



The market access experts

Since 1999, Access Partnership has been helping some of the world's leading telecommunications companies, investment groups and government agencies to gain access to new markets, obtain valuable spectrum and introduce new services and organisations into previously underserved markets. Helen Jameson speaks to Zeina Mokaddem, Director of the Abu Dhabi office, about regulatory challenges, dialogue between governments and operators, licence fees and so-called 'paper satellites'.



Zeina Mokaddem, Director of the Abu Dhabi office.

Question: What are the main challenges facing the satcom sector in terms of regulation in the EMEA region?

Zeina Mokaddem: With few satellite projects coming up in the region, regulators are now looking to regulate the market in a more systematic way. Some regulators do not have existing comprehensive satellite regulations in place, despite the technology having been around for some time. This represents a challenge for existing as well as new satellite operators: high licensing fees and local representation requirements are among the common challenges faced here. Another imminent issue is the lack of adequate spec-

trum to support the investment. While this may force operators to be more innovative in the spectrum they use and the way they use it, they do come up against the hard laws of physics. With demand for their services increasing, so is the need for spectrum. Operators are now looking to use Ka-band for a variety of services currently restricted to the lower bands. And while this is a decent solution, Ka-band is not a substitute for L or C-band...

Question: Is there enough dialogue facilitated between government and operators?

Zeina Mokaddem: This is certainly happening, albeit in some markets more than others. Governments have started to realise the importance of involving the industry in their decision making process and are now more open to contributions from operators. Regulators are initiating more regular consultations, opening the floor to the wider public and interested stakeholders. UAE is taking a lead on this, where TRA's consultation procedure has been very much streamlined. Bahrain has also been actively working with stakeholders to reach consensus on some regulatory and policy issues.

Question: How does Access Partnership work to streamline the license acquisition process?

Zeina Mokaddem: Just knowing how to present an application – and how not to – takes months off the application processes in this region. We also work with governments throughout the year, not just at moments when we're asking them to grant a licence. We have worked hard to develop a level of trust and of access that allows us to engage more effectively and regularly with regulators.

Question: Has international co-ordination advanced to ensure that obtaining licenses is easier?

Zeina Mokaddem: This is a highly debated issue but I can say for sure that coordination between different stakeholders is ongoing. Is the process for getting licences harmonised in the region? No. Is the collective work of the GCC, the ITU, the ASMG helping? Yes. But it is still faster to get a licence in three countries in the region than to wait for a policy group to harmonise the processes.

Question: Is there still a significant problem with so-called paper satellites?



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Zeina Mokaddem: There really is not a paper satellite issue in this region, no. Not when compared with some other regions. In the Middle East, there are a number of new satellite projects, and for most it is the first time that the government of those countries gets materially involved in the issues. Globally, the ITU Radiocommunication Bureau is taking steps to improve the status quo and operators are in discussions with the Bureau to ensure a practical, efficient, and economic solution to this problem. It is mostly the new entrants that are suffering from a lack of availability of suitable spectrum at a convenient orbital position. Governments around the world are currently in discussions with the ITU on this issue and WRC-12 is expected to seek closure on the matter. I somehow think this issue may live on past WRC-12, though.

Question: Are there many problems that arise in terms of the length of time it takes to issue licenses?

Zeina Mokaddem: Where the number of satellite operator licences is not fixed, they normally take a long time to be issued – months, even years. In most cases, this is due to long administrative processes and some cumbersome licensing requirements such as the need for local representation and in some instances of restrictions on foreign ownership. Service licences are quicker, and depending on how you position the service can be very quick.

Question: What about license fees? Are they coming down and becoming more reasonable for those in emerging countries?

Zeina Mokaddem: Licence fees associated with satellite services represent some of the main barriers to entry for satellite operators in the region. Satellite services have traditionally been charged at a premium in the region and there is little effort by regulators to change this.

However, a more open and engaged in-

teraction between regulators here and their counterparts in more mature markets, as well as some WTO and national policy goals are constantly pushing regulators to lower satellite licence fees.

Question: Which markets are proving to be most interesting at present for Access Partnership's clients? Are there any particularly hot markets?

Zeina Mokaddem: The region as a whole is an interesting one. This is not disconnected from access to energy resources in many of the countries. There are some markets that are proving to be unusually “hot” and the whole outlook on satellite issues is very much different than the one clients are used to elsewhere.

This presents a unique and interesting market for them. In terms of potential for growth, the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia are among the most coveted GCC countries. We are also prepared for Southern Sudan, and the new Libya.



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