



1 March 2011

First EU Radio Spectrum Policy Programme

ETNO Q&A

What is the Radio Spectrum Policy Programme?

The first Radio Spectrum Policy Programme (RSPP), adopted by the European Commission on 20 September 2010, is derived from the recently revised EU Regulatory Framework for e-communications services. The RSPP will need to be approved by the European Parliament and the Council. This multi-annual policy programme aims at achieving more harmonisation in spectrum usage within the next five years. One of the key targets of the RSPP is to accelerate the opening up of the 800 MHz band – freed up as a result of the switchover from analogue to digital television – to wireless and mobile services.

Why is ETNO welcoming the RSPP proposed by the Commission?

Operators welcome this far reaching proposal because it will aim at maximising the benefits of harmonisation in this field. By establishing a deadline for opening up the current digital dividend and investigating additional spectrum availability, the Commission addresses both short and long term broadband spectrum needs. This is essential considering the rapidly increasing data traffic. ETNO calls on the EP and the Council to swiftly adopt the RSPP.

Why is it so essential for wireless and mobile services to get additional spectrum?

Mobile Internet traffic is currently observed to double every year and this is expected to continue between 2010 and 2015. Even though industry works to use available spectrum in the most efficient way, it will not be able to keep up without additional harmonised spectrum allocation.

How is spectrum policy contributing to the Digital Agenda? Does it not contradict with the policy objective of deploying high speed broadband access infrastructure?

Spectrum policy is one of the key instruments to meet the Digital Agenda objectives in terms of broadband coverage. As highlighted by the Digital Agenda itself, providing all Europeans with high speed broadband access will require a mix of technologies and platforms, depending on the feasibility and the market needs. This is why the RSPP is adopted in a package with the NGA recommendation and the Broadband communication. In rural and remote areas in particular, wireless and mobile networks will play a fundamental role to bridge the digital divide.

Why the 800 MHz band?

The propagation characteristics of spectrum below 1 GHz are ideal for remote and rural areas and for indoor coverage. As a further step, there should be a general review of the spectrum allocations (between 300 MHz and 6 GHz) to ensure that there will be sufficient spectrum allocated to mobile broadband services beyond 2020.

In particular serious investigations should start for the allocation of additional spectrum below 1 GHz for broadband communications. This issue should be put at the agenda of the World Radio Conference in 2016.

What are the countries that already opened the digital dividend to wireless and mobile services?

Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom and Sweden have already allocated the band to mobile service and have started (or are in the process of) opening the band 790-862 MHz well ahead of the deadline of June 2015 decided by the World Radio Communications Conference 2007 for the European region. A deadline should be imposed for all other member states to open the band as soon as possible.

Are already some European regions that benefit from mobile broadband using the digital dividend band?

Germany is the first European country so far that awarded spectrum in the 800 MHz band as a result of an auction. First pilots in rural areas have proven to be very successful. Many European countries including Sweden, France, Belgium, Italy and Spain should award spectrum in the coming months.

Should the RSPP impose on member states a deadline for opening up the 800 MHz band to mobile services?

ETNO would indeed support such a deadline to all member states. Considering that other Regions of the world have already opened their bands or are in the process of doing so, it is also key for Europe's competitiveness that this band is made available as soon as possible for wireless broadband services. Derogations for technical reasons, if any, should be given only in extremely exceptional cases.

Why is harmonisation key?

As leading investors in broadband services and networks, ETNO members support coordination and common initiatives at the EU level. The Radio Spectrum Policy Programme also represents an opportunity to achieve that.

As pan-European operators, ETNO members would favour a more harmonised usage of spectrum in order to help achieving economies of scale and avoid distortion of competition. Certain authorisations and procedural conditions could be defined in a concerted way between member states and the Commission, including for instance spectrum block sizes, timing of granting rights and duration of rights.

A lack of harmonisation would risk leading to cross border interferences, a fragmentation of the single market and would seriously hamper innovation.

Could possible interferences with CABLE-TV services slow the opening up of bands to wireless and mobile services?

The quality of current services to consumers should not be undermined. The opening up of the digital dividend would not create interferences with existing services. Potential issues have been reported, as the existing Cable TV networks shielding quality does not in some cases guarantee the immunity to radio signals or as existing TV receivers do not provide appropriate selectivity against mobile networks operating in adjacent frequency band. While occurring only in a limited number of situations, solutions have to be defined before broadband networks deployment.

ETSI and CENELEC have worked together to analyse the issue and produced a report for the European Commission. The outcome of this work was that the problem can be avoided for future networks with simple improvements of the TV receiver immunity standard. For existing networks there may be the need for some mitigation techniques. Cable operators are encouraged to collaborate in order to define the most appropriate solutions.

As well, the interference issue between terrestrial TV receivers and mobile base station is under investigation. The DVB forum is currently considering practical solution for the protection of existing TV equipments and standards enhancements for future ones

PMSE issue: there's still the possibility for the PMSE community to use the frequencies below 790 MHz and the centre gap of the mobile channel plan (11 MHz), as well as other tuning ranges under investigations. These would satisfy the PMSE frequency demand, especially with the new and more efficient digital modulation schemes that are becoming available.

