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The International Comparative Legal Guide to:

Telecoms, Media & Internet Laws & Regulations 2019

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Switzerland



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1 Overview

1.1 Please describe the: (a) telecoms, including internet; and (b) audio-visual media distribution sectors in your jurisdiction, in particular by reference to each sector's: (i) annual revenue; and (ii) 3–5 most significant market participants.

Switzerland has very high-performance, high-speed telecommunications infrastructure. The economy as a whole benefits from competition in infrastructure and services.

The *fixed broadband communications market* – including internet and digital TV – involves telecommunications operators as well as cable (CATV) operators.

At the end of 2016, the total operating revenue was CHF 6,497 Mio (Var. 15–16: -1.8%) for services on fixed networks, and CHF 189 Mio (Var. 15–16: +12.4%) for added-value services (including internet access services).

At the end of 2017, DSL/FTTx telecommunications service providers (TSPs) were still way in front of cable TV providers for *internet access*:

- just over 69% of surfers opted for an offering from a *telecoms operator* (2,806,000 connections): Swisscom, as the market leader, held a market share of 49.7%; and the share of all the alternative TSPs was 19.5%, 10.4% of which was held by Sunrise; and
- almost 31% for an offering from a *cable operator* (1,245,500 connections): UPC holds a market share of 18.5%; and the other CATV providers 12.2%.

With almost 46% of the population having broadband access as of the end of June 2017, Switzerland is consolidating its position at the top of the ranking of OECD countries.

In the *mobile market*, at the end of 2016, the total operating revenue for services on mobile networks was CHF 4,367 Mio (Var. 15–16: +4.5%).

At the end of 2017, Swisscom held approximately 58% of the market share, with Sunrise at 25% and Salt at 17%. The percentages include the connections of virtual operators or resellers of services using the networks of Swisscom (M-Budget), Sunrise (Yallo, Lebara, Ortel) and Salt (Coop Mobile).

It should be noted that, in the same period, cable operators had 150,000 mobile customers (of which 115,000 customers are with UPC) and may potentially become serious competitors in this market. At the present time, the market share of CATV operators is just above 1%.

With approximately 11.4 million subscriptions for a total population of 8.48 million inhabitants, the penetration rate of mobile telephony in Switzerland was almost 135% at the end of 2017. This rate is slightly higher than the average for the countries of Europe, which was approximately 130% for the same period.

At the end of 2017, in the *digital TV market* Swisscom held a market share of 36.2%, increasing its share by almost 3.5%, and UPC a market share of 29.6%, losing almost 4% of its share.

The cable operators are continuing to lose customers, with a loss of more than 62,000 TV customers in 2017 – down 2.5%. The market share of all cable operators, at almost 2.4 million customers for digital television, dropped below 60% for the first time. Over the same period, the number of digital television subscribers on the fixed telephony network continued to increase, and the DSL providers are now seriously competing with the cable operators in this market segment.

1.2 List the most important legislation which applies to the: (a) telecoms, including internet; and (b) audio-visual media distribution sectors in your jurisdiction.

(a) Telecoms

The main law governing the transmission of information by means of telecommunications techniques is the Telecommunications Act (TCA), which is currently under partial revision.

The aim of the TCA is to ensure that a range of cost-effective, high quality, and nationally and internationally competitive telecommunications services is available to private individuals and the business community. The TCA shall, in particular: a) ensure that a reliable universal service is provided at affordable prices for the entire population in all parts of the country; b) ensure that telecommunications traffic is free from interference and respects personal and intellectual property rights; c) allow effective competition in the provision of telecommunications services; and d) protect users of telecommunications services from unfair mass advertising and from abuse associated with value-added services.

On the basis of the TCA, several Ordinances have been enacted: Ordinance on Telecommunications Services; Ordinance on Telecommunications Installations; Ordinance on the Addressing Resources of Telecommunications Services; and Ordinance on Frequency Management and Radio Licences.

Further, the Federal Act on Surveillance of Post and Telecommunications (SPTA) and the respective Ordinance apply to communications services.

The only specific legislation pertaining to the internet is the Ordinance on Internet Domains.

(b) Audio-visual media distribution

Audio-visual media distribution is governed by the Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) and its respective Ordinance, which shall be replaced by a new Act on Electronic Media.

Further, general statutes such as the Federal Act on Data Protection, the Unfair Competition Act, the Ordinance on Price Disclosure, the Code of Obligations and the Criminal Code apply to all sectors.

1.3 List the government ministries, regulators, other agencies and major industry self-regulatory bodies which have a role in the regulation of the: (a) telecoms, including internet; and (b) audio-visual media distribution sectors in your jurisdiction.

The Federal Communications Commission (ComCom), an independent commission with decision-making powers, is in charge of the regulation of the telecommunications market and awarding the universal service licence, as well as radio communication licences for the use of the frequency spectrum, of determining access conditions and prices when TSP cannot reach agreement, of the approval of the national numbering plans, and of the regulation of the methods of application of number portability and carrier selection.

The Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) is part of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC), and acts as the supervisory authority in the communications sector. It is responsible for tasks relating to regulation and is the national authority in the areas of telecommunications, broadcasting and post, in particular ensuring the quality of the universal service and the public service.

Disputes between customers and TSPs are reconciled by the Ombudscorn, while the Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television (UBI) assesses complaints concerning radio and television programmes.

1.4 In relation to the: (a) telecoms, including internet; and (b) audio-visual media distribution sectors: (i) have they been liberalised?; and (ii) are they open to foreign investment?

The market for telecommunications services has been liberalised for almost 20 years, with former monopoly situations having been replaced by a system of licences and notification duties. Foreign TSPs are free to enter the Swiss market. Moreover, the development towards an IP-based network offered by new and/or foreign TSPs fuels competition. In general, there are no barriers; however, in the absence of any international obligations to the contrary, the ComCom may prohibit undertakings incorporated under foreign law from providing telecommunications services in Switzerland, unless reciprocal rights are granted.

2 Telecoms

General

2.1 Is your jurisdiction a member of the World Trade Organisation? Has your jurisdiction made commitments under the GATS regarding telecommunications and has your jurisdiction adopted and implemented the telecoms reference paper?

Switzerland joined the WTO on 1 July 1995. Switzerland has

adopted the reference paper on regulatory principles and has made commitments regarding telecommunications under the GATS.

2.2 How is the provision of telecoms (or electronic communications) networks and services regulated?

The TCA regulates the transmission of information by means of telecommunications techniques.

Specific Ordinances contain more detailed regulation on topics such as the use of radio spectrum, internet domain names or telecommunications installations.

The TCA is currently undergoing partial revision, with the main aims being further liberalisation of the use of radio frequencies, increased consumer protection and market access conditions, and the removal of notification duties for TSPs.

2.3 Who are the regulatory and competition law authorities in your jurisdiction? How are their roles differentiated? Are they independent from the government?

The regulatory authority for telecommunications is the ComCom (*cf.* question 1.3).

The competition law authority is the Competition Commission (COMCO), subdivided into the Commission and the Secretariat of the Commission. The Commission monitors competition, has decision power, provides its opinion on federal bills that influence competition, makes recommendations to other authorities, and provides them with expert reports. The Secretariat prepares the Commission's business, conducts investigations and advises governmental offices and undertakings on competition matters. Formally part of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER), the COMCO is independent of the administrative authorities.

In the field of telecommunications, both authorities have concurrent jurisdiction as regards their specific tasks.

2.4 Are decisions of the national regulatory authority able to be appealed? If so, to which court or body, and on what basis?

Decisions of the ComCom can be appealed to the Federal Administrative Tribunal based on, *inter alia*, violation of federal law including the exceeding or abuse of discretionary powers, and the incorrect or incomplete determination of the legally relevant facts of the case.

Decisions of the Administrative Tribunal can be further appealed to the Federal Supreme Court based on, *inter alia*, the violation of federal law and manifestly incorrect determination of the legally relevant facts of the case. Decisions of the Federal Administrative Tribunal regarding licences granted by means of public tender proceedings, and disputes regarding access to facilities and services of providers with a dominant position, cannot be deferred to the Federal Supreme Court.

Licences and Authorisations

2.5 What types of general and individual authorisations are used in your jurisdiction?

No general authorisation is required for the provision of telecommunication services as such. Currently, there is merely

a notification duty which requires all TSPs to notify the OFCOM of the type of services provided, description of interfaces and infrastructure, as well as corporate information. The OFCOM keeps a register of the providers.

The current revision of the TCA shall limit the registration duty to TSPs using radiocommunications frequency spectrum and addressing resources to provide their services.

Basic telecommunication services must be available to the entire Swiss population in all regions. To ensure that these are affordable, reliable, and of good quality, the ComCom grants a licence for providing universal service within a tender process. The universal services have been awarded to Swisscom, the incumbent provider, for a term of five years, beginning from 2018.

Mobile radio frequencies are subject to licences which are allocated by the ComCom (*cf.* question 2.7 and 3.2).

2.6 Please summarise the main requirements of your jurisdiction's general authorisation.

Beyond the notification requirement, *cf.* question 2.5, there is no general authorisation for the provision of telecommunication services in Switzerland.

2.7 In relation to individual authorisations, please identify their subject matter, duration and ability to be transferred or traded. Are there restrictions on the change of control of the licensee?

The TCA provides for a licence requirement to use the radiocommunications frequency spectrum.

The TCA itself does not impose a set duration for licences regarding the use of radio frequencies, but leaves this to the licensing authority. The mobile phone frequencies currently in use are covered by 16-year licences. An auction is planned for 2018/2019, in particular for the allocation of new frequency bands for the introduction of a 5G network.

Licences may be transferred in whole or in part to a third party only with the consent of the licensing authority. The same applies to an economic transfer due to takeover of the licensee.

The current revision of the TCA aims at a paradigm shift on this subject as the frequency spectrum shall, in principle, henceforth not be subject to a licence unless a specific Ordinance of Federal Council provides for the contrary.

Public and Private Works

2.8 Are there specific legal or administrative provisions dealing with access and/or securing or enforcing rights to public and private land in order to install telecommunications infrastructure?

The TCA requires owners of land in public use to allow TSPs to use that land to install and operate lines, provided those installations do not interfere with the public use of the land. The authorisation procedure is simple and rapid. Compensation for the authorisation is limited to an administrative charge covering the costs; additional land use charges are prohibited. Under certain conditions, providers may be granted expropriation rights. As regards passive infrastructure – *cf.* question 2.13.

Access and Interconnection

2.9 How is wholesale interconnection and access mandated? How are wholesale interconnection or access disputes resolved?

The TCA requires providers with a dominant market position to provide access to other providers in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner, at cost-oriented prices. The same applies to universal services providers. The access required by the TCA currently covers interconnection as well as fully unbundled access to the local loop, rebilling for fixed network local loops, leased lines and access to cable ducts, provided these have sufficient capacity.

If the providers in question are unable to negotiate an amicable settlement with regard to access conditions within three months, the dispute may be brought before the ComCom, which decides based on a proposal made by the OFCOM.

Disputes relating to access contracts or decisions are subject to the jurisdiction of the civil courts.

2.10 Which operators are required to publish their standard interconnection contracts and/or prices?

Only providers with a dominant market position, i.e., the incumbent provider Swisscom, are obliged to disclose the conditions and prices for their access services and provide the OFCOM with a copy of their access contracts. There is no publishing obligation; however, the contracts may be accessed by the public unless there is an overriding public or private interest.

2.11 Looking at fixed, mobile and other services, are charges for interconnection (e.g. switched services) and/or network access (e.g. wholesale leased lines) subject to price or cost regulation and, if so, how?

Providers with a market-dominating position are obliged to charge cost-oriented prices for interconnection and access on the basis of the functional equivalent. By contrast to other jurisdictions, access charges are not set by the authorities but rather within proceedings initiated by other providers. Over the past years, charges have been lowered considerably.

2.12 Are any operators subject to: (a) accounting separation; (b) functional separation; and/or (c) legal separation?

Providers are not subject to any obligation regarding accounting separation, functional separation and/or legal separation.

2.13 Describe the regulation applicable to high-speed broadband networks. On what terms are passive infrastructure (ducts and poles), copper networks, cable TV and/or fibre networks required to be made available? Are there any incentives or 'regulatory holidays'?

The TCA is essentially technologically neutral and, accordingly, applies to high-speed broadband networks.

However, only owners of existing copper local loop access infrastructure with a dominant position in the market are obliged

to fully unbundle access to the local loop in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner, at cost-oriented prices (*cf.* question 2.9). Broadcasting of radio and television programme services are explicitly exempted from this obligation.

Regulations on FTTH are currently being discussed within the TCA revision. The bill provides for a delegation of competences to the Federal Council, which may provide for technology-neutral access to the local loop, which can be also virtual. However, this regulation was recently rejected by the National Council in September 2018.

At present, there are no incentives or regulatory holidays in force.

Price and Consumer Regulation

2.14 Are retail price controls imposed on any operator in relation to fixed, mobile, or other services?

In principle, providers are free to determine the prices for fixed, mobile, or other services, including in particular roaming charges, which are relatively high in Switzerland.

Maximum charges apply, however, to certain telephony services provided by the universal services provider Swisscom, as well as value-added services.

With regard to international roaming, the current revision of the TCA shall empower the Federal Council to issue specific regulations to avoid disproportionately high retail tariffs and to take measures to promote competition.

Lastly, the Federal Price Supervisor monitors price developments and prevents or eliminates the abusive increase and retention of prices based upon the Federal Price Supervision Act, and the COMCO takes measures against unlawful restraints of competition where retail prices are affected, based upon the Cartel Act of the COMCO.

2.15 Is the provision of electronic communications services to consumers subject to any special rules (such as universal service) and if so, in what principal respects?

“Basic telecommunication services must be available to the entire Swiss population in all regions. To ensure that these are affordable, reliable, and of good quality, the ComCom grants a licence for providing universal service within a tender process” (*cf.* question 2.5). Providers are essentially free to determine the general terms and conditions applicable to consumers. However, such general terms and conditions need to comply with data protection law and are subject to the limitations under unfair competition law. Further, providers must comply with the principle of secrecy of telecommunications as well as the data retention obligations.

According to the TCA, TSPs must block the access to telephone and internet services for persons only in circumstances where they have provided false data or failed to provide the necessary documentation.

Numbering

2.16 How are telephone numbers and network identifying codes allocated and by whom?

The OFCOM assigns numbering, naming and addressing resources. Technical management of the “.ch” domain is currently provided by SWITCH (the registry). The registration of a domain name

within the “.ch” domain may be requested from registrars who have concluded a contract with SWITCH. SWITCH itself is not allowed to allocate domain names.

Since autumn 2015, the registration of “.swiss” domain names has been possible upon validation of every application to the OFCOM, in accordance with the principles laid out in the Ordinance on Internet Domains.

2.17 Are there any special rules which govern the use of telephone numbers?

The national numbering plans apply. Furthermore, providers must ensure number portability and freedom of choice of providers – *cf.* question 2.18.

2.18 Are there any obligations requiring number portability?

TSPs must ensure number portability and freedom of choice of providers regarding national and international connections. The ComCom fixes the detailed rules for implementation in the light of technical developments and international harmonisation.

In order to speed up number porting, the ComCom has reduced the deadlines for the original TSP to arrange the number porting application for mobile numbers to the new provider within one working day, and for all other phone numbers within two working days at the latest. Further, the original TSP is obliged to agree to the porting even in the event of disputes with the customer.

3 Radio Spectrum

3.1 What authority regulates spectrum use?

The TCA regulates the use of the radiocommunications frequency spectrum and the ComCom grants licences for its use.

3.2 How is the use of radio spectrum authorised in your jurisdiction? What procedures are used to allocate spectrum between candidates – i.e. spectrum auctions, comparative ‘beauty parades’, etc.?

The use of the radio communications frequency spectrum is currently subject to a licence granted by ComCom. Radiocommunication licences shall, as a rule, be granted on the basis of a public invitation to tender if it is intended to provide telecommunications services using the requested frequencies, and there are not enough frequencies available to meet all applicants’ present and future needs. The ComCom determines whether the contract is awarded within a competitive process or an auction.

The application process shall be conducted in accordance with the principles of objectivity, non-discrimination and transparency, and guarantee the confidential character of all information provided by applicants.

The current revision of the TCA aims at a paradigm shift on this subject as the frequency spectrum shall, in principle, henceforth not be subject to a licence unless a specific Ordinance of Federal Council provides for the contrary.

3.3 Can the use of spectrum be made licence-exempt? If so, under what conditions?

In accordance with the TCA, the Federal Council and the OFCOM have provided exceptions for technical means of limited importance in specific Ordinances on frequency management and frequency licences.

The armed forces and civil defence do not require a licence.

3.4 If licence or other authorisation fees are payable for the use of radio frequency spectrum, how are these applied and calculated?

The amount of the fees for the licence shall be calculated on the basis of: the frequency range allocated, the class of frequency and the value of the frequencies; the bandwidth allocated; the territorial scope; and the temporal scope. The Ordinance on Telecommunications Fees provides for different fees depending on the radiocommunication type (directional radio, wireless broadband, satellite transmission, etc.). However, according to the TCA, no licence fees are charged for broadcasting licensed radio or television programme services and the Federal Council may exempt specific institutions and private bodies, i.e., to perform duties of public interest.

In addition to the licence fees, administrative charges and reimbursement of expenses need to be paid to the COMCOM for the grant or amendment of the licence, pursuant to the Ordinance on the Administrative Charges in the Telecommunications Sector.

If the radiocommunication licence is granted by auction (*cf.* question 3.2), the licence fee shall correspond to the amount of the bid, minus administrative charges for the invitation to tender and the granting of the licence.

3.5 What happens to spectrum licences if there is a change of control of the licensee?

The transfer due to change of control is subject to the approval by the licensing authority, *cf.* question 2.7.

3.6 Are spectrum licences able to be assigned, traded or sub-licensed and, if so, on what conditions?

Subject to the approval by the licensing authority, the licence may be transferred. To date, the mere use cannot be traded or shared; however, the revision of the TCA aims at a more flexible regime.

4 Cyber-security, Interception, Encryption and Data Retention

4.1 Describe the legal framework for cybersecurity.

Switzerland does not have a specific regulation on cybersecurity. Provisions of general statutes apply, such as the Swiss Criminal Code, the Federal Act on Data Protection (FADP), the TCA, etc.

On 19 April 2018, the Federal Council adopted the “National Strategy for the Protection of Switzerland against Cyber-risks (NCS)” for the period 2018–2022. The strategy builds on the results of the previous NCS adopted earlier in 2012, and aims at further developing it. The objective is to minimise cyber-risks.

The strategy encompasses new standardisation and regulations objectives, and lays the ground for discussions on minimal standards for cybersecurity and new notification duties for cyber-incidents. A new Information Security Act applying to federal authorities and a competence centre for cybersecurity are currently in discussion.

4.2 Describe the legal framework (including listing relevant legislation) which governs the ability of the state (police, security services, etc.) to obtain access to private communications.

The Federal Act on Surveillance of Post and Telecommunications (SPTA) and the corresponding Ordinances form the basis for the surveillance of private communications by establishing the Post and Telecommunication Surveillance Service (PTSS), an independent service administratively affiliated to the Federal Department of Justice and Police, which conducts inquiries upon request by Swiss enforcement authorities and has the authority to give instructions to TSPs.

The scope of application of the SPTA is limited to surveillance measures ordered and executed: (i) within criminal proceedings; (ii) for the enforcement of international judicial assistance requests; (iii) for the search of missing persons or criminal fugitives; and (iv) for the enforcement of the Federal Intelligence Service Act (ISA).

Requirements and procedures for ordering surveillance measures are set out in (i) the Federal Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) and the Military Criminal Procedure (MCP), (ii) the Federal Act on International Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (IMAC), (iii) the SPTA, and (iv) the Federal Intelligence Service Act (ISA).

The SPTA further provides for a multitude of challenges to providers regarding data retention (*cf.* question 4.6), interfaces in order for the surveillance authorities to access user communications in real time, as well as information of the authorities on new services and products prior to the go-to-market. The SPTA is complemented with provisions on the deployment of GovWare and IMSI-catchers pursuant to the CCP and the MCP.

4.3 Summarise the rules which require market participants to maintain call interception (wire-tap) capabilities. Does this cover: (i) traditional telephone calls; (ii) VoIP calls; (iii) emails; and (iv) any other forms of communications?

According to the SPTA, TSPs shall at any time be able to monitor the telecommunications services they provide if the surveillance is standardised. The surveillance types the TSPs are obliged to perform are set out in the Ordinance on Surveillance of Post and Telecommunications (OSPT), further standardised in the Ordinance on Implementation of the Surveillance of Post and Telecommunications (OI-SPT). These regulations provide detailed rules on traditional telephone calls, VoIP calls, emails, text and instant messenger, and all other forms of electronic communications such as chatting platforms.

If the surveillance is not standardised, TSPs must cooperate with the PTSS according to its instructions, and take all appropriate measures to ensure their implementation.

The PTSS can request TSPs to prove that they are able to implement the standardised surveillance in accordance with applicable law at their own expense, and instruct them to take technical and organisational measures to remedy deficiencies.

4.4 How does the state intercept communications for a particular individual?

As a general rule, enforcement authorities order the surveillance of post and telecommunications and notify the order to the PTSS, which then implements the order. TSPs must cooperate with and provide information to the PTSS, which in turn grants the enforcement authorities access to communications and information. The order needs to be approved by the supervisory authority. Depending on the procedure, the approval needs to be issued before or after the implementation of the order. The approval is of limited duration and needs to be renewed. Information collected without approval cannot be used in a proceeding and has to be destroyed.

Other measures, such as GovWare and IMSI-catchers, are not implemented by the PTSS.

4.5 Describe the rules governing the use of encryption and the circumstances when encryption keys need to be provided to the state.

According to the TCA, TSPs must comply with security requirements. The specific regulations provide for details on encryption.

Based on the SPTA, once a surveillance order has been issued, TSPs have the duty to disclose their encryption keys to the PTSS.

4.6 What data are telecoms or internet infrastructure operators obliged to retain and for how long?

Pursuant to the SPTA, providers are obliged to retain the data provided by the customer at the beginning of the customer relationship, including identification data, date of birth and profession, addressing resources, and services provided. Such data must be retained for the entire duration of the customer relationship as well as for six months after termination. Further, providers are obliged to maintain all peripheral communication data for six months. The OSPT lays down the details.

5 Distribution of Audio-Visual Media

5.1 How is the distribution of audio-visual media regulated in your jurisdiction?

The broadcasting, processing, transmission and reception of radio and television programme services are regulated by the Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) and, unless the RTVA provides to the contrary, by the TCA (*cf.* question 1.2).

The RTVA is technologically neutral, meaning that, in principle, it applies to any type of broadcasting, transmission, etc.

In principle, Swiss broadcasters must register with the OFCOM prior to any transmission. The national public broadcaster SRG SSR, as well as other broadcasters with a performance mandate (with or without fee-splitting), require a licence. This applies in particular to those broadcasters making use of VHF frequencies. In order to prevent media concentration, a broadcasting company may, as a rule, obtain a licence for two TV channels and two radio channels at most.

5.2 Is content regulation (including advertising, as well as editorial) different for content broadcast via traditional distribution platforms as opposed to content delivered over the internet or other platforms? Please describe the main differences.

There are additional rules that apply to content broadcast via television and radio, such as clear separation of advertising and editorial content, split-screen, interactive and digital advertising, ad breaks, limitation/prohibition of advertising for tobacco, alcohol, therapeutic products, political and religious content, etc.

Only licensed broadcasters as well as broadcasters broadcasting abroad are obliged to limit advertising time in line with EU Directives. Special provisions apply to SRG SSR TV programmes, and radio programmes of SRG SSR are not permitted to broadcast advertising.

5.3 Describe the different types of licences for the distribution of audio-visual media and their key obligations.

The SRG SSR holds a licence from the Federal Council and has a constitutional programme service mandate, and must therefore fulfil certain obligations regarding quality, content and diversity of its programmes detailed in the licence and in legislation. Further, there are regional licensed broadcasters with a performance mandate. Finally, broadcasters without a performance mandate must only notify the OFCOM and have, in comparison, more limited obligations.

5.4 Are licences assignable? If not, what rules apply? Are there restrictions on change of control of the licensee?

Licences may be assigned upon prior approval by the DETEC. The same applies in the event that 20% of the share capital changes ownership. If the DETEC deems that the conditions for the licence may no longer be fulfilled after the assignment or change of control, the DETEC will not grant approval.

6 Internet Infrastructure

6.1 How have the courts interpreted and applied any defences (e.g. 'mere conduit' or 'common carrier') available to protect telecommunications operators and/or internet service providers from liability for content carried over their networks?

General principles of accessory liability apply, and the jurisprudence has not established clear requirements on accessory liability for providers yet.

To date, TSPs have not been held liable for any content carried over their networks.

In a leading case, which has been widely criticised, the Federal Supreme Court decided that a publisher of a newspaper had to remove illegal content uploaded by a third party to the blog hosted by the publisher, stating that the publisher was accessorially liable without even being aware of the content (Decision of the Swiss Federal Supreme Court 5A_792/2011).

6.2 Are telecommunications operators and/or internet service providers under any obligations (i.e. to provide information, inform customers, disconnect customers) to assist content owners whose rights may be infringed by means of file-sharing or other activities?

There are no statutory provisions obliging internet service providers (ISPs) to provide information, to inform customers, etc.

The self-regulatory “Code of Conduct Hosting” of the Swiss Internet Industry Association (simsa) contains “notice and notice” and “notice and take down” procedures.

6.3 Are there any ‘net neutrality’ requirements? Are telecommunications operators and/or internet service providers able to differentially charge and/or block different types of traffic over their networks?

The TCA does not guarantee net neutrality, but such a statutory provision is currently being discussed within the TCA revision and was accepted by the National Council in September 2018.

So far, the main network operators have concluded a “Code of Conduct on net neutrality” and established a conciliation board for disputes on net neutrality.



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6.4 Are telecommunications operators and/or internet service providers under any obligations to block access to certain sites or content? Are consumer VPN services regulated or blocked?

There are no statutory provisions in force obliging ISPs to block access to certain sites or remove content, unless they are themselves held liable.

Currently, the Swiss Coordination Unit for Cybercrime Control at the Federal Office of Police keeps a list of illegal content that is blocked by ISPs on a voluntary basis. New obligations for TSPs to block access to internet offers containing prohibited pornography are discussed within the current revision of the TCA.

With the entry into force of the new Federal Act on Gambling (Gambling Act) in the near future, statutory provisions will oblige TSPs to block access to online gambling offers mentioned on a list provided by the Federal Gaming Board and Swiss Lottery and Betting Board.

Within the revision of the Copyright Act, a “stay down” obligation for hosting providers as regards copyright-infringing content is currently being discussed.

Consumer VPN services as such are neither regulated nor blocked.



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Arioli Law provides legal expertise with a straightforward, hands-on approach. Martina Arioli established her law firm Arioli Law in 2013 in Zurich, after having worked for one of Switzerland’s leading law firms as well as for a major Swiss bank and a major Swiss insurance company. Martina Arioli combines in-depth knowledge on complex contractual matters in outsourcing, information technology and telecoms projects with the experience of implementing such global projects as an in-house lawyer. Further, she provides comprehensive advice to companies in the IT industry on software development, licensing, technology-related transactions, IP protection, data protection and compliance as well as employment law. She also regularly advises clients in the entertainment industry, mainly film and music. For almost a decade, she has chaired a prestigious annual conference on data protection in Switzerland.

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