



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS & ENERGY

Sectoral Committee

Weekly Update
05.03.10

Contents



- **Telecoms: consultation on future universal service in digital eraPg 2**

- **EU assembly wants affordable broadband access for every home.....Pg 3**



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

Telecoms: consultation on future universal service in digital era

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on what is the best approach to ensure that basic telecoms services are available for all EU citizens. Current EU rules on universal service obligations for telecoms date from 2002 and guarantee that Europeans have access to public telephone networks and to services like basic internet access. The consultation launched today aims to see if these rules and definitions on universal service need to be updated for the digital age, and in particular if they should be extended to cover broadband access. Reactions from consumers, industry stakeholders, and policy experts will help the Commission decide if it needs to present new legislative proposals on universal service obligations for telecoms by end of 2010.

The Commission is seeking views on the following key areas:

- **Basic concept of universal service:** The current concept of universal service was designed for traditional voice-based telecoms services, but is this approach still valid in today's dynamic digital environment? Which policies should be used to ensure that consumers in remote and rural areas or those on a low income can access and use basic telecoms services?
- **Broadband:** Wide broadband coverage is crucial to foster growth and jobs in Europe, but 23% of people in rural areas do not have access to fixed broadband networks. Should universal service principles help to reach the EU's goal of 'broadband for all', or would competition on the open telecoms market or other policy options be more effective?
- **National flexibility and a coordinated EU approach:** The state of development of telecoms markets, availability of broadband, take-up by consumers, and government responses to the so-called 'digital divide' (i.e. the gap between those sections of the population that have access to internet and other digital technologies and those that do not) can vary considerably from country to country. What is the right balance between a coordinated EU-wide response and the need for national flexibility?
- **Financing:** How should universal service be financed in the future? Should there be a financial contribution from the telecoms sector to ensure universal broadband coverage, or should the public purse intervene since other sectors of the economy and society as a whole also feel the benefits?

The Commission will also organise a public workshop on 30 March 2010 in Brussels so that consumers, industry stakeholders, policy experts and other interested parties can exchange their views. The consultation closes on 7 May 2010 and the Commission will report on the results in a Communication, which it may follow with legislative proposals.

The Commission's public consultation document, including information on the public hearing, can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/comm/library/public_consult/index_en.htm



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

[More news...](#)

04.03.2010 - EU assembly wants affordable broadband access for every home

High-speed internet is a basic good that must be available to everyone, Europe's local and regional politicians said today in support of the 'Europe 2020' goal of bringing broadband access to every home by 2013. Where markets fail to deliver this target, the public sector must be allowed to fill in the gap, argues Jean-François Istasse (BE/PES), member of the Parliament of the Belgian Communauté française and author of a Committee of the Regions report on the issue.

Speaking today after local and regional politicians from across Europe adopted his [draft opinion on the 'digital dividend' and the future internet](#) in the Committee of the Regions' Commission for education, youth, culture and research (EDUC), Istasse commented:

"The internet has become a basic infrastructure, essential for everyday life and business. Still, many Europeans don't have access to broadband services at a reasonable price. This stifles both the quality of life and the chances for a swift economic recovery in these areas. The European Commission's 'Europe 2020' blueprint recognises this and aims to provide full broadband coverage by 2013. But we cannot rely on markets alone to deliver high-speed internet to rural areas, mountainous regions or islands. We therefore call on the European Commission to develop policies that acknowledge market failure and facilitate public initiatives to develop open networks in these areas."

Universal broadband access for all Europeans has also become a more realistic vision due to recent technical developments. The rapporteur shares the European Commission's view that the ongoing switchover from analogue to digital television is a unique window of opportunity. The radio frequency spectrum freed by this switchover could also be used to supply wireless high-speed internet in remote areas. "This can increase the accessibility and quality of online services provided by local and regional authorities, and make it easier for local companies to market their products across Europe", Istasse added.

As these wireless internet services will require more antennas than are used for TV broadcasting, Istasse also points out that their potential impact on town planning and the environment has to be taken into account: "In the EU it is usually local and regional authorities that are responsible for such matters, and the installation of antennas and masts can be a very sensitive issue for local communities. We therefore need to listen to the local level and strike



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

the right balance between rolling out new networks and protecting the interests of our citizens", Istasse concluded.

Find the full article click here:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/DetailTemplate.aspx?view=detail&id=88ae3bd7-b8fc-4616-bfbf-1b8b624bb38b>