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PROGRESS REPORT

RSPG WORKING GROUP ON THE DIGITAL DIVIDEND

Progress Report on the RSPG Working Group on the Digital Dividend (RSPG WGDD)

The 1st meeting of the RSPG WGDD took place on 8th January 2009 in Dublin at ComReg's offices and was attended by representatives of Czech Republic, Denmark, EC, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, UK.

Objective and Principles

The focus of discussions during this first meeting was to discuss and agree on the key objective and guiding principles for the work to be undertaken by the group.

In compliance with the RSPG Work Programme 2009 (document RSPG09-253), the WGDD agreed that the key objective of its work is to provide *strategic policy advice* to the EC on development of the digital dividend in Europe.

The group will examine how the digital dividend can be used on a technology and service neutral basis, while promoting new and innovative applications and services. This will enable the RSPG to provide input to the EC in order to best define a road-map for Europe in this respect, and in line with concurrent work on wireless broadband.

The output from the WGDD's work should promote a common understanding of the significant issues to be addressed in order to reap the full benefits of digital dividend throughout Europe.

In achieving this objective the following guiding principles were noted:

1. Note that digital switch on dates will vary across Europe
2. In line with 2007 RSPG Opinion on digital dividend, note that a non-mandatory approach will be appropriate
3. Ensure that the principle of WAPECS is taken into account.

The situation in Europe

Pertinent to the work of the WGDD are the different approaches to digital switch-over and the timing of digital switch-over in each Member State. It was also noted that there may be potential for geographical clustering of switch-over activities and release of the digital dividend which could bring significant benefits in comparison to localised switch-over approaches.

In this context the WGDD was also made aware of the need for Member States to coordinate between each other and that for many Member States cross-border coordination is a very sensitive and complex issue.

Nevertheless, noting these issues, it was agreed that the WGDD should focus on high level issues and avoid getting into too much detail on these issues which are likely to be addressed elsewhere, e.g., in the Analysys/Mason study currently underway on behalf of the EC. Also it is important that WGDD does not duplicate the work of other fora, for example CEPT ECC TG4, in this domain.

The Timetable for the Digital Dividend

As is already recognised, progress towards realising a digital dividend varies considerably between Member States. One of the areas the WGDD will explore within the context of a common understanding of the timetabling requirements of the Member States are the potential issues with reconfiguration of bands IV/V (to release spectrum between 790 and 862 MHz i.e. the 800 MHz band). Other relevant issues which could be explored for opportunities and benefits could include a number of transitional activities (e.g., analogue to digital transition, upgrading of digital networks (say, from MPEG2 to MPEG4), etc).

These activities and the associated timeframes are likely to impact on access to the 800MHz band for other services.

Position Paper structure

According to the RSPG work programme the WGDD is required to produce a draft position paper for approval by the RSPG and to also prepare a draft RSPG Opinion for public consultation. The WGDD agreed that the position paper should aim at being no more than 2-3 pages in length and should summarise the issues to be addressed more fully in the Opinion. It was also agreed that the position paper should avoid an inventory of the status of digital broadcasting in Europe. Furthermore, it was also agreed that a minimalist approach, i.e., of simply comparing RSPG Opinion 161 against the current situation would also not suffice as a final deliverable nor meet EC's requirements.

The group agreed that *the WGDD chairman should seek clarification from the February meeting of the RSPG on whether cost recovery mechanisms (who pays for what? e.g. broadcasters, mobile operators, etc), in respect of any restructuring/refarming issues which might arise as a result of the digital dividend, should be explored and addressed by the WGDD.*

Questionnaire

In order to maximise clarity on the strategic issues to be addressed, the working group prepared a short questionnaire, for distribution to all Member States, dealing with the timescales for availability of the 800 MHz band and implementation of ITU RR footnotes on the mobile service covering the band. WGDD has requested that the questionnaire be returned by Friday 13th February.

Relationship with the RSPG work on Wireless Broadband

The WGDD noted that the RSPG Work Programme for 2009 (document RSPG09-253) refers to linkages between the work on the digital dividend and that on wireless broadband.

The digital dividend is relevant in the context of the work on wireless broadband, as the digital dividend is one of a range of spectrum bands which are suitable for the provision of electronic communications services including wireless broadband. In that sense, the work of the group on the digital dividend will have some relevance for the parallel work on wireless broadband

However, it is clear that the work on the digital dividend should not overlap so as to duplicate that on wireless broadband and to that end the two working groups will keep each other informed of their respective work to ensure that there are no unnecessary overlaps.

This working group will also welcome any further steer from the RSPG on linkages between the two work streams.

Next Steps

The WGDD is currently developing a draft Position Paper and will soon commence work on outlining the key points to be addressed in the draft RSPG Opinion. The group intends to complete as much work as possible by correspondence.

Dates of Next Meetings

Next meetings of the RSPG DD WG will take place on
Wednesday 18 March in Dublin
Tuesday 7 April in Dublin
[27 April – tentative (in case need to finalise texts in
advance of RSPG#19)]

Mike Byrne
Chairman RSPG WGDD
28 January 2009