Resolution on accelerating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting

2005/2634(RSP) - 16/11/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Having put an oral question to the commission, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on accelerating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, encouraging those Member States that have not yet published their switchover plans to announce them by the end of 2005. The transition from analogue to digital broadcasting will bring benefits at all levels, enabling new and improved broadcasting to be offered, permitting the release of several hundred megahertz of prime spectrum, which could be reallocated for various purposes, and increasing market competition and innovation.

Parliament called on the Member States to ensure that policy interventions carried out to secure and accelerate digital switchover are transparent, justified, proportionate and non-discriminatory. The Commission must lay down clearly defined policy objectives to ensure the deepest possible penetration of the new and innovative services. It must also ensure that research and development is completed at an early stage in the interests of penetration, including that of the new non-broadcasting digital services.

Parliament went on to ask the Commission to establish a European Digital Working Party within the existing structure (Communications Committee) with the task of coordinating the regulations, objectives, strategies and timetables of the Member States at Community level. This European Digital Working Party should monitor the performance of the Member States concerning digital transition and arrange workshops where the Member States and other stakeholders can hold discussion panels and exchange views. The Working Party should also be responsible for assisting in harmonising approaches to the spectrum dividend in order to ensure the future operation of pan-European services in all Member States.

In addition, the Commission must act to prevent the formation of vertical bottlenecks and horizontal monopolies. Member states are asked to subsidise – in accordance with Community law – digital TV receivers (either set-top boxes or boxes integrated into TV sets) such as the Multimedia Home Platform system, with an open API (Application Program Interface) to prevent the development of bottlenecks.

Parliament emphasised the great importance of ensuring "equitable access" to the spectrum dividend within the frame of the RRC06 negotiations. There must be a common negotiating position to support the scenario based on the deadline of 2015 for the end of general protection against interference by analogue channels transmitting from outside the EU, in order to ensure undisturbed digital broadcasting as close as possible to 2012.

In order to ensure that the digital divide in society is not exacerbated, Member States must ensure that there are adequate provisions in place prior to the transition from analogue to digital, including funding and intelligible information, which will mitigate the cost of conversion for those in society who will have difficulty in procuring and financing the necessary replacement equipment;

In regulating the digital transition, a clear distinction should be made between the regulation of transmission of electronic signals and infrastructure and the regulation of content (including audiovisual content). It must also be ensured, in order to protect pluralism and diversity in the broadcasting field, that the majority, or an appropriate part, of the new broadcasting possibilities and broadcasters do not come under the exclusive control or decisive influence of multinational media undertakings. The various additional services transmitted alongside digital broadcasts on the same network must be regulated by making a distinction appropriate to their nature: content services related to broadcasting, other content services and services related to telecommunications.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to ensure full interoperability and technological neutrality in order to provide a level playing field for all operators and to boost European innovation.