

# International Co-operation Needed to Face Information Age Challenges

Magdalena Gaj

*UnderSecretary of State, Ministry of Infrastructure, Poland*

I am delighted to present to the delegates of the ITU 2010 Plenipotentiary Conference in Guadalajara Mexico a summary of recent changes in telecommunication sector in my country. Poland has become a member of the International Telecommunication Union in 1921 when it gained independence after the 1st World War. Earlier it ceased to exist as an independent entity for more than a hundred years. From the very beginning, in close collaboration with other ITU Members, the Polish telecommunication sector was growing fast. That growth was stopped during the 2nd World War after which the sector was completely disrupted. Its reconstruction started immediately at the war end, but accelerated rapidly only after the transformation of our political and economic system in 1989, as result of the famous Solidarity Movement.

My first task after the ministerial appointment in 2008 was to identify urgent issues to focus on. Although Poland is a Member of the European Union from 1 May 2004, it joined EU when the other Members were already in an advanced state of development. In the telecommunication sector we have suffered a number of problems:

- Low broadband penetration rate in comparison with more advanced EU countries.
- Strong position of the incumbent operator on the market.
- Newly build housing without broadband infrastructure.
- Disproportionate high access charges
- Barriers in the investment process.
- Insufficient IT knowledge among population.
- Generation exclusion.
- Exclusion of poor social strata and inhabitants of rural regions.

To solve them, we have joined the “i2010” and other European programs and started “Digital Poland” initiative. We are increasing our involvement in various ITU and other international initiatives. We are seeking assistance from our own National Institute of Telecommunications and we welcome collaboration with governmental and private

sector entities from abroad. The challenges of information and knowledge society listed above, are common for a number of countries. We strongly believe that our problems can successfully be solved all over the world only in close international co-operation and wide exchange of national experience of each country. The ITU has created the best framework for such a joint effort. My country is ready to share our experience with other ITU Members interested.

In Poland, our Ministry of Infrastructure, together with the regulatory Office of Electronic Communication, have started with deep modifications of our telecommunication legislation and regulation structure. A new Act on “Support of the Development of Telecommunication Services and Networks” has been prepared and came into force just in July this year. New legislation authorizes local governments and authorities for telecommunication activities, such as network and services provision. The new “rights of way” impose obligation on commodities enterprises, such as public ways, electrical, water and sewing companies, to share their infrastructures with telecommunication operators. The construction law is modified implementing simplified procedures of construction licensing and projects approvals. New competencies are given to electronic communication regulator, including right to appeal any local prohibition against new telecommunication investments, including radiocommunication masts and stations. The common aim of these rules is to faster and make easier investment processes in telecommunication sector, especially in new regional broadband infrastructure, new generation access networks (including wireless networks) and new service platforms. We believe these new regulations will encourage wider investments in our telecommunication sector and will end with higher penetration of broadband access and new services in our country. We invite all partners of international ITU community to share their experiences in similar efforts.

New telecommunication and information technologies are indispensable vehicles in our way for better life. They promote social and economical development, but they create numerous challenges in each country. International exchange of best practices can make this way easier. We are ready to co-operate with the ITU community on that way.



**Magdalena Gaj**, born in 1974 in Chełm, Poland. Graduated from Faculty of Law (MA degree) at University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin; applicant at District Chamber of Solicitors in Lublin, 1998–2002. Applicant at Solicitors Office till 2001. Worked in the Office for Telecommunication

Regulations, Office for Postal and Telecommunications regulation since 2001, and now – Office of Electronic Communications (UKE) in Legal Department, since 2005 – Director of Legal Department. Scope of competence: legal service of UKE President within telecommunications, postal, administration, civil and EU laws. From 2008 in the Ministry of Infrastructure, as Under-Secretary of State responsible for telecommunication sector's matters in Poland.