Commission presents new initiatives for digital infrastructures of tomorrow

Brussels, 21 February 2024

Today, the Commission presented a set of possible actions to foster the innovation, security and resilience of digital infrastructures. The future competitiveness of Europe's economy depends on these advanced digital network infrastructures and services, since fast, secure, and widespread connectivity is essential for the deployment of the technologies that will bring us into tomorrow's world: telemedicine, automated driving, predictive maintenance of buildings, or precision agriculture.

This digital connectivity package aims to start a discussion on concrete proposals with stakeholders, Member States and like-minded partners on how to shape future EU policy action with a view to achieving a consensus:

- The **White Paper on "How to master Europe's digital infrastructure needs?"** analyses the challenges Europe currently faces in the rollout of future connectivity networks, and presents possible scenarios to attract investments, foster innovation, increase security, and achieve a true Digital Single Market.

- The **Recommendation on the security and resilience of submarine cable infrastructures** presents a set of actions at national and EU level aimed at improving submarine cable security and resilience, through a better coordination across the EU, both in terms of governance and funding.

The EU should foster a vibrant community of European innovators, advancing the development of **integrated connectivity and collaborative computing infrastructures**. To reach this goal, the White Paper envisages the creation of a "Connected Collaborative Computing" Network ("**3C Network**") to set up end-to-end integrated infrastructures and platforms for telco cloud and edge, which could be used to orchestrate the development of innovative technologies and AI applications for various use cases. Such collaborative approach could be prepared via the set-up of large-scale pilots or a possible new Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI) in the computing continuum.

It is also essential to **better leverage synergies between existing initiatives**, such as the IPCEI on Next Generation Cloud Infrastructure and Services, and funding programmes such as the Connecting Europe Facility and Digital Europe. This could include a **possible coordinating role** for the Smart Networks and Services Joint Undertaking (SNS JU) to support the creation of a collaborative connectivity and computing ecosystem.

Moreover, the EU must realise the full potential of the digital single market for telecoms, by considering measures to ensure a true **level playing field** and to rethink the **scope of application and objectives of its current regulatory framework.** This reflection should take into account the technology convergence between telecoms and cloud, which are nonetheless subject to different regulatory frameworks, as well as the need to ensure all operators investing in digital infrastructure can benefit from the necessary scale to undertake massive investments. This could entail a more harmonised approach to authorisation procedures of telecoms operators, a more integrated governance at Union level for spectrum and possible changes in wholesale access policy. The Commission may also consider measures to accelerate the copper switch-off by 2030, and to foster the greening of digital networks by improving their efficiency.

To protect Europe's network and computing infrastructure, an essential element of our economic security, the EU should **incentivise the deployment and enhance the security and resilience of strategic submarine cable infrastructures.** Building on the Recommendation adopted together with the White Paper, a joint EU governance system may be considered in the longer term, together with a review of available instruments designed to better leverage private investments to support **Cable Projects of European Interest (CPEIs)**.

As an immediate action responding to calls from Member States and stakeholders, the Recommendation seeks to improve coordination within the EU, for instance by assessing and

mitigating security risks, establishing a **Cable Security Toolbox**, and streamlining procedures for permit granting. Moreover, to support the follow-up of the Recommendation, the Commission is setting up the **Submarine Cable Infrastructure Expert Group**, composed of Member States' authorities.

Next Steps

The Commission launched today a public consultation on 12 scenarios set out in the White Paper. The consultation will close on 30 June 2024. The submissions will be published and will contribute to the future policy actions.

Background

The EU has already taken several actions to foster the transition of traditional connectivity networks towards the infrastructures of the future:

- On 23 February 2023, the Commission launched a broad exploratory consultation on the future of the connectivity sector and its infrastructure, whose results were published in October 2023.

- Together with the consultation, the Commission also presented the Gigabit Infrastructure Act (GIA), for which a political agreement was found on 5 February 2024, one year after the proposal. The GIA introduces a set of actions to simplify and speed up the deployment of very high-capacity networks reducing the administrative burden and the cost of deployment.

- The agreement came at the same time as the adoption of the Recommendation on the regulatory promotion of gigabit connectivity (Gigabit Recommendation), which provides to National Regulatory Authorities guidance on how to design wholesale access remedy obligations for operators with significant market power.

- Furthermore, the EU has taken measures to strengthen our backbone connectivity through, for example, Global Gateway Partnerships, which ensure high-quality connectivity with all parts of the Union, including the outermost regions, islands, Member States with coastlines, and overseas countries and territories. The Global Gateways partnership, funded through CEF, supports key infrastructures such as submarine cables.

For More Information

White Paper "How to master Europe's digital infrastructure needs?"

Recommendation on the security and resilience of submarine cable infrastructures

Factsheet

Q&A

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Quotes:

"In Europe we still have 27 national telco markets with different network architectures, different levels of network coverage, different national spectrum management, and different regulations. This fragmentation is a missed economic opportunity. With the White paper we have identified various policy solutions to help the creation of a Single Market for Telcos. This will help since we need a digital infrastructure that provides secure, fast, and reliable connectivity – to everyone, everywhere in Europe."
Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age - 21/02/2024

"Digital network infrastructures are key for a competitive and resilient Europe. The White Paper we are presenting today is laying the foundations for a future Digital Networks Act focused on three pillars: investment, regulatory framework, and security. We need to create a level playing field for a true Digital Single Market to unlock the investment needed to build the digital network infrastructures of tomorrow."
Thierry Breton, Commissioner for Internal Market - 21/02/2024

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