAIEX Workshop (WS) on Guidance on institutional and methodological prerequisites for Eastern Partnership Countries accession to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), which took place in April in Chisinau, Moldova.

The WS gathered all relevant stakeholders (representatives of the NRAs, line ministries and statistical offices of EaP countries) and served as an efficient platform allowing all relevant parties, including EU4Digital and EC to contribute to the discussions.  Besides, the workshop proved to be a successful platform for IRB EWG’s cooperation with EaP public stakeholders (line ministries in EaP and other relevant public organizations, e.g., cadaster or statistics authorities). In terms of DESI implementation, it demonstrated the IRB EWG competences regarding broadband coverage data collection. Besides, these competences were made known by other public authorities in EaP and initiated successful cooperation with them.

Moreover, group discussed the necessity of sharing Portuguese experience related to the digital mapping. Within the framework of 4-Lateral Summit of Regulatory Networks, the leaders of IRB EWG discussed the possibility of organizing a joint workshop with the Portuguese regulatory authority, ANACOM on the creation and maintenance of the geoportal that displays the availability of broadband services at the level of address. It was decided to organise the workshop at the end of March 2025 in Lisbon.

**SEWG** – Main goal of Spectrum Expert Working Group is to harmonize frequency bands, in particular 700 MHz and 3.6 GHz frequency bands. During 2023 SEWG activities were focusing on important topics within the telecommunications and broadcasting industries. One of the main goals of the SEWG in 2023 was possible signing of the Regional Spectrum Agreement (RSA), with the SEWG reiterating its commitment to harmonizing frequency bands, particularly the 700 MHz and 3.6 GHz bands. This agreement plays a vital role in optimizing spectrum utilization and promoting efficient spectrum management practices. But due to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war, signing of the the RSA is still pending. Nevertheless, efforts were made to extend the Regional Spectrum Agreement considering the ongoing political situation in Ukraine. This approach allows for additional time to resolve the conflict while streamlining the signing process and focusing efforts on harmonizing spectrum allocation across the region.

During 2023 SEWG successfully established terms of use for the 700MHz and 800MHz frequency ranges. Moreover, the group formulated the terms of use for the 3400-3800MHz frequency range, ensured compatibility on the band edge and frequency coordination for digital broadcasting, re-channelling of Programme making and special events (PMSE). The group Addressed out-of-band emission issues of IMT systems, created individual roadmaps, harmonised IMT bands within the scope of the EU framework, etc.

SEWG aims to achieve broadcasting excellence by considering mobile networks. SEWG regular meeting held in November provided a platform for sharing knowledge and making informed decisions. SEWG Members paid great attention to EU toolbox for 5G security topic. Regarding this, the group agreed with the EU4Digital-Telecom Rules experts that they shall elaborate a questionnaire on as-is situation and potential areas of interest for Eastern Partner countries regarding EU toolbox for 5G security topic. EU4Digital will support SEWG to collect the positions and prepare feedback on the national stakeholders’ consultations. By aligning efforts and priorities, SEWG intends to drive the advancement of innovative technologies and ensure their seamless integration into the communication ecosystem.

**REWG** – main goal of the Roaming Expert Working Group is to create common roaming space with the EaP by means of signing and enforcing the Regional Roaming Agreement at the first stage and then, if appropriate, with the EU. During 2023 the final version of the Regional Roaming Agreement was distributed among the Members of the Group for internal discussions. Due to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, the final position of Ukraine is pending to initiate the formal consultations required before the signing the RRA.

To continue working towards reaching its main goal – reduction of roaming tariffs, as well as to pave the way to the enforcement of the RRA, the REWG leadership initiated to conduct voice call termination market analysis. This proposal was discussed during the REWG meeting. During the 22nd Plenary meeting EaP countries representatives confirmed their support to this initiative.

**Mzia Gogilashvili,** representative of EaPeReg Chair 2023 delivered a presentation on the activities of the EaPeReg leadership 2023. She outlined that in order to achieve the goals defined in the EaPeReg Work Plan 2023, as well as to support the development of the Network and to increase its visibility, the EaPeReg Chair 2023 participated in important international, regional and bilateral events/meetings; namely:

Within the framework of cooperation between EaPeReg and International Communication Union (ITU) she participated in the WSIS high-level week (beginning of March), ITU Regional Development Forum for Europe (end of May), Global Symposium for regulators (beginning of June) Contribution to on current needs of the Network has been submitted by the EaPeReg Chair 2023 to the ITU focusing on broadband infrastructure and services map, development of the regional digital corridors and digital service hubs, measurements and standards related to electromagnetic fields, 5G Toolbox, Technical Measurements in IMT networks, etc. As a follow up, ITU Office for Europe initiated signature of a Joint Declaration between ITU, EaPeReg and EMERG. The Declaration was signed within the framework of Global Symposium for Regulators on 5 June in Sharm-El Sheikh by the Director of ITU Development Sector, the EaPeReg Chair and EMERG Co-Chairs.

On 4 October EaPeReg leadership participated in the Joint Summit of 4 Networks of Regulators – BEREC, EMERG, REGULATEL and EaPeReg, held in Funchal, Madeira. The event was organised by BEREC, supported by DG CNECT and DG NEAR and hosted by ANACOM – Portuguese regulator. Prior to the Summit**,** a bilateral meeting between BEREC Mini Board and BEREC Office from one side and EaPeReg Leadership from another side was held. The parties discussed the present and future cooperation of 2 Networks. The scope of cooperation will include Broadband Mapping; QoS for End Users; BCRD implementation; Modern radiocommunication technologies during emergency and force-major situations; Small Cells &Small-Area Wireless Access Implementation; Investment mapping for 5G; Spectrum sharing; and so on.

In October 2023 EaPeReg Chair participated in the International Forum for Regulators organized by the International Institute of Communications (IIC). During the Forum, the issue of cooperation between IIC and EaPeReg has been discussed between EaPeReg Chair 2023 and the representatives of IIC. As a result, the Director of IIC was invited to participate in Plenary, to present IIC activities, events and projects thus paying the way to future bilateral cooperation.

As to the bilateral meetings, throughout the year the EaPeReg Chair 2023 has held meetings with following counterparts. discussing the cooperation with the EaPeReg.:

* Mr. Cosmas Zavazava, the Director of ITU/BDT;
* Ms. Renate Nikolay Deputy Director-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology;
* Mr. Konstantinos Masselos, BEREC Chair 2023;
* Ms. Annemarie Sipkes, BEREC Vice-Chair, etc.

And last but not the least, EaPeReg leadership supported to increase the visibility of the Network via social media establishing the EaPeReg pages on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Kindly accepting the EaPeReg leadership invitation, **Istvan Bakk**, the representative of DG NEAR, delivered a presentation on the EC latest rules and procedures related to organization of EaPeReg events with the support of the European Commission. This information is extremely important for the EaPeReg leadership, and it caused outstanding interest among the participants, in particular among the EaPeReg incoming Chair and Vice-Chair. In 2024 they will be responsible for organizing all the events of the Network.

**Robert Mourik,** the EaPeREg Vice Chair 2023, delivered a presentation on the main takeaways of Joint Summit of 4 Networks of Regulators – BEREC, EMERG, REGULATEL and EaPeReg held in Funchal, Madeira, on 4 October. The Summit was focused on one of the most prevailing topics - International Connectivity, - the critical segment of the Internet service provision value chain linking each country’s Networks to the global Internet. The working sessions of the Summit were focused on the extended and significant role of the regulatory authorities towards facilitation and ensuring achieving a sustainable and inclusive digital future benefiting end-users worldwide. During the session related to the achievement of connectivity by satellite and submarine cables, moderated by Robert Mourik, EaPeReg Vice-Chair 2023, Ekaterine Imedadze, EaPeReg Chair 2023 presented the case of regional connectivity corridors - how Georgia can leverage the regional opportunities of the Europe-Asia Digital Corridors and facilitate resilient international connectivity corridors in the region, benefitting all EaP countries. EaPeReg participation in the Summit was significant, since International Connectivity, bringing the EaP region closer to the EU, is one of the highest importance not only for the Network but for the region at all.

Another important session of the EaPeReg Plenary was dedicated to International Cooperation During this session the representatives of the international partners of EaPeReg – BEREC Office, ITU Office for Europe, EMERG and IIC – described the common activities/projects fulfilled during 2023 and proposed the topics for bilateral cooperation in 2024. The representatives of international partners of EaPeReg expressed their gratitude to the Network for cooperation.

During the Plenary meeting, the EaPeReg Chair and Vice Chair 2024 were elected. **Sergiu Gaibu**, Director of ANRCETI, National Regulatory Agency for Electronic Communications and Information Technology of the Republic of Moldovawas nominated as the Chair 2024. **Valeriu Zgonea**, President of ANCOM, National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania was elected as the Vice Chair of the Network. After the elections, ANCOM representative presented the EaPeReg Work Plan 2024. At the end of 2023 or the beginning of 2024, the Work Plan will be submitted to the DG CNECT and DG NEAR for approval.

At the end of the meeting, **Ekaterine Imedadze** the EaPeReg Chair 2023, **Robert Mourik**, Vice-Chair 2023 and **Vassilis Kopanas**, DG CNECT representative expressed their commitments to the abovementioned activities, as well as gratitude towards the EaPeReg experts, EC, Cecoforma, participants, organisers, interpreters, and all supporters of the event. With this, EaPeReg 22nd Plenary meeting was closed.

On 30 November **3-Lateral Workshop** on"Strengthening Broadband Infrastructure and Services across the Europe Region and beyond" between EaPeReg, EMERG and ITU was held at ComCom premises. It was the third workshop held within the framework of Joint Declaration signed by EaPeReg, EMERG and ITU on 5 June 2023. 3-lateral Workshop on "Strengthening Broadband Infrastructure and Services across the Europe Region and beyond" stems from the joint declaration signed by the Chairs of EaPeReg, EMERG and the Director of BDT/ITUon 5 June 2023.

Main objective of the Workshop was to serve as a platform for the NRAs of EaPeReg and EMERG to share good practices, address challenges related to emerging technologies, and facilitate the creation of potential new features of broadband infrastructure and services mapping tools. The workshop supported promoting harmonization of approaches across the participating regions, thereby enhancing the cooperation in the field of broadband infrastructure and services mapping. Broadband infrastructure is referred to in the Directive 2014/61/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks. Directive (EU) 2018/1972 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 establishing the European Electronic Communications Code.

The welcome speeches were delivered by the EaPeReg Chair 2023, EMERG Co-Chair and ITU representative. The workshop was moderated by the ITU representative. Georgia, Portugal, and Romania case studies were presented during the working session. Broadband mapping is one of the most significant topics for the EaP countries thus resulting in an interactive exchange among the participants.

After concluding the Workshop, a closed session on future activities/projects of ITU, EaPeReg and EMERG was held. Only the leadership of EaPeReg and EMERG, as well as the representatives of ITU participated in the closed session. The following was discussed during this session:

* In 2024 ITU will release the compendium with best practices and challenges of case studies on broadband infrastructure and services from the 10 case studies presented during the series of trilateral workshops: This will be the first product of 2024: Series of ITU-EMERG-EaPeReg Joint Workshops on Strengthening Broadband Infrastructure and Services;
* ITU shared that it is available to deliver trainings on Fifth Generation Regulations towards digital transformation in 2024;
* Cyprus (EMERG) offered to deliver specialized trainings on cyber security and network resilience to experts of EMERG and EaPeReg national regulatory authorities for a total of around 20 experts to be trained;
* Interest for broadband mapping in Georgia and Moldova was also expressed by the parties; this item will necessitate further bilateral discussion as it requires considerable capacity that might not be available in 2024 under the umbrella of trilateral cooperation: reminder to the ITU Guidelines - Establishing or strengthening broadband mapping systems;
* EaPeReg shared that ANACOM and ANCOM are available to cooperate with ITU to implement support to the countries of the region;
* EMERG and EaPeReg agreed to brainstorm internally on possible initiatives;
* In the following days, ITU will circulate a one-page draft of a tentative plan for 2024 with a kind request for feedback from EMERG and EaPeReg by December 18 in order to decide and finalize the actions for 2024 on a trilateral meeting which will be scheduled for Thursday December 21.