



State of the Union: Commission calls on Member States to boost fast network connectivity and develop joint approach to 5G rollout

Brussels, 18 September 2020

STATE OF THE UNION 2020

Today, the Commission takes further steps in the Digital Decade agenda to strengthen Europe's digital sovereignty, as announced by President Ursula **von der Leyen** in her [State of the Union](#) address on Wednesday.

The Commission has published a [Recommendation](#) calling Member States to boost investment in very high-capacity broadband connectivity infrastructure, including 5G, which is the most fundamental block of the digital transformation and an essential pillar of the [recovery](#). The timely deployment of 5G networks will offer significant economic opportunities for the years to come, as a crucial asset for European competitiveness, sustainability and a major enabler for future digital services.

In parallel, and closely linked to this Recommendation, the Commission [proposed today](#) a new [Regulation](#) for the [European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking](#) to maintain and advance Europe's leading role in supercomputing technology to underpin the entire digital strategy and to ensure the Union's competitiveness in the global setting.

Executive Vice-President for a Europe fit for the Digital Age, Margrethe **Vestager**, said: *"Broadband and 5G connectivity lay the foundation for the green and digital transformation of the economy, regardless if we talk about transport and energy, healthcare and education, or manufacturing and agriculture. And we have seen the current crisis highlight the importance of access to very high-speed internet for businesses, public services and citizens, but also to accelerate the pace towards 5G. We must therefore work together towards fast network rollout without any further delays."*

Commissioner for the Internal Market, Thierry **Breton**, added: *"Digital infrastructures have proven to be crucial during the pandemic to help citizens, public services and businesses get through the crisis and yet recent investments have slowed down. At a time when access to broadband Internet represents both a fundamental commodity for Europeans and a geostrategic stake for companies, we must – together with Member States – enable and accelerate the rollout of secure fibre and 5G networks. Greater connectivity will not only contribute to creating jobs, boosting sustainable growth and modernising the European economy, it will help Europe building its resilience and achieve its technological autonomy."*

With today's Recommendation the Commission invites Member States to come together to develop, by 30 March 2021, a common approach, in the form of a toolbox of best practices, for the timely rollout of fixed and mobile very high-capacity networks, including 5G networks. Such measures should aim to:

- **Reduce the cost and increase the speed of deployment** of very high capacity networks, notably by removing unnecessary administrative hurdles;
- Provide **timely access to 5G radio spectrum** and encourage operators' investments in expanding network infrastructure;
- Establish **more cross-border coordination** for radio spectrum assignments, to support innovative 5G services, particularly in the industry and transport fields.

Today's Recommendation also sets out guidance for best practices to provide timely access to radio spectrum for 5G as well as ensure stronger coordination of spectrum assignment for 5G cross-border applications. This is particularly important to enable connected and automated mobility, as well as the digitisation of industry and smart factories. Enhanced cross-border coordination will help to provide Europe's main transport paths, particularly road, rail and in-land waterways, with

uninterrupted 5G coverage by 2025. However, until mid-September 2020, Member States (and the UK) had assigned on average only 27.5% of the 5G pioneer bands. It is therefore essential that Member States avoid or minimise any delays in granting access to radio spectrum to ensure timely deployment of 5G.

The Recommendation also highlights the need to ensure that 5G networks are secure and resilient. Member States have worked together with the Commission and the EU Cybersecurity Agency (ENISA) on a respective [toolbox of mitigating measures and plans](#), designed to address effectively major risks to 5G networks. In July, a [progress report](#) was published.

Sustainable network deployment for improved connectivity

The Recommendation also builds upon the [Broadband Cost Reduction Directive](#). It promotes the rollout of high-speed networks by reducing deployment costs through harmonised measures to ensure network providers and operators can share infrastructure, coordinate civil works and obtain the necessary permits for deployment. The Recommendation is calling on Member States to share and agree on best practices under this Directive, to:

- **Support simpler and more transparent permit-granting** procedures for civil works;
- **Improve transparency** on existing physical infrastructure, so that operators can access more easily all relevant information on the infrastructure available in a certain area, and facilitate permit-granting procedures, through a single information point in the administration of public authorities;
- **Expand network operators' rights to access** existing infrastructure controlled by public sector bodies (i.e. buildings, street lamps and those belonging to energy and other utilities) to install elements for network deployment;
- **Improve the effectiveness of the dispute resolution mechanism** related to infrastructure access.

Improved connectivity can also minimise the climate impact of data transmission and thus contribute to achieving the Union's climate targets. Member States are encouraged to develop criteria for assessing the environmental impact of future networks and provide incentives to operators to deploy environmentally sustainable networks.

Next steps

The Recommendation calls for Member States to identify and share best practices for the Toolbox by 20 December 2020. The Member States should agree on the list of best practices by 30 March 2021.

As announced in its strategy "[Shaping Europe's digital future](#)" in February, the Commission plans two further actions in this area:

- The update of its action plan on 5G and 6G in 2021. The updated plan will rely and expand on the spectrum-related actions in this Recommendation. It will look at the progress made so far, and set new, ambitious goals for 5G network roll-out.
- The revision of the Broadband Cost Reduction Directive. The next steps in this process are the launch of an open consultation in autumn 2020 and of a dedicated study to evaluate the current Directive and assess the impact of several policy options.

Background

The Recommendation will contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Broadband Cost Reduction Directive as well as the [European Electronic Communications Code](#). The Code, which needs to be implemented into national law in Member States by 21 December 2020, aims to promote connectivity and access to very high-capacity networks by all citizens and businesses.

The Commission's strategy on [Connectivity for a European Gigabit Society](#) sets the EU's connectivity objectives. By 2025, all main socio-economic drivers (i.e. schools, hospitals, transport hubs) should have gigabit connectivity, all urban areas and major terrestrial transport paths should be connected with uninterrupted 5G coverage, and all European households should have access to connectivity offering at least 100 Mbps upgradable to Gigabit speeds.

As [announced](#) in June, the EU is funding 11 new technology and trial projects to enable 5G connectivity and pave the way for autonomous driving on main road, train and maritime routes in Europe.

For more information

[Questions and Answers](#)

[Factsheet on the Connectivity Recommendation](#)

[Recommendation on Connectivity](#)

[State of the Union Address](#)

[Press release on the main initiatives of the State of the Union 2020](#)

[Dedicated webpage on the State of the Union 2020](#)

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