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Common approach to the use of the spectrum released by the digital switchover

P6_TA(2008)0451

European Parliament resolution of 24 September 2008 on reaping the full benefits of the digital dividend in Europe: a common approach to the use of the spectrum released by the digital switchover (2008/2099(INI))

(2010/C 8 E/11)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission Communication of 13 November 2007 entitled Reaping the full benefits of the digital dividend in Europe: A common approach to the use of the spectrum released by the digital switchover (COM(2007)0700) (Commission Communication on a common approach to the use of spectrum),
 - having regard to its resolution of 14 February 2007 entitled Towards a European policy on the radio spectrum ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 29 September 2005 entitled EU spectrum policy priorities for the digital switchover in the context of the upcoming ITU Regional Radiocommunication Conference 2006 (RRC-06) (COM(2005)0461),
 - having regard to the opinion of the Radio Spectrum Policy Group of 14 February 2007 entitled EU Spectrum Policy Implications of the Digital Dividend,
 - having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2005 on accelerating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the opinions of the Committee on Culture and Education, the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (A6-0305/2008),
- A. whereas the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial television by the end of 2012 will, as a result of the superior transmission efficiency of digital technology, free up a significant amount of spectrum in the European Union, thus offering the possibility of reallocating spectrum and presenting new opportunities for market growth and for the expansion of quality consumer services and choice,
- B. whereas the benefits of the use of radio spectrum will be maximised through coordinated action at EU level in order to ensure optimal use in terms of efficiency,
- C. whereas radio spectrum is key to the provision of a wide range of services and to the development of technology-driven markets whose value is estimated at 2,2 % of the EU's GDP, and is therefore a key factor for the growth, productivity and development of EU industry in accordance with the Lisbon Strategy,
- D. whereas radio spectrum is both a scarce natural resource and a public good, and its efficient use is critical in ensuring access to spectrum by the various interested parties that want to offer connected services,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 287 E, 29.11.2007, p. 364.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 280 E, 18.11.2006, p. 115.

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- E. whereas a large part of the spectrum is currently used for military purposes under analogue technology and therefore the large increase in the total amount of spectrum in public will also include this part after the digital switchover,
- F. whereas the Member States do not have a common timetable for the digital switchover; whereas in many Member States plans for the digital switchover are at an advanced stage, while in a few others the switchover has already taken place,
- G. whereas the Commission Communication on a common approach to the use of the spectrum is an integral part of the package on electronic communications adopted by the Commission in November 2007 concerning the reform of the regulatory framework for electronic communications,
- H. whereas the (re-)allocation of broadcast frequencies to digital broadcasters is currently under way in many Member States, with the consequence that those frequencies are being allocated and thereby locked away for many years,
- I. whereas technological neutrality is key to the promotion of interoperability and essential to a more flexible and transparent digital switchover policy which takes into account the public interest,
- J. whereas the Council has called on the Member States to complete, as far as possible, the digital switchover before 2012,
- K. whereas all the Member States have published their proposals concerning the digital switchover,
1. Recognises the importance of the i2010 initiative as part of the renewed Lisbon Strategy, and emphasises the importance of efficient access to and use of spectrum in achieving the Lisbon goals; stresses, in this context, the need for access to broadband services in order to overcome the digital divide;
 2. Emphasises the need for digital switchover which, together with the development of new information and communication technologies and the digital dividend, will help to bridge the digital divide and contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon goals;
 3. Notes the divergence in national regimes relating to spectrum allocation and exploitation; notes that these differences may represent obstacles to the achievement of an effectively functioning internal market;
 4. Stresses that the size of the digital dividend will vary from one Member State to another, owing to national circumstances and reflecting national media and audiovisual policies;
 5. Recognises that the increased spectrum efficiency of digital terrestrial television should allow for around 100 MHz of digital dividend to be re-allocated to mobile broadband and other services (such as public safety services, radio-frequency identification and road safety applications) whilst ensuring that broadcasting services can continue to flourish;
 6. Notes that most Member States today are lagging behind other developed countries regarding investment in new generation communication infrastructures, and stresses that achieving leadership in broadband and Internet development is crucial to the competitiveness and cohesion of the European Union in the international arena, especially as regards the development of interactive digital platforms and the provision of new services such as e-trade, e-health, e-learning and e-government services; emphasises that greater investment should be made at national and EU level to encourage the take-up of innovative products and services; stresses that efforts to secure access to broadband services should not be focused on the digital dividend alone;

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7. Is convinced that new multi-play packages, containing innovative technologies and services, may soon be offered due to increased technological convergence, and at the same time observes that the emergence of those offers depends crucially on the availability of valuable spectrum as well as of new interactive technologies enabling seamless interoperability, connectivity and coverage, such as mobile multimedia technologies and broadband wireless access technologies;
8. Notes that technological convergence is a reality, offering traditional services new means and opportunities; emphasises that access to the parts of the spectrum that have previously been reserved for broadcasting can enable the emergence of new services provided that the spectrum is managed as efficiently and effectively as possible in order to avoid interference with the delivery of high-quality digital broadcasting programmes;
9. Calls for close cooperation among Member States to achieve an efficient, open and competitive electronic communications internal market which will allow the deployment of new network technologies;
10. Stresses the strategic importance of an environment in the European Union where room for innovation, new technologies, new services and new entrants is guaranteed in order to enhance European competitiveness and cohesion; emphasises that it is crucial to give end-users freedom of choice as regards products and services in order to achieve the dynamic development of markets and technologies in the European Union;
11. Emphasises that the digital dividend provides the European Union with unique opportunities to develop new services such as mobile television and wireless Internet access and to remain a world leader in mobile multimedia technologies whilst bridging the digital divide, providing new opportunities for citizens, services, media and cultural diversity throughout the European Union;
12. Calls on the Member States, whilst fully respecting their sovereignty in this regard, to analyse the impact of the digital switchover on the spectrum used in the past for military purposes, and, if appropriate, to reallocate part of that specific digital dividend to new civilian applications;
13. Acknowledges that coordination at EU level would encourage development, boost the digital economy and allow all citizens affordable and equal access to the information society;
14. Urges the Member States to release their digital dividends as quickly as possible, allowing citizens of the Union to benefit from the deployment of new, innovative and competitive services; emphasises that, for this purpose, the active cooperation between Member States to overcome obstacles existing at national level for the efficient (re)allocation of the digital dividend is required;
15. Stresses that broadcasters are essential actors in the defence of pluralistic and democratic principles and strongly believes that the opportunities offered by the digital dividend will enable public and private broadcasters to provide a much larger number of programmes serving general interest objectives — set out in national legislation — such as the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity;
16. Believes that the digital dividend should provide an opportunity for broadcasters to develop and expand their services and at the same time to take into account other potential social, cultural and economic applications, such as new and open broadband technologies and access services designed to overcome the digital divide, while not allowing interoperability barriers;
17. Underlines the potential benefits of a coordinated approach to the usage of spectrum in the European Union in terms of economies of scale, the development of interoperable wireless services, and avoiding fragmentation which leads to a suboptimal use of this scarce resource; considers that, while closer coordination and greater flexibility are necessary for efficient exploitation of spectrum, the Commission and the Member States need to strike an appropriate balance between flexibility and the degree of harmonisation, with a view to deriving maximum benefit from the digital dividend;

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18. Observes that efficient allocation of the digital dividend may be achieved without hampering any of the players that currently hold spectrum licences in the ultra-high frequency (UHF) band, and that the continuation and expansion of current broadcasting services can be effectively achieved, at the same time ensuring that new mobile multimedia and broadband wireless access technologies are allocated substantial spectrum resources in the UHF band to bring new interactive services to citizens of the Union;
19. Considers that where auctions are used to allocate frequencies, Member States should adopt a common approach as regards the conditions and methods of auction and the allocation of the generated resources; calls on the Commission to present guidelines along these lines;
20. Stresses that the main guiding principle in the allocation of the digital dividend should be to serve the general interest by ensuring the best social, cultural and economic value in terms of an enhanced and geographically wider offer of services and digital content to citizens, and not only to maximise public revenues, while also protecting the rights of current users of audiovisual media services and reflecting cultural and linguistic diversity;
21. Emphasises that the digital dividend provides a unique opportunity for the European Union to develop its role as a world leader in mobile multimedia technologies and at the same time to bridge the digital divide with an increased flow of information, knowledge and services connecting all citizens of the Union with each other and providing new opportunities for media, culture and diversity in all areas of the territory of the European Union;
22. Emphasises that a way in which the digital dividend could help to achieve the Lisbon goals is by increasing the availability of broadband access services to citizens and economic players throughout the European Union, addressing the digital divide by providing benefits in underprivileged, remote or rural areas and ensuring universal coverage in the Member States;
23. Deplores the uneven access of citizens of the Union to digital services, particularly in broadcasting; notes that rural and peripheral regions are especially disadvantaged (in terms of promptness, choice and quality) with regard to the roll-out of digital services; urges Member States and regional authorities to do everything in their power to ensure that the digital switchover is conducted quickly and fairly for all their citizens;
24. Stresses that the digital divide is not just a rural issue; highlights the difficulty in fitting some older high-rise buildings with the infrastructure for new networks; emphasises the benefit that spectrum can play in overcoming the digital divide in both urban and rural areas;
25. Emphasises the contribution that the digital dividend can make to the provision of enhanced interoperable social services, such as e-government, e-health, e-vocational training and e-education to citizens, in particular those living in less favoured or isolated areas, such as rural and less developed areas and islands;
26. Urges the Member States to step up measures to enable disabled and elderly users and those with special social needs to make the most of the benefits provided by the digital dividend;
27. Confirms the societal value of public safety services and the need to include support for their operational requirements in the spectrum arrangements arising from the reorganisation of the UHF band resulting from the switch-off of analogue services;
28. Emphasises that the main priority of the policy on reaping the full benefits of the digital dividend in Europe is to ensure that consumers enjoy a very broad range of high quality services, while their rights are fully respected, taking account of the need to make effective use of the spectrum released by the digital switchover;

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29. Stresses that the digital dividend provides new opportunities for audiovisual and media policy objectives; is therefore convinced that decisions on digital dividend management should promote and protect general interest objectives linked to audiovisual and media policies such as freedom of expression, media pluralism, cultural and linguistic diversity and the rights of minors;
30. Encourages Member States to recognise the social, cultural and economic value of allowing unlicensed users access to the dividend, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises and the not-for-profit sector, and thus increasing the efficiency of spectrum use by concentrating such unlicensed uses in the currently unused frequencies (white spaces);
31. Calls for a step-by-step approach in this field; is of the opinion that effects for smaller networks — especially local wireless networks — for which no licence requirements currently apply must be taken into account and that universal access to broadband, especially in rural areas, should be promoted;
32. Calls on Member States to support enhanced cooperation measures between spectrum management authorities to consider areas where unlicensed white space spectrum allocation would allow new technologies and services to emerge so as to foster innovation;
33. Encourages Member States to consider, in the context of allocating white space, the need for unlicensed open access to spectrum for non-commercial and educational service providers and local communities with a public service mission;
34. Stresses that one of the key elements when seeking to provide access to the digital dividend to unlicensed users is the need to take account of the needs of social groups threatened with exclusion, particularly disabled and elderly users and users with special social needs;
35. Recognises the benefit of new technologies, such as WiFi and Bluetooth, that have emerged in the unlicensed 2,4 GHz band; recognises that particular frequencies are best suited to particular services; believes that allocating a small amount of unlicensed spectrum in other lower frequencies could encourage yet more innovation in new services;
36. Emphasises, therefore, that frequencies should be assigned in a transparent manner, taking into account all the potential uses for the new spectrum and their benefits to society;
37. Encourages the Member States to assess in detail the social and economic value of any spectrum freed up in the years to come by the switchover from analogue to digital broadcast;
38. Recognises the importance of the ITU Geneva-06 Agreement (Regional Radio Communication Conference 2006) and of the national frequency allocation plans as well as of the decisions of the World Radio Communication Conference 2007 (WRC-07) to the reorganisation of the UHF band;
39. Calls on the Member States to develop, following a common methodology, national digital dividend strategies by the end of 2009; urges the Commission to assist Member States in the development of their national digital dividend strategies and to promote best practice at EU level;
40. Emphasises that the immediacy of switchover in some Member States and the differences in national switchover plans require a response at Community level that cannot await the entry into force of the amending directives;
41. Acknowledges the right of Member States to determine their use of the digital dividend, but also affirms that a coordinated approach at Community level greatly enhances the value of the dividend and is the most efficient way to avoid harmful interference between Member States and between Member States and third countries;

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42. Reiterates that, in the interest of citizens of the Union, the digital dividend should be managed as efficiently and effectively as possible in order to avoid interference with the delivery of high quality digital TV programmes to an increasing number of citizens and to respect consumers' rights and interests and their investment in equipment;

43. Emphasises that Member States may consider technology-neutral auctions for the purpose of allocating frequencies that are liberated because of the digital dividend and making those frequencies tradable; considers, however, that this procedure should be in full compliance with ITU radio regulations, national frequency planning and national policy objectives in order to avoid harmful interference between services provided; warns of spectrum fragmentation which leads to the suboptimal use of scarce resources; calls on the Commission to ensure that a future coordinated spectrum plan will not create new barriers to future innovation;

44. Supports a common, balanced approach to the use of digital dividend, allowing both broadcasters to continue offering and expanding their services and electronic communications operators to use this resource to deploy new services addressing other important social and economic uses, but stresses that in any event the digital dividend should be allocated on a technology-neutral basis;

45. Stresses that spectrum policy must be dynamic and must enable broadcasters and communications operators to employ new technologies and develop new services, allowing them to continue to play a key role in achieving the objectives of cultural and media policy, while also providing new high-quality communications services;

46. Stresses the potential benefits in terms of economies of scale, innovation, interoperability and the provision of potential pan-European services of more coherent and integrated spectrum planning at Community level; encourages Member States to work together and with the Commission to identify common spectrum sub-bands of the digital dividend for different application clusters that could be harmonised on a technology-neutral basis;

47. Believes that clustering within the UHF band should be based on a 'bottom-up' approach according to the specifics of the national markets while ensuring that harmonisation at Community level takes place wherever this creates a clear added value;

48. In order to achieve a more efficient use of spectrum and to facilitate the emergence of innovative and successful national, cross-border and pan-European services, supports a coordinated approach at Community level, based on different clusters of the UHF spectrum for uni-directional and bi-directional services, taking into account the potential for harmful interference arising from the co-existence of different types of networks in the same band, the outcomes of the ITU Geneva RRC 06 and WRC 07 and the existing authorisations;

49. Considers that the part of the harmonised spectrum at Community level dedicated to emergency services should be capable of providing access to future broadband technologies for the retrieval and transmission of information needed for the protection of human life through a more efficient response on the part of the emergency services;

50. Urges the Commission to undertake, in cooperation with the Member States, the appropriate technical, socio-economic and cost-benefit studies to determine the size and characteristics of the sub-bands that could be coordinated or harmonised at Community level; recalls that such studies should take into account that the dividend is not static, but that technological development is ongoing and implementation of new technologies should allow the usage of the UHF band for new types of innovative social, cultural and economic services beyond broadcasting and wireless broadband; calls on the Commission to ensure that Member States contribute to such studies in order to identify common bands to be harmonised at European level for clearly defined and interoperable pan-European services, as well as for the allocation of these bands;

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51. Urges the Commission to seek to cooperate with the countries neighbouring the Member States so that they adopt similar frequency maps or coordinate the allocation of their frequencies with the European Union, in order to avoid disruptions to the operation of telecommunications applications;
52. Calls on the Commission to conduct a study on conflicts between users of open source software and certification authorities concerning software defined radios;
53. Calls on the Commission to propose steps to reduce legal liabilities in the context of wireless mesh network provision;
54. Calls on the Commission to submit, as soon as the abovementioned studies have been completed, and having consulted both the Radio Spectrum Policy Group and the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations, and taking due account of national specificities, a proposal to the European Parliament and the Council for better coordination measures at Community level on the use of the digital dividend, in accordance with internationally agreed frequency plans;
55. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

International Tropical Timber Agreement

P6_TA(2008)0454

European Parliament resolution of 24 September 2008 on the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 2006

(2010/C 8 E/12)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the draft Council Decision (11964/2007),
 - having regard to the Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2008 (COM(2007)0640),
 - having regard to the Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) 'Forest Products Annual Market Review' of 2006-2007,
 - having regard to the 'Review on the Economics of Climate Change' by Sir Nicholas Stern, presented on 30 October 2006,
 - having regard to its resolution of 7 July 2005 on speeding up implementation of the EU action plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 108(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the planning and implementation of the common commercial policy (Articles 6 and 3(1)(b) of the Treaty), since one of the key objectives of the European Community's environment policy is the promotion of measures at the international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems including the conservation and sustainable use of forest biological diversity (Article 174 of the Treaty),
- B. whereas deforestation occurs at a rate of about 13 million hectares per year, including 6 million hectares of primary forests,
- C. whereas deforestation is estimated to have accounted for 20 % of greenhouse gas emissions in the 1990s,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 157 E, 6.7.2006, p. 482.