



## **COSIPLAN**

Argentinian *Pro Tempore*

Presidency 2017 –2018

### **Working Group on Telecommunications**

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#### **REPORT**

#### **VIDEOCONFERENCE OF THE WORKING GROUP ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

June 22, 2017

Nine Member countries of UNASUR, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, and an Advisor to the General Secretariat, gathered for an exchange of information and opinions on the consultation process for the preparation of new Terms of Reference aimed the development of a study on the design of a South American integration broadband within the framework of the Working Group on Telecommunications.

The Undersecretary of Planning from the Ministry of Communications of Argentina, Lic. Hugo Miguel, and Mr. Diego Miranda (CONATEL, Paraguay), on behalf of the Coordination of the Working Group on Telecommunications, welcomed the participants, and excused the principal Coordinator of the Group, Mr. Luis Añazco, for his absence to the meeting due to health issues. Then, the agenda for the meeting was officially approved and the exchange started.

1.- Comments on the written contributions and request for clarifications respect to the reflection document and the survey delivered by the delegation of Argentina

1.1. Comments by Lic. Hugo Miguel

In Argentina's opinion it is not necessary to search for external support in order to carry out the mapping of the fiber installed capacity, either in border areas or in low-population areas, as that information already exists. It is up to each country to decide if the data is available or if it is necessary to collect it.

The following subjects were addressed in response to previous inquiries. With respect to the building up of an emergency network, Argentina considers that it is feasible given the existence of the satellite technology, as well as the fiber, and the submarine cable. However, an alternative plan should be prepared,

which would not need the intervention of an external consultancy. With the appropriate means, the governments of the region may enforce appropriate legislation to have the priority in case of disaster, but this would not justify the creation of a new network that may be actually available, and which may generate unnecessary expenditures.

With respect to a new submarine cable, there are several projects developed by private firms with the same purpose. Therefore, Argentina does not support the idea of a new study for the construction of a new cable which will compete with the projects already in progress.

The information requested through the survey was related to data transmission banks, as the issue of access for distribution to the population is a responsibility of each country.

With respect to the suggestion on the analysis of the legal frameworks, there are links among the countries for international traffic and the internal framework is up to each particular country.

As per the lack of information on the destination of data transmission to other countries, either in border areas or in interconnection heads to the submarine cable, the suggestion is the submission of the information by each country for the preparation of the map on the traffic and the interconnections.

With respect to the suggestion on the study focusing on the existing connection points at the regional level, Argentina agreed with the idea, previous definition of concepts aimed at avoiding duplication of efforts.

The Undersecretary recalled that in some countries the information on the traffic in networks is public, while in other countries, this information is confidential.

Each of the countries may adhere to a joint project, may define which information is available for sharing, or may define if a consultancy is needed. The last would not be required for Argentina, and the delegation considers that this task should be carried out in a joint manner.

Re-definition of the Terms of Reference does not require the constitution of an atlas with the capacities of each country; definition of the interconnection points is enough, together with the determination of the extension requirements and of the kind of traffic the country needs to develop.

## 1.2. Comments by the delegations

The delegations expressed the following opinions during their different interventions.

**-Bolivia:** The country agrees with Argentina in that it is not necessary to build up a parallel network. Bolivia ratify the need to develop a study focused on the issue of the interconnection models, aimed at achieving a single model for all the countries. The second main purpose of the study should be determining the ways to increase the contents within the region, and the third element is referred to reinforcing the exchange points as indicated by the countries, the points that every country desires to connect with.

The aforementioned study should be executive and concise, and take into account the progress achieved with respect to the existing interconnection agreements, the ways to increase regional traffic, and the paths to achieve independence of the region from other areas.

Bolivia agrees with the statement that traffic is carried out by private operators, but it considers that there should exist a body within UNASUR to collect information from all the countries aimed at submitting recommendations on possible modifications to be applied in each country. The countries need to achieve interconnection under certain circumstances. Thus, any study should recommend the permanence of operators and traffic within South America.

Bolivia suggested the Coordination of the WG to promote bilateral meetings in parallel to the study on regional interconnection with redundancy alternatives, aimed at advancing interconnection issues, and to resume the initial roadmap which also looked for the advancement of a scientific network, CLARA.

**-Colombia:** The country requested the holding of a special meeting of the technical area of telecommunications with the Coordination of the Working Group and Lic. Hugo Miguel.

- **Ecuador:** The country considered that the countries have already surpassed the stage of a study on physical connection, and therefore, Ecuador expects that the object of the study is connection at the logic level, analysis on technical capacities, and the creation of new data centers for content generation, to avoid the exit of traffic from the region. As a direct effect the countries should consider cost reduction for users. Ecuador agrees with the proposal of constituting and emergency network but in its opinion, such construction is possible using the existing connections. The information requested through the survey is confidential in the country, but it may be disclosed for the development of the study, under terms of confidentiality.

**-Guyana:** The country agrees with the position of Argentina of avoiding the duplication of networks. In Guyana there is only one operator with license for provision of international communication services. The country has two fiber interconnection points, one through Trinidad and Tobago, and the other with French Guyana, through Suriname. There is a draft agreement to liberalize telecommunications. Guyana will strive to provide the requested information as soon as possible.

**-Peru:** The country considers that it is necessary to review the objectives of the new consultancy, based on the advancements achieved by the rest of the countries. Peru has a national fiber backbone available, with links to Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, and Ecuador. The company responsible for the administration of this structure is responsible for laying a cable to any border when a neighbor country requests for interconnection capacity. The study should include the different ways of international connection and the possibility of contents movement through the existing networks and not through other external means. At the same time, it should include the advantages that may be offered to the operators in each country.

**-Paraguay:** The country agrees that it is useless to duplicate the networks, and that the countries should agree by consensus on the objectives and the roadmap for the following steps.

**-Uruguay:** The country agrees with the position expressed by Argentina, and considers it would be very positive to subscribe agreements among UNASUR's countries. The country will send the requested information.

Data exchange within the region is carried out by companies, most of them private. Therefore, it is difficult to determine at the government level the connection conditions, as the companies are the ones establishing the relevant features. The first question for Uruguay would be the role of the WG on Telecommunications within UNASUR. Are the countries going to impose obligations on the private companies? Uruguay does not deem this move very convenient. Or, on the contrary, are they going to foster the creation of a negotiation framework, where these interventions are possible?

Uruguay considers that the survey conveyed by Argentina goes in the right direction, and it does not consider necessary the development of a study with external consultancy. The collected information on the traffic volumes exchanged by the operators may constitute the starting point to create the aforementioned negotiation spaces. For the country, the traffic and the interconnection are not carried out by the countries, but by operators. Therefore, policies are needed in each country to regulate the way the operators connect each other. A study may not provide more results than the results that may be obtained from the countries themselves.

As mentioned by Argentina, Uruguay is working with other spaces such as CITELE and MERCOSUR, where cost reductions are already materialized. In this regard, it is required to define clearly the objective of regional interconnection, which would be getting the traffic shared within the region and avoiding its exit outside of it. There are agreements with several operators aimed at improving international traffic.

Uruguay is working to offer services both at the national and international levels. The country is willing to offer the region availability of Internet services, which will depend on the construction of a submarine cable interconnecting Uruguay, Brazil, and the United States, and which will be operating by this year.

**-Venezuela:** After the relevant greetings by the National Coordination, the delegation expressed that new elements have emerged in the last months which are currently under assessment by the team in charge of the field of telecommunications in Venezuela.

Venezuela is willing to contribute with the process to re-define the Terms of Reference. In this regard, the country would requested for a special meeting with the Coordination of the WG on Telecommunications and Lic. Hugo Miguel. Initially, Venezuela agrees with the information provided by Argentina and Uruguay on the role of the operators, but the country expects to achieve greater content generation. The answers to the questions will be provided soon.

## 2.- Conclusions

### 2.1. Lic. Hugo Miguel

In general terms, he thinks countries are building upon common consent. He agreed with the positions expressed by Peru, Bolivia, and Uruguay. With respect to the latter, he said that clearly the operators are private companies, but each country has a responsibility on the operation of those firms within their territories.

With respect to Bolivia's intervention on the need to avoid traffic leaving the region, he recalled Argentina's plan to develop an IXP network for traffic, aimed at avoiding traffic from leaving the region. The country is currently working on interconnection regulations.

UNASUR's members may share information on interconnection models in the border areas, not with the purpose of imposing such models to the companies, but only to collect information that will be useful when establishing costs.

He suggests holding consultations through email and using videoconferences to deal directly with the subjects agreed upon.

### 2.2. Coordination of the WG on Telecommunications

There were several common assertions; the need to achieve logic connection, not only physical connection, and the possibility of sharing interconnection models. The Coordination agreed with Uruguay on the need to define clearly the objectives of regional interconnection, and on assessing the possibility to take this as the first consensus. Absence of initial consensus on the objective may lead to wasting work once it is launched. The Coordination insists on achieving consensus around the addressed issued and to build up a road map or schedule.

All countries should get involved in this stage, aimed at contributing to work advancement.

3.- Next activities

Lic. Hugo Miguel will check his agenda to agree on the holding of the special meetings requested by Colombia and Venezuela for the next weeks.

The deadline established for the submission of comments by the delegations that have not conveyed their documents is July 7, 2017. When all the observations are duly conveyed, the delegation of Argentina through his technical area will prepare a draft Terms of Reference, to be sent to Coordination of the GTT, Paraguay, for its consideration and the subsequently distributed among the members for final comments. The document and the subsequent activity schedule may be approved within the framework of a new videoconference.