

# Building a European policy on broadband

2006/2273(INI) - 03/05/2007

The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Gunnar HÖKMARK (EPP-ED, SE) on building a European policy on broadband. The report stressed the opportunities that would be created by an internal market with nearly 500 million people connected to broadband, and said that the deployment of broadband networks offering reliable transmission at competitive bandwidth was crucial for business growth, social development and the enhancement of public services.

The report called on the Member States to promote the deployment of broadband services in rural areas - which was a key factor in ensuring that everyone could take part in the information society - and to promote broadband connections in every school, university and educational centre in the EU. It said that "the key to closing the broadband gap is innovative technology", which offers interesting and cheaper solutions for remote, inaccessible and rural areas, and noted that new technologies such as wireless links, mobile and satellite communications must be taken into account when radio spectrum is allocated.

The committee emphasised that digital literacy is an indispensable basis for exploiting the opportunities offered by broadband, and pointed to the responsibility of public education in this area. It also noted that investment in e-health, e-government and e-learning application can play an important role in driving consumer demand for broadband, and called on the Commission and Member States to give preference to broadband Internet solutions and technologies in the computerisation of government departments, the education sector and SMEs. Moreover, it wanted to see structural and rural funds used to support "a core set of European e-services", which would help to achieve further integration and strengthened cohesion as well as to create a single European electronic market via the use of broadband.

The report also urged the Community institutions and Member States to work with industry and address problems (such as micro-payment, security and trust, interoperability and Digital Rights Management) that hamper the development of new business models in the field of broadband.

Among other recommendations, the committee called on the Commission to help create a supportive environment for innovation and new technologies by providing a regulatory framework that invites competition and private investment and by supporting the necessary infrastructure. It also stressed the important role that the Member States could play by implementing the EU regulatory framework for electronic communications, thereby creating legal certainty in this area.

On the question of consumer protection, the report urged the Commission to examine the availability of Internet services at reasonable and affordable rates throughout the EU to all citizens and whether there is a need to modify the existing universal service requirements. The Commission should also address consumer concerns regarding secure and safe broadband use.

Lastly the committee stressed that public funding should only be used where the roll-out of broadband infrastructure is not economically viable for private undertakings and should not serve to duplicate existing infrastructure capable of providing broadband services. In this connection, the Commission was urged to "provide guidance and disseminate good practice" on the observance of State aid rules regarding public financial support to broadband projects. The report insisted that public funding of broadband infrastructure must adhere to the principle of 'technology neutrality'.