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Subject:	Review of the Regulatory Framework Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Electronic Communications Code (Recast) Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 5G for Europe: An Action Plan Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market - Towards a European Gigabit Society - Policy debate

Better Internet connectivity: a must for Europe

Within the next 10 years up to 50 billion smart objects are expected to be connected worldwide, in addition to our smartphones and computers. The great majority of these will connect wirelessly, in homes, in cars or as "wearables" like smart watches. –. New solutions based on Internet connectivity – including cloud computing, Internet of Things, high performance computing and big data analytics – will transform business processes and influence social interactions. New digital applications – like virtual and augmented reality, remote surgery, artificial intelligence, precision farming, drones – will require speed, quality and responsiveness that only very high-capacity broadband networks can deliver. In particular, the development of connected and autonomous driving will benefit from the deployment of 5G communication networks.

The full economic and social benefits of this digital transformation will only be achieved if Europe can ensure widespread deployment and take-up of very high capacity networks, in urban and rural areas, and across all of society. Europe's territorial cohesion, competitiveness, future jobs and growth are at stake. The Slovak Presidency therefore considers this exchange of views a highlight of its mandate to ensure that we combine efforts on the crucial next steps in this field.

Building the right framework for investment

In June 2016, the European Council called for very high-capacity fixed and wireless broadband connectivity across Europe, as a precondition for future competitiveness, and for telecoms regulatory reforms to incentivise major network investments while promoting effective competition and consumer rights.

On 14 September 2016, the European Commission adopted a "connectivity package": a set of regulatory, funding and policy measures intended to ensure that everyone in the EU will have the best possible Internet connection to participate in the digital society and economy. It has set new connectivity objectives for 2025 in terms of enhanced connectivity for socio-economic drivers, roll-out of 5G networks, and a higher basic level of connectivity available in all areas, which it has called on the European Parliament and the Council to endorse.

The Commission adopted an Action Plan on 5G which foresees a common EU calendar for network deployment by end 2020 at the latest and a closer cooperation with Member States and industry stakeholders, including for the timely identification and assignment of spectrum for 5G and other supporting actions to promote innovation and the potential demand in key industry sectors that should benefit from advanced 5G connectivity. It also announced a range of initiatives to incentivise investment in very high-capacity networks across Europe, including in particular the proposal for a European Electronic Communications Code intended to provide incentives for primarily market-funded roll-out of very high-capacity fixed and mobile networks by a variety of different actors, both incumbents and challengers, while facilitating take-up through continued competition, end-user choice and the appropriate level of consumer protection.

The role of the Council towards a European Gigabit Society

A favourable framework for investment is essential to achieve a European Gigabit society, where availability and take-up of very high capacity networks enable the widespread use of products, services and applications in the Digital Single Market. Now that the Commission has proposed measures that seek to achieve this, it is up to the Council and Parliament at European level, as well as Member States at national level, to consider these proposals and take the next necessary steps within their respective competences.

The proposals both set a clear ambition to provide Europe with very high-capacity fixed and wireless Internet connectivity and cover a wide range of issues that must be addressed to make this a reality. The Slovak Presidency therefore aims to confirm the ambition at political level and to begin the work of analysing these proposals to allow for an efficient and effective implementation at all levels.

Questions for debate

In order to provide political guidance for further work by the Working Party on Telecommunications and Information Society, notably on the Electronic Communications Code, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- Do you think that the connectivity objectives for a European Gigabit society are proportionate to its ambition to enable a competitive economy and inclusive society?

- What aspects of coordination between Member States are most important for reaching the goal of common deployment of 5G networks, including the timely availability of harmonised spectrum?

- Which measures of the connectivity package, including in particular within the proposed European Electronic Communications Code, do you see as key for securing the objectives of a European Gigabit Society by 2025?