

12th Meeting of the Technical Assembly in Geneva

Interview with Philip Laven, Director, EBU Technical Department



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Director of the EBU Technical Department, by Patrick Jaquin, EBU

12th Technical Assembly in Geneva, 11 and 12 May 2006

Patrick Jaquin: What is the main purpose of the meeting ?

Phil Laven: The Technical Assembly is our annual opportunity to bring together the senior technical staff of EBU Members. It's a chance for them to catch up on developments across the Technical Committee's wide range of groups and activities, and to look ahead to, and help shape, the EBU's future work. The Members share experiences and knowledge, and 'network' socially. Importantly for us also, it gives us a chance at EBU Headquarters to gain feedback on how well we are doing, and how good a service we are providing to EBU Members.

This year the Technical Assembly also has to elect our 13 member Technical Committee, the body which acts on the Members' behalf on technical matters, for the next two-year term. The members of the Technical Committee need to represent the Members as a whole, and take decisions on their behalf. It is a hard job, but we have been fortunate in



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having very competent and hard working individuals on the Technical Committee in the past. We expect the same from the next Technical Committee team.

What specific subjects and results do you expect this year?

This year, we are focusing on High Definition Television – in fact this is a main reason for having the Technical Assembly here in Geneva this year, rather than at a Member's centre, as we normally do. Having it here in Geneva we can more readily demonstrate some of the key issues in HDTV standards to our Members. All EBU Members will have to decide soon on what to do about HDTV – essentially when to start HDTV broadcasting and with which technical standards. We aim to provide much of the key information they will need to make these choices. We will be showing them in carefully controlled conditions, what different systems look like in the studio and what they will look like by the time they are viewed on the home receiver.

When you decide on a broadcasting system it often happens that you have to choose between something tried and tested, and something new which holds the promise of performing better. We have exactly this situation with one of the technologies needed for HDTV, the 'compression system', and we will be debating the relative advantages of the old ('MPEG-2') and the new ('MPEG-4 AVC'). There may be no simple answer to the question of which to use, but at least we hope to lay all the facts before our Members.

Another delicate issue for us this year is the standard used for the multimedia broadcasting which accompanies digital television. For some years, the Technical Committee has recommended a technology developed in Europe, in our own DVB Project, called 'MHP'. It's a great technical system, but just recently a



number of the holders of patents for the system, which include some large European companies we know well, have announced what we believe are very unfair licensing terms, which make the system unattractive. So, there are some issues here of trust: Is announcing large patent fees many years after people have started broadcasting the system, fair?

Among the other issues we will be debating is security, and how in the age of Information Technology our Members prevent hackers from breaking in to our IT systems.

Equally, we will be taking a tour through the range of EBU work in production technology, transmission, and broadcast networks. We also provide Members, for convenience, with a DVD which is a complete copy of all the documents on our web site.

Will there be less serious moments?

There will be an excursion into the Swiss mountains, but I am afraid most of the talk will be about technology rather than cheese.



Agenda

Thursday 11 May 2006

1. Welcome message, Jean Réveillon, EBU Secretary General
2. Report from Technical Committee, Daniel Sauvet-Goichon (TDF)
3. Report from Technical Department, Phil Laven (EBU)
4. Report from PMC, Maurizio Ardito (RAI)
5. Report from BMC, Jan Doeven (NPB/Nozema)
6. Report from NMC, Rhys Lewis (BBC)
7. HDTV standards, David Wood (EBU)
8. Licensing issues (MPEG-4 AVC, DVB-MHP, etc.), Phil Laven (EBU)
9. Horizontal markets, Georg Lütteke (EICTA)
10. MPEG-2 or MPEG-4 AVC for TV broadcasting
Marek Holynski (PRT/TVP), Gerd Bock (ARD/ZDF-IRT), Mohamed Madour (TDA), Arild Hellgren (NRK)

Friday 12 May 2006

11. Elections (Technical Committee, Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen)
12. DAB in Denmark, Leif Lonsmann (DR)
13. Broadcasters in a broadband & mobile world, Lieven Vermaele (VRT)
14. DVB-H in Italy, Alberto Morello (RAI)
15. Modern TV production systems, Henk den Bok (NPB/NOB)
16. EBU initiatives, Frans de Jong, Walid Sami, Mathias Coinchon (EBU)
17. Round table session "Security"
18. Dates and location of the next Technical Committee and Assembly meetings