

The EBU at Telecom Interactive 97

Telecom Interactive 97, organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), was held in Geneva between 8 and 14 September. The event – the first of its kind to be organized by the ITU – attracted over 20,000 participants, including a large number of highly-placed VIPs from Governments and the industry. One of its main aims was to focus on the human face of telecommunications and multimedia, and their implications world-wide. The *Telecom Development Symposium*, for example, brought 70 telecommunications specialists from 40 Least Developed Countries on a fellowship to discuss the Internet, the services and applications that can run on it, and the impact it will have on culture and society.

The *Forum* at Telecom Interactive 97 encompassed over sixty sessions, and featured more than 400 speakers from around the world who came to discuss the challenges facing the telecommunications and Internet communities. One of the sessions – *Interactive Broadcasting from Internet to Satellite: a Global Vision* – was chaired by **Mr David Wood**, Head of New Technologies at the EBU. Another session – *Interactive Television* – was chaired by **Prof. Dr Mark Krivocheev** whose name should be familiar to many readers of the Review. During the event, Prof. Krivocheev – who made history on 3 September 1948 when he pressed the button which inaugurated the world's first 625-line television transmission – was given public recognition for his lifetime contribution to radiocommunications. The award was presented to him by **Dr Pekka Tarjanne**, Secretary-General of the ITU, in conjunction with the satellite operator, Hispasat.

Telecom Interactive 97 was also the venue for the launching of a new ITU publication – *Challenges to the Network: Telecoms and the Internet* – which examines the relationship between the telecommunications and Internet communities, and provides the latest statistics concerning the Internet and its use. At the opening ceremony, Dr Tarjanne said that it was time to globalize the Internet, and to encourage all people to work towards the creation of a fairer society: *"The Internet today is a grotesquely unequal place. It is almost exclusively reserved for the richest, best-educated people in the wealthiest, most developed nations. By July 1997, nineteen of the world's nineteen and a half million Internet hosts were to be found in the 29 OECD countries."* He went on to cite a number of stark statistics concerning the global distribution of Internet hosts. *"The whole continent of Africa, excluding South Africa, has fewer Internet hosts than Estonia. South Africa itself boasts five times as many hosts as China. And there are nearly four times as many Internet hosts in Iceland, with its population of 250,000, as there are in India with its 930 million inhabitants."* Dr Tarjanne went on to stress that the ITU would not want to control the Internet, even if it could be controlled by any one organization.

Challenges to the Network: Telecoms and the Internet is available from ITU Sales Service (E-mail: sales@itu.int).

The *Exhibition* at Telecom Interactive 97 was unlike any previous ITU Telecom exhibition in that it featured, for the first time, thematic pavilions which focused on specific areas: *Networked Communities, Education and Healthcare, Networked Services and Intelligent Living*. At these thematic pavilions, and around the Exhibition as a whole, were to be seen demonstrations of the latest benefits of technology, and how it could be used in the future to enhance the lives of all the world's people.



The EBU's David Wood chairs the session *Interactive Broadcasting from Internet to Satellite: a Global Vision*.

EBU Communication co-ordinated two stands in the Exhibition area. One of these featured four "projects":

- DigiTAG;
- WorldDAB;
- EBU Educational TV Unit;
- EBU publications and projects, and the Web pages of EBU members.

The other EBU stand was in the *Intelligent Living Pavilion* and featured:

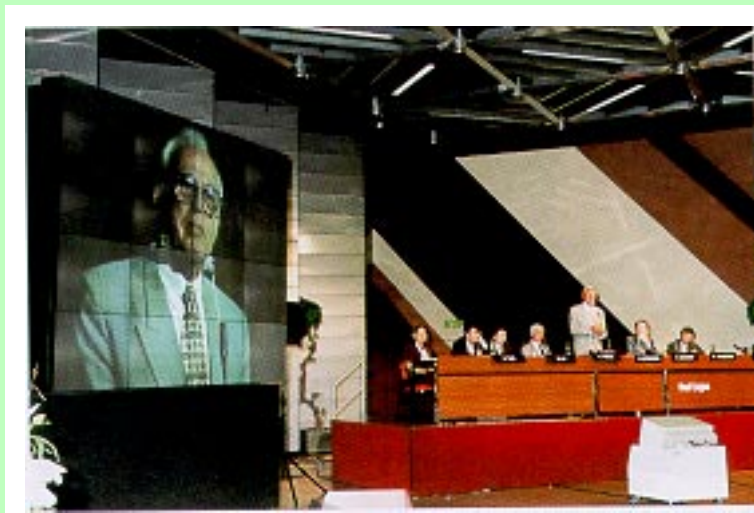
- EBU Internet Broadcasting.



DigiTAG – Digital Terrestrial Television Action Group – was set up to create a framework for the harmonious and market-driven introduction of digital terrestrial services in Europe, using the DVB-T specification. Over 60 broadcasters, manufacturers, network operators and regulators have joined together in DigiTAG. The EBU is a member of the Group, whose Project Office is located at the EBU's headquarters in Geneva. The DigiTAG Steering Board has now agreed a number of initial statements about *Enhanced Services*, the *Application Programming Interface*, the *Common Interface*, *Event Service Guides* and *Interactivity*. These issues, in particular, are considered as critical to the initial market success of DVB-T services and, in the long-term, to the successful transition to the all-digital terrestrial broadcasting environment. Further information on DigiTAG can be found on its Website (www.digitag.org).

The **WorldDAB** Forum is overseeing the introduction around the world of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) services, based on the system developed by the European Eureka-147 Consortium. WorldDAB also has its Project Office at the EBU's headquarters in Geneva. The Forum is dedicated to encouraging international co-operation and co-ordination between sound and data broadcasters, network providers, manufacturers, governments and other official bodies, thus gaining consensus for the smooth introduction of DAB services. The goal of the Forum is to convert a brilliant piece of engineering achievement into a world-wide commercial marketing success, to the lasting economic and social benefit of all concerned. Further information on the WorldDAB Forum can be found on its Website (www.worlddab.org).

The **EBU Educational TV Unit** was set up in October 1996 to develop and promote the broadcasting and use of educational television programmes, both nationally and internationally. The Unit provides a wide range of services from fund-raising to obtaining rights, from distributing programmes to evaluating their quality. The Unit recently launched a new competition for Primary and Secondary schools in Europe. Pupils were invited to submit up to 750 words on how they believe their classroom or school will look in the year 2020, and what technology they will be using, e.g. computers, televisions, etc. The prizes were to be announced at the end of October 1997. Further information on the EBU Educational TV Unit can be found on its Website (www.edutv.org).



Prof. Dr Mark Krivocheev chairs the session *Interactive Television*.

The **EBU Internet Radio Group** has just published a two-part status report on "Radio via Internet". Part A discusses the implications of the Internet for European radio stations while Part B looks at the audio quality performance of different Internet radio systems, based on listening tests carried out by the **IRT** in Munich. On the EBU's stand in

the *Intelligent Living Pavilion*, visitors to Telecom Interactive 97 were able to compare the different Internet radio coding systems, side-by-side, and transmitted at various modem speeds. The main conclusions of the IRT study are that Internet radio, when received via a 14.4 kbit/s analogue modem, offers something akin to "shortwave radio quality", described subjectively as "very annoying". However, if a 28.8 kbit/s modem is used, the received audio quality improves significantly – to "slightly annoying" or "annoying" depending on which coding system is used. Some of the codecs under test delivered an audio quality level which is better than AM radio. With a 64 kbit/s ISDN line, good FM-quality audio can be obtained when receiving in mono, and better-than-AM quality when receiving in stereo – assuming of course that the backbone of the Internet itself is not limiting the data throughput. The future of Internet radio looks promising, we are told, with developments such as MPEG-4 coding, increases in the capacity of the Internet itself, and new interactive carriers which use satellites and bandwidth-on-demand techniques.

Further information on the *Radio via Internet* report (ref: BPN 010 a & b) can be obtained from Mrs Lina Vanberghem at EBU headquarters in Geneva (E-mail: lina.vanberghem@ebu.ch), or from the Website of Radio Netherlands (www.rnw.nl/EBU/).

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The ITU plans to stage its next Interactive event in conjunction with *Telecom 99* in Geneva, running from 10 to 17 October, 1999.



General view of the main EBU stand.



General view of the EBU Internet Broadcasting stand in the *Intelligent Living Pavilion*.