Internet connectivity for growth, competitiveness and cohesion: European gigabit society and 5G

2016/2305(INI) - 05/05/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy adopted an own-initiative report by Micha? BONI (EPP, PL) on internet connectivity for growth, competitiveness and cohesion: European gigabit society and 5G.

Recognising that 5G will be a key building block of the gigabit society, Members welcomed the Commissions action plan aimed at making the EU a world leader in the deployment of standardised 5G networks from 2020 to 2025.

5G vision: Members stressed the importance of adequate coordination among the Member States, so as to prevent the same kinds of delays in the rollout of 5G that were experienced with 4G. They emphasised the importance of an ambitious timeline for spectrum allocation within the Union if Europe is to be in the lead regarding the development of 5G technology.

Certain conditions need to be fulfilled in order to enable the development of 5G infrastructure:

- private investments should be supported by an infrastructure-oriented policy and regulatory environment tailored to predictability and certainty and aimed at promoting competition to the benefit of the end users;
- all sectors - academia, research institutions, the private sector and the public sector on research and development should be involved in the process;
- the deployment of fibre backhaul infrastructure, competition for driving investment and high-quality end user experiences should be prioritised;
- a maximum number of EU citizens should be able to benefit from gigabit society connectivity, including those living in remote areas;
- a coherent European spectrum strategy, including coordinated national roadmaps and timetables, is needed in order to ensure a smooth transition period towards 5G in all Member States;
- spectrum allocation should be harmonised in order to ensure the consistency of decisions and concerted EU-wide efforts should be made to manage the accessibility of 700 MHz and frequencies ranging from 1GHz to 100 GHz in the long term;
- all sector players should benefit from a predictable level playing field that drives competition and should enjoy the flexibility to design their own networks.

Enabling gigabit society benefits: the report underlined that 5G and 5G applications will reinvent business models by providing very high speed connectivity, which will unlock innovation in all sectors, not least transport, energy, finance and health. The deployment of 5G technologies in Europe is expected to have benefits amounting to EUR 141.8 billion annually by 2025.

Members stressed the following:

- any decision made in the rollout of 5G technologies should always remain oriented towards the ultimate purpose of offering end users affordable, trustworthy and high-quality services;
- fair competition and a level playing field for market participants are key necessities for the deployment of the gigabit society by market participants; the principle of same services, same risk, same rules should apply in this respect;
- a competitive legislative framework and initiatives are required, which encourage investments in infrastructure, particularly in order to tackle the digital divide between urban and rural areas.

Policy approach: Members believed that the best path towards the gigabit society lies in a future-proof, pro-competitive and technology-neutral approach supported by a broad range of investment models such as public-private or co-investments.

All decisions related to spectrum allocation and 5G deployment, must be formulated based on future needs and how the market is expected to develop over the next 10-15 years; a successful 5G deployment can only be achieved through far-sighted European legislation and policy coordination.

The Commission should:

- ensure, long-term financing for the 5G Action Plan and the network modernisation at the appropriate level within the horizon of the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2020-2027;
- take the lead in promoting intersectoral, cross-lingual 5G and cross-border interoperability and supporting privacy-friendly, reliable, secure services;
- consider setting a concrete and appealing target as a framework for private sector experimentation with 5G technologies and products;
- detail its action plans to facilitate the participation of SMEs and start-ups in experimentation with 5G technologies and to ensure them access to the 5G Participatory Broadband Platform.

For their part, Member States should:

- implement the 5G Action Plan fully through coherent, inclusive and timely action in regions and cities;
- implement rapidly the provisions in Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union.

The report calls for:

- stepping up efforts on standardisation with a view to ensuring that Europe plays a leading role in setting technology standards allowing for the deployment of 5G networks and services;
- adopting effective measures to fight piracy and a comprehensive approach to improve the enforcement of intellectual property rights to

ensure easy routes to legal content for consumers;

- encouraging the development of integrated solutions and tests followed by cross-industry trials of large-scale pilots in response to demand for services in the gigabit society;
- adopting clear, common EU rules in order to preserve affordability and consumer choice.

Members supported EU-level initiatives to ensure greater spectrum coordination between Member States and long-term licence durations. They also called on the EU to coordinate efforts within the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with a view to ensuring coherent EU policy.