

Thomas Zielke

Germany

Candidate
for the post of
**Director of the
ITU Telecommunication
Standardization Bureau**

What is your view on the role of digital technologies in a rapidly changing world?

Many dimensions of our daily life are affected by digital technologies: communication, education, work, science, politics and culture.

Today, almost two-thirds of the world's population use the Internet.

This presents many opportunities, especially for emerging countries, sectors, and the young generation. We all benefit from mobile financial services and remote business models.

At the same time, the digital transformation places unprecedented demands on connectivity. How do we, as a global community, want to shape this process in a fair and sustainable way?

This is where standards come in. They set minimum requirements for safety, efficiency, and interoperability. Besides, they provide maximum reliability in terms of consensus, acceptance, and consumer protection. Good standards provide solutions to current and future challenges derived from digital technologies.



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How should the work of ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Sector evolve to maintain relevance in today's world?

Today's rapid developments pose new challenges for ITU as a tradition-rich organization. How can emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, the upcoming 6G, and fintech services be standardized? How to strike a balance between self-confident independence and cooperation? And what will be key issues in the next ten years?

To find answers to these questions, ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) needs fresh ideas and forward-looking approaches. There also needs to be strong focus on the right and most rewarding issues in standardization. We need to anticipate future developments and find positions of common interest in a fast-changing world.

No one other than ITU as a United Nations (UN) agency would be more predestined to conduct dialogue on fundamental issues of standardization between major organizations, leading industrial nations and developing countries, large and small companies.

If elected, what are your top three priorities and how do you plan to achieve them?

I am committed to the following major efforts for the benefit of the organization and its members:

First: I will pilot a process ensuring **ITU-T's focus on key issues in standardization** for the business community. I believe ITU needs a vision, a clear set of goals, and a transparent process to determine its actions – all to face the newest technological challenges.

Second: **I will involve new, relevant stakeholders.** Especially those who can both help create universally accepted standards and support the organization. ITU is only as strong as its members, including those from emerging countries and sectors. I will ensure they have a reason to commit and participate.

Third: **I will build solid bridges** by fostering cooperation with other international standards organizations. ITU is in a great position to initiate dialogue. Cooperating with other international standards organizations, science and industry will be crucial to reach our goals as an institution and serve Member States.

To achieve these goals, I can build on my experiences as a freelance lawyer and president of a private business association, as well as my established contacts with industry and international standards bodies.

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How can the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector contribute to progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals?

The digital transformation significantly impacts the achievement of the UN SDGs. We are seeing major shifts in the way our economies work. The transformation affects the environment and societies. Therefore, involving all stakeholders, especially developing and emerging economies, is key in the discussion on how to shape this in a sustainable way.

The relevance of standards and the work of ITU-T will grow in importance. Standards enable free and fair international trade. They encourage innovation and foster trust through world-class, consensus-based specifications.

Through the work of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB), all economies can compete in global markets and participate in international value chains – if existing and new members, partners, and contributors are at the table. As the global community mobilizes for the Decade of Action on the SDGs, this will only become more important.

Tell us about your achievements in leadership and building consensus.

I have taken on various leadership roles in international standards bodies: as German Representative and Head of Delegation to the European Union Committee on Standards in Brussels; as Head of the German National Delegation to the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI); as part of the German National Delegation to the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). For six years, I worked as Communications Director at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.

Since 2016, I have been Director of the Office for National and International Standardization Policy and Patent Policy at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. In this capacity, I have fostered African standardization infrastructure projects and EU-Twinning Projects in Namibia, Azerbaijan and Jordan.

While my roles in international standardization have been diverse, they share one important requirement: being able to listen and understand the needs of partners. This is what I bring to ITU-T as well: the ability to foster a dialogue, build bridges, and act together.

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In my current position, I combine the needs of the public with the needs of the business community – a real public-private partnership that we have valued in my home country Germany for more than 100 years. I have led intercultural teams and am able to work within different cultural contexts. For me, it is essential to provide an outcome-oriented atmosphere where achievements are the focus.

What else would you bring to the table as the next Director of ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Bureau?

As TSB Director, I will bring fresh approaches to take on pressing issues for international standardization. Digital technologies are rapidly changing the way our world works, and international bodies need to adjust accordingly.

I worked as First Secretary in the German Representative Office to the UN in New York, as Co-Chair of the Chinese-German Commission on Standards, and on the US-German Standards Panel. I bring a strong understanding of current trends and issues in international standardization. At the same time, my work fostering emerging standardization infrastructure, particularly in Brazil, Mexico, India and Indonesia, has sharpened my awareness about challenges on a practical level.

As ITU's next TSB Director, I will make sure to apply these qualities to facilitate a strong exchange on current and future key issues. But action follows analysis. Observing the needs of members is important. I will contribute to speeding up processes to align the organization with the necessities of our fast-developing digital age.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

ITU shall remain an organization of highest importance. It has a wealth of expertise and enormous capacities for dealing with cutting-edge topics. Let's strengthen and renew these qualities with fresh ideas and bold approaches.



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