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Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

2006/2273(INI)

26.3.2007

OPINION

of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

on Building a European Policy on Broadband
(2006/2273(INI))

Draftsman: Malcolm Harbour

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection calls on the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Agrees that the deployment of broadband networks offering reliable transmission at competitive bandwidth is crucial for business growth, societal development and the enhancement of public services;

2. Calls on the Commission, in its forthcoming green paper, to examine the availability of Internet services at reasonable and affordable rates throughout the EU to all citizens, including those on a low income, rural and high-cost areas, and whether there is a need to modify the existing universal service requirements; also expects the green paper to address consumer concerns of secure and safe broadband use;

3. Underlines the need for updated and comprehensive statistics, especially for the newer Member States, so that future reports can give more focus to their problems;

4. Notes that new wireless platforms are well suited to ensure broadband access in rural areas. Underlines the importance of technology-neutrality in spectrum allocation; recalls that the Commission has envisaged a more active spectrum policy[1], and that this has also been supported by Parliament in its Resolution of 14 February 2007 "Towards a European policy on the radio spectrum"[2];

5. Endorses the importance of ensuring competitive market conditions, and the need for all Member States to transpose and implement the regulatory framework for electronic communication, and to ensure effective, independent and properly resourced regulators;

6. Notes that the Community strategic guidelines for economic, social and territorial cohesion for 2007-2013 make it a priority to ensure the availability of ICT infrastructure where the market is unable to provide it at a reasonable cost and in sufficient quantity to accommodate the services required;

7. Notes, however, that local authorities in rural areas are often faced with the problem that, in the absence of sufficient demand, it is not possible to find private providers of broadband Internet connections; stresses that, in such cases, a technology-neutral and supplier-neutral public intervention may be justified, in order to prevent under-supplied local authorities being economically disadvantaged;

8. Notes that public authorities have an important role to play in stimulating broadband network roll-out, and that they should consider measures to encourage demand, and investment in fixed infrastructure; calls for a clear framework for infrastructure investment that should not distort markets nor be operated on unfair terms when compared to private enterprises; commends the Commission for having clarified the State aid rules

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[1] Cf. COM(2005)0400 A market-based approach to spectrum management in the European Union as well as COM(2005)0411 A forward looking radio spectrum policy for the European Union. Second Annual Report.
[2] *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2007)0041.

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as regards participation by public authorities in broadband development programmes;

9. Notes that in bridging the digital divide, a basic structure, such as the availability of computers in households and in public institutions, must be promoted; calls for the funding of public areas with multimedia facilities where citizens are able to attend collective learning workshops with free access to the use of equipment;

10. Highlights the scope for public authorities to exploit pre-commercial procurement to stimulate innovative service delivery across broadband networks; notes that they can also co-ordinate demand across communities and service providers to ensure the critical mass needed to underpin new network investments; the Commission is encouraged to promote awareness and use of these tools;

11. Points out that, in order to accelerate broadband roll-out in rural areas, no undue restrictions should be placed upon voluntary infrastructure network-sharing by network operators; emphasises that such arrangements between operators can be a powerful tool in regions where no infrastructure capable of providing broadband services exists, and where there is insufficient demand to support multiple networks;

12. Encourages Member States to produce broadband infrastructure mapping in order to more accurately indicate the coverage of broadband service.

PROCEDURE

Title	Building a European Policy on Broadband
Procedure number	2006/2273(INI)
Committee responsible	ITRE
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	IMCO 29.11.2006
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary	
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Malcolm Harbour 19.12.2006
Previous drafts(wo)man	
Discussed in committee	25.1.2007 28.2.2007 22.3.2007
Date adopted	22.3.2007
Result of final vote	+: 37 −: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Nedzhmi Ali, Adam Bielan, Georgi Bliznashki, Godfrey Bloom, Charlotte Cederschiöld, Corina Creţu, Mia De Vits, Rosa Díez González, Martin Dimitrov, Evelyne Gebhardt, Małgorzata Handzlik, Malcolm Harbour, Anna Hedh, Pierre Jonckheer, Alexander Lambsdorff, Arlene McCarthy, Toine Manders, Bill Newton Dunn, Zita Pleštinská, Karin Riis-Jørgensen, Zuzana Roithová, Heide Rühle, Leopold Józef Rutowicz, Christel Schaldemose, Andreas Schwab, Alexander Stubb, Marianne Thyssen, Jacques Toubon, Bernadette Vergnaud, Barbara Weiler,
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Simon Coveney, Jean-Claude Fruteau, Othmar Karas, Manuel Medina Ortega, Joseph Muscat, Gary Titley, Søren Bo Søndergaard.
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	
Comments (available in one language only)	...