



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

2010/2304(INI)

13.4.2011

OPINION

of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

on European Broadband: investing in digitally driven growth
(2010/2304(INI))

Rapporteur: 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. Notes that all Member States have a national broadband strategy, but only a few have fully-fledged operational plans which include the necessary set targets required to realise in full the flagship initiative for a Digital Agenda for Europe as laid out in the Europe 2020 strategy;
2. Calls on the Member States to open up network competition fully, in accordance with the new telecoms framework rules; calls on national regulators to use their powers to avoid both subsidies which distort the market and the emergence and abuse of dominant market positions, and where appropriate, to follow public procurement rules to ensure fair competition;
3. Highlights the importance of competitive markets in achieving affordable broadband, and emphasises the need for swift implementation and full enforcement by Member States and national regulatory authorities (NRAs) of the revised EU telecoms framework and the Recommendation on next generation access (NGA) networks;
4. Stresses that broadband services are essential for the competitiveness of the economy and are a prerequisite if all regions and social groups are to participate in digital life in the EU;
5. Considers that the investment risks involved in rolling out new networks can be reduced by measures to drive demand, in particular in the areas of e-procurement, e-commerce, e-governance, e-health services, interactive e-education, and low-carbon interactive energy-saving devices;
6. Highlights the importance of public pre-commercial procurement of R&D-based solutions for the aforementioned sectors as a means to stimulate a virtuous cycle of technological development and demand for high-speed broadband services;
7. Notes that simplification and streamlining of the subsidy procedure would help to speed up the introduction of broadband technology; calls on the Commission to clarify State aid rules and to ensure that State aid is targeted at measures that stimulate or consolidate demand;
8. Calls for specific measures to be taken to ensure that SMEs can fully enjoy the potential of broadband in the fields of e-commerce and e-procurement; calls on the Commission to exchange best practices and to consider taking on board a specific programme for SMEs and broadband connectivity as part of its Digital Agenda flagship initiative;
9. Calls on Member States to promote and extend high-speed open-access connectivity to important public infrastructure (schools, hospitals and other public institutions)

located in remote areas, as a means of improving public service and anchoring high-speed connectivity in remote regions, thereby decreasing investment costs for local private distribution;

10. Stresses that, in order to optimise its impact and its benefits to society, broadband deployment should be coupled with demand-awareness information and educational programmes;
11. Notes the difficulty in meeting the Europe 2020 broadband targets, given consumer, business and public-sector financial resources; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure the use of infrastructure by third parties, ensure non-discrimination, promote available technologies and prevent measures placing unfair burdens on consumers and business, particularly as regards universal obligations; considers that public-private partnerships and public investment, including from the structural funds, should be used where necessary to deploy broadband and enhance access to high-speed internet;
12. Calls on Member States, the Commission and the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), in consultation with the relevant public authorities, to facilitate public-private partnerships and deploy other European funding instruments, including ERDF, EAFRD and EBRD funds; welcomes the Commission's plans to add European Investment Bank loans with low interest rates to the list of subsidy instruments;
13. Maintains that the strong demand for connectivity, which simultaneously boosts the profile of the EU online economy, contributes to EU network readiness and responds to the societal changes taking place within the single market, should be backed by the appropriate funds and solid competition infrastructure needed for realisation of the European Broadband project;
14. Acknowledges the slow absorption of monies from the structural funds for broadband infrastructure investment, and the need for guidance on the use of these funding instruments; calls for a thorough analysis of such instruments in order to identify and remove bottlenecks that are deterring Member States and regions from using them;
15. Believes that extending broadband access to rural and remote areas, where market incentives are lower, plays an important role in geographic and social cohesion, making territories more attractive and companies more competitive; considers that public support should prioritise the roll-out of broadband infrastructure to such areas;
16. Requests the Commission and BEREC to collect and collate annually data on broadband (speed and quality) specifications and the choice available to consumers and business in different Member States, as well as the progress towards implementation of the EU telecoms framework and the Recommendation on NGA;
17. Notes that new fibre-optics networks offer consumers high-quality access at consistently higher speeds than existing technology; believes that it would be expedient to prioritise the development of fibre-optics-based broadband in areas where it represents the most economic and sustainable solution in the long term; asks

BEREC to ensure that typical broadband speeds experienced by consumers are advertised fairly in the interests of transparency on the benefits of new technology for upload and download; calls on NRAs to take measures against providers that do not comply with BEREC recommendations;

18. Notes the importance of an ambitious, forward-looking multi-annual radio spectrum policy programme in creating high-speed broadband access across Europe, delivering on the Europe 2020 goals and ensuring that Europe is a world leader in innovation and high-tech industrial development;
19. Calls for a technology-neutral approach combining fixed, wireless, satellite and spectrum technologies; calls for effective transposition of the telecoms framework, including its net neutrality provisions, in order to ensure that the roll-out of broadband does not restrict innovation;
20. Calls on the Commission to coordinate best practices among the Member States in the field of publicly accessible, free, high-speed WiFi networks in public transport;
21. Notes that the next generation of mobile telephone technology can also play a significant role in opening up broadband services, particularly to remote geographical areas; considers that, in the forthcoming allocation of new spectrum, governments and telecom regulators could link the release of spectrum to enhanced coverage obligations for mobile phone operators;
22. Underlines the need for sustained research investment within the EU in both fixed and mobile future communication technologies; calls on the Commission to continue to develop joint technology initiatives in these areas, involving universities, research institutes, device manufacturers and service and content providers; considers that these platforms provide the optimum means of developing and exploiting new technology and will give the EU a significant competitive advantage.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	13.4.2011
Result of final vote	+: 37 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Pablo Arias Echeverría, Adam Bielan, Lara Comi, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, António Fernando Correia De Campos, Jürgen Creutzmann, Christian Engström, Evelyne Gebhardt, Louis Grech, Małgorzata Handzlik, Iliana Ivanova, Philippe Juvin, Sandra Kalniete, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Edvard Kožušník, Kurt Lechner, Toine Manders, Mitro Repo, Robert Rochefort, Zuzana Roithová, Heide Rühle, Matteo Salvini, Christel Schaldemose, Andreas Schwab, Eva-Britt Svensson, Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Emilie Turunen, Bernadette Vergnaud, Barbara Weiler
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Ashley Fox, María Irigoyen Pérez, Constance Le Grip, Konstantinos Poupakis, Sylvana Rapti, Olle Schmidt, Marc Tarabella