

NEWS

FROM AROUND THE GLOBE



Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, delivers his 'state of the union' address. He proposed to give every village free wireless internet; rights holders to be paid fairly for their work; and also said privacy is a "matter of human dignity". Competition was also highlighted

EUROPE'S REGULATORY PROPOSALS

A GIGABIT SINGLE MARKET

The European Commission has published a raft of proposals under the theme of 'internet connectivity' on the occasion of president Claude Juncker's 'state of the union' address. Among the proposals are the promised revision of the electronic communications framework, which is now called a 'code'; an action plan for 5G; and a new project to generate more public WiFi points. The proposed directive to establish a new electronic communications code comes alongside the strategic objectives, by 2025, of gigabit connectivity for public services and enterprises relying on digital technologies; a target of 100 Mbps download for all households; and 'uninterrupted' 5G coverage in all urban areas and major roads and railways. The main planks of the code are:

- Increased competition and predictability for investments – the code will apply market regulation only where end-user interest requires it and where commercial arrangements between operators do not deliver competitive outcomes
- Better use of radio frequencies: the code proposes long licence durations, coupled with more stringent requirements to use spectrum effectively and efficiently
- Stronger consumer protection – making it easier to switch suppliers and ensuring that vulnerable groups have affordable internet contracts
- A safer online environment for users and fairer rules for all players: 'selected rules' are extended to online players which offer equivalent services to traditional operators, and may include emergency calls.

Reaction has been mixed. There has been broad agreement that the Commission is tackling incentives to stimulate next-generation networks and efficient use of spectrum, although ECTA, the body representing smaller telecoms firms, would like more emphasis on access to infrastructure. Over the top (OTT) players are concerned about legacy rules that may apply to them. The Commission is also drafting a 'fair use' policy on the roaming regulation, which has upset those who thought this was settled. The new code and other documents are at bit.ly/2cXbPTQ

■ Alongside the new code, the Commission also proposes to turn BEREC, the body of European regulators, "into a fully fledged agency" that will allow it to "foster the consistent implementation of the regulatory framework for electronic communications". See bit.ly/2d2Bc6K

NET NEUTRALITY

BEREC CLARIFIES RULES

BEREC, the body of European telecoms regulators, has issued final guidelines on the EU's net neutrality rules that have been applauded by digital rights activists. "ISPs are prohibited from blocking or slowing down of internet traffic, except where necessary," BEREC says, with exceptions limited to "traffic management to comply with a legal order, to ensure network integrity and security, and to manage congestion, provided that equivalent categories of traffic are treated equally". Also prohibited is zero rating where other applications are blocked or slowed down once the data cap is reached, although a case by case basis can be made in less clear cut situations. BEREC received nearly half a million responses to its consultation. See the documents at: bit.ly/2cc7tdW

UNITED STATES

FCC GOES FOR FREE APPS

Ninety-nine percent of pay-TV subscribers in the US currently rent set-top boxes because there aren't meaningful alternatives, reports the FCC's chairman, Tom Wheeler. "Lack of competition has meant few choices and high prices for consumers – \$231 in rental fees annually for the average American household." The FCC is to propose rules that will allow consumers to "access their pay-TV content via free apps on a variety of devices so they no longer have to pay monthly rental fees, enable integrated search, and protect content and privacy." If adopted, the largest pay-TV providers, which serve 95% of pay-TV subscribers, will have two years to comply with the rules.

See fcc.us/2cfXKib

■ The most recent FCC stats show 78% of census blocks have access to only one internet provider offering speeds of 25 Mbps or more – the minimum speed to be considered 'broadband' – while 30% have no broadband access.

AUSTRALIA

ISSUES DOWN UNDER

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has released an issues paper as part of its market study of the communications sector. It calls for comment on managing demand for data, expected to more than double each year for the next few years; the transition to the next-generation broadband network and what this means for competition and meeting consumer expectations; the relationship between mobile and fixed-line networks; industry consolidation; and new technologies and delivery platforms. More at bit.ly/2d80OPD

INTERNET

CONTENT CRITICAL TO GLOBAL TAKE-UP

Internet access and availability are not enough to get people online, says a Internet Society study, 'Promoting content in Africa'. It reveals that while significant improvements have been made in internet infrastructure, mostly in mobile networks, internet adoption rates are slowing in many countries because users lack compelling reasons to connect.

According to the study, content and services are the main factors in making the internet desirable, especially when the subject matter is relevant and in a language that users can easily understand. A lack of local content and services is affecting the number of new online users in Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, local language content is key to bringing new users online, as many are not comfortable reading in English or French.

In the Sub-Saharan countries studied by the Internet Society, the majority of international and locally

developed content is hosted outside the country, typically overseas. This results in slow internet speeds and higher access costs.

Meanwhile India has overtaken the US to become the world's second largest internet market, with 333 million users, trailing China's 721 million, according to 'The state of broadband', from the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. But just six nations – including China and India – together account for 55% of the total global population still offline, because of the sheer size of their populations.

■ As reported recently by Mary Meeker in her annual trends talk, internet growth was 'flat' in 2015 at 9%, and actually slowed globally, if India is excluded. Another study by the Internet Society, in Brazil, has also shown that lack of need, interest and skills are more important in take-up than access and cost.

COMPETITION

AFRICA NEEDS TO 'UNLOCK POTENTIAL'

A World Bank report shows how competition policy can help African countries boost inclusive and sustainable development. 'Breaking down barriers: Unlocking Africa's potential through vigorous competition policy', examines three important sectors: cement, fertilisers and telecoms. It says that African mobile and wireless markets display high concentration. "In 27 countries, one player has more than 50% market share. Monopolies are still present: 11 in international gateway services and six in wireless internet services. Fostering non-distortive state participation, competitive allocation of spectrum, and regulation of termination rates will be important for the region."

See bit.ly/2cg02Op

■ Another World Bank paper quantifies the impact of internet adoption on international trade. See bit.ly/2bxjfe1

COPYRIGHT REFORM MISSES THE MARK?

The European Commission has proposed adapting EU copyright rules to the "realities of the digital single market" by aiming for:

- Better choice and access to content online and across borders
- Improved copyright rules on research, education and inclusion of disabled people
- A fairer and sustainable marketplace for creators, the creative industries and the press.

But pressure group Digital Europe says the reform lacks ambition and misses a vital opportunity to adapt European copyright to the digital age. "The Commission is effectively opting to subsidise rights holders that have failed to embrace the thriving digital sector," it says.

See bit.ly/2cGMH7d and bit.ly/2cg6ntm

EVENTS

10-14 October, Bangkok
IIC Communications Policy and Regulation Week 2016

17-18 October, Costa Rica
Freedom Online Conference

14-17 November, Bangkok
ITU Telecom World 2016

29-30 November, Washington
IIC Telecommunications and Media Forum (TMF)

6-9 December, Guadalajara
Internet Governance Forum

6-9 February 2017, Geneva
Digital Radio Week, EBU

IN BRIEF

SDGs MOBILE APP

Mobile group, GSMA, with the UN and Project Everyone, a non-profit global campaign, have developed 'SDGs in Action', a mobile app for tracking the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals. See: sdgsinaction.com

■ At the ITU's Green Standards Week, the Montevideo Declaration on smart, sustainable cities was issued. See bit.ly/2cTabVK

WU IN THE HOUSE

Tim Wu, the law professor and tech policy expert known for coining the term 'net neutrality', has joined the Obama White House to work on economic competitiveness issues.

A PM 'ON MESSAGE'

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, speaking at the National Day rally, said the 'defining challenge' facing his country is disruption from technology and globalisation. His full remarks are at bit.ly/2c3stUe

BANDING TOGETHER

Industry groups in the US are urging the FCC to release the 1675-1680 MHz band for shared commercial use, and to develop rules for sharing that band with government users and making it available via auction.

DUOPOLY CONCERN

Belgium and the Netherlands have sent a short position paper to the European Commission on regulating oligopolistic markets, as they are concerned that regulators do not have tools for addressing duopolies in the access market. See bit.ly/2cKdHGa