



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Neelie Kroes

Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda

Smashing barriers and thinking big

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Today's wireless industry faces many demands. We must get creative to meet them.

We have demands driven by our broadband goals, to get every European digital. New figures, published yesterday, show mobile broadband penetration reached 47.8% last year: nearly one broadband SIM for every two Europeans. Yet there is still an investment gap to deploy and upgrade our mobile networks.

We have rocketing demands from users. Recent growth in mobile data could continue, climbing 66% each year - as we move to 4G, the cloud, and the "internet of things", with mobile devices soon outnumbering people.

And we have an economic imperative. Europe used to lead the world in wireless: we invented the GSM standard, we once dominated devices. Yet now we are falling behind. Overtaken to the east and the west. We urgently need to catch up. To reclaim a strong wireless industry. To cement a strong economy. And to give people the technological tools to access and create opportunity.

Those are not simple demands. I know, because you tell me the challenges you face in our fragmented market.

Challenges like spectrum: a resource in shorter and shorter supply—ever more expensive to find. With some Member States seeing auctions as merely revenue-raising, rather than seeing the wider public interest for consumer prices and network investment. And with assignment systems different in each country, so you face a kaleidoscope of different rules and practices across the EU.

Challenges like wildly different rules for planning and permits, so that what's easy in one part of Europe takes two years in another.

Like wildly different safety assessments, so some authorities are 100 times more cautious than they need to be, delaying or preventing new services. Even based on the same scientific evidence.

Like uncertainty about whether you can share infrastructure, meaning extra duplication and digging, and higher rollout costs.

Like uncoordinated research that is harder to benefit from and harder to steer. Like markets that aren't competitive enough.

With all that fragmentation, no wonder mobile broadband penetration diverges so much across Europe: from around 25% in some countries to 100% in others.

All that makes it harder for you to think big and plan across borders. Harder to repay your investment quickly. Harder to join up services across Europe, or guarantee end-to-end quality. Harder for manufacturers to think about Europe when planning their new gadgets. Harder to secure effective coverage by the fastest networks; still harder to guarantee we will lead the race to 5G.

You have all seen the political agreement on the EU Budget. Proposed funding for the digital "Connecting Europe Facility" was cut by over 8 billion euros; in practice not leaving enough room to invest in broadband. I am very disappointed: the Connecting Europe Facility was just one tool to help us reach our broadband goals, but an important one. And one that would have paid back, with interest.

I am still determined to deliver broadband for all: and for that we must improve the market. So that it works for you in the industry, works for consumers, works for the economy. A European telecoms market more coherent, more integrated, more efficient; with lower investor risks and higher investor rewards. Building that market must now be our focus, so it can deliver what's expected.

How do we do that? I'm pragmatic, not dogmatic. But we all need to change our mind-set. We can no longer just think instrument by instrument, interest by interest, country by country.

We can no longer stick to legacy systems, 20th century needs, historically allocated powers.

We must focus on our goal, on the digital imperative, and do what's needed to deliver it.

As the problems you face are varied – so must our solutions be subtle and targeted. As the issues you face cross borders, so must our solutions be European. Where there are innovative opportunities, we must ourselves innovate to seize them.

For a start, where measures are already agreed, we must implement them fully. We've already fixed a target to find a total of 1200 Megahertz of spectrum for wireless broadband. But on average national governments have only awarded 65% of the spectrum we have already harmonised in the EU. So when Member States aren't implementing legal commitments, we will use our full Treaty powers.

Plus, we've already set out our ideas on the shared use of spectrum. Because using this precious resource effectively needs us to be more creative and flexible.

But we need to go beyond that.

That is what we will do with our wireless action plan. Looking at how to find more spectrum and bring closer its assignment conditions across Europe. But also, we should take every possible step to make it easier and worthwhile for you to invest. From looking at the burdensome and delaying permit procedures that plague your projects; to new ways to share infrastructure that do not limit your ability or incentive to innovate and compete.

And we will focus on demand, too, looking holistically at new wireless services. Like services to improve our transport, health, or cities. Imagine a range of services using standardised technology, widely available on mobile. Like NFC, near-field communication – supported by proven security solutions and easy billing. Not to build new walled gardens, but as a platform for choice and convenience, at less cost.

Member States support our broadband targets; and many of them actively call for a Digital Single Market. Our proposals will help deliver both of those goals.

Yet this will not be politically easy. Because when we get down to details, I'm sure many instincts will be to resist: to stick to the safety of the status quo, the comfort of longstanding practice, the clamours of vested interests. In both public and private sectors.

But in the long run, I know that would damage our competitiveness, harm our industry, and cut Europeans off from a world of online opportunity. I don't want that; you don't want that. We need governments to see the big picture here: and I hope I can count on your support showing them it.

And here's another way to improve our wireless ecosystem. Rolling out today's networks is important: but what comes after? For the next global standard, and the next generation of technology, will Europe lead the world, or merely follow? Will future ubiquitous ultra-high bandwidth communication infrastructure, also known as 5G, be pioneered by European industry, based on European research, creating European jobs? Or will global competitors get there first – and, by the way, many of them are already investing heavily.

Europe has the funds, the will, and the expertise to succeed here. And today I call on EU industry and other partners to join us in a Public-Private partnership in this area. An open platform that helps us reach our common goal more coherently, directly, and quickly. European 5G is an unmissable opportunity to recapture the global technological lead. And I hope you will be able to support and join us.

This matters. Mobiles matter for our future. And they matter to our people.

Just look at the long queues for the latest gadget. Look at the campaigns, profound and passionate, over the rules that should apply online. All these, people care deeply about – yet none of it matters without broadband connections: reliable, pervasive, fast.

There is, in theory, no limit to the innovation in the wireless industry. But only if we provide the right support. Here in the audience we have one very talented innovator who is making the most of that potential: I'd like him to talk a little about what he's been doing.

And that's a very good example of what we can do in this field. But the fact is, if we don't provide the spectrum, the networks, or the most up-to-date technology, then that innovation just won't be possible: we would be blocking off tomorrow's opportunities.

And I don't think citizens of any generation, would forgive us that.