



CEMR key points on information society and broadband

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Information Society and Broadband Infrastructure

Context:

Broadband communication has become an important industrial technology and carrier of data, information and services. It includes a great potential to the benefit of the development and transformation of society in general, and it has been an important part of the European political agenda in the recent years.

Broadband has a decisive influence on business development in both the public and the private sector, on local and regional development, on the development of e-governance, public services like health care and social services, education and - last but not least - on fighting against and adapt to climate change.

However the coverage (availability) and take-up of broadband varies significantly between the EU Member States and between regions within the countries ("broadband gap"). There are also significant differences in relation to the economic, social and cultural preconditions, which inevitably lead to market variations in terms of supply and quality of services.

The heads of state and government agreed in March to allocate a budget of additional €1 billion in the framework of the European Economic Recovery Plan to achieve a 100% high-speed Internet coverage by 2010, mainly targeting rural and underserved areas. Further policy measures and the possibility to use the structural funds also support this objective.

As a Service of General Economic Interest (SGEI), the provision of broadband infrastructure is subject to the application of the internal market rules. However, broadband will soon be recognised as a universal service, which implies that telecoms operators will be obliged to offer nationwide coverage for high-speed Internet services. End of March, the European institutions have reached a compromise on the so-called telecoms package, agreeing to include broadband into the Universal Service Directive.

CEMR key points on information society and broadband

1. Given the strategic role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in support of local and regional economic development, the "broadband gap" could become a serious obstacle for innovation and growth in Europe's regions, cities, towns and municipalities.
2. Local and regional authorities are users of the new technologies, committed to further develop eGovernment and supplying eServices to their citizens and the businesses.
3. Local and regional government also play an important role in the deployment of broadband infrastructure; they promote the use of information and communication technologies and assure access for both private and professional users.
4. In rural and remote areas, deployment of broadband is hampered by market failure. There might be a need for public intervention in cases where market players are not investing, and local and regional authorities may choose to use public funding for broadband infrastructures.
5. The use of the structural funds and other well-targeted public funding, preferably in combination with public private partnerships, could be an appropriate means to stimulate the market to invest and operate in these areas.
6. Public engagement should, however, aim to establish open networks, based on open standards and accessible for all, as well as a functional separation of infrastructure and services in order to enhance competition between different market players.

7. Local and regional authorities have a key role to play in the promotion and facilitation of roll-out of the future high-speed broadband networks, including the fibre-optics NGA (Next Generation Access) networks. These networks play an important role, as the strategic use of ICT is a crucial enabler of regional and local development, in both economic and social realms.
8. Better and smarter use of broadband constitutes a major contribution in achieving prosperous and vital communities in rural areas and strengthening the social infrastructure and the well-being of its inhabitants. Therefore, it is crucial that the focus of the future development is not only on the ICT infrastructure but also on the content of the services, e.g. on health and social services, and on the user aspects of the services provided.
9. Local and regional authorities are main purchasers and key actors when it comes to the application of e-procurement and related services, which can help significantly in making local community-based services more efficient and customer friendly.
10. Social impacts of the new technologies need to be assessed; in addition to digital exclusion, children and young people are especially vulnerable to various forms of abuse.
11. The development and deployment of broadband technologies and broadband-based services should be continuously monitored and evaluated against strategic objectives and policy recommendations, in order to achieve a balanced development integrating all aspects of local, regional, national and European objectives and policies.
12. ICT Policy has to be integrated into other policy areas such as territorial cohesion, regional development, social policies, the completion of the internal market, improvement of services and the Lisbon Strategy.

CEMR position papers on this item

(available at CEMR's website www.ccre.org) :

- CEMR response to the Communication on the "Communication on the second periodic review of the scope of universal service in electronic communications" (March 2009)
- CEMR Response To the public consultation on Next Generation Access (NGA) networks (November 2008)
- CEMR Policy paper on Broadband (September 2008)

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