

European Media Policy



A Newsletter from NORDICOM

No.1, 2013 (May)

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Media Freedom and Pluralism

European Press Freedom Model Unravelling?

In January the organisation Reporters Without Borders published its [2013 World Press Freedom Index](#). The report shows that the situation is unchanged for much of the European Union. But the European model is unravelling, says the report.

Sixteen EU members are still in the top 30. The same three European countries that headed the index last year hold the top three positions again this year. For the third year running, Finland has distinguished itself as the country that most respects media freedom. It is followed by the Netherlands and Norway.

However, the bad legislation seen in 2011 continued, especially in Italy (57th, +4), where defamation has yet to be decriminalized and state agencies make dangerous use of gag laws. Hungary (56th, -16) is still paying the price of its repressive legislative reforms, which had a major impact on the way journalists work.

Greece's dramatic fall (84th, -14) is even more disturbing. The social and professional environment for its journalists, who are exposed to public condemnation and violence both from extremist groups and the police, is disastrous, writes Reporters Without Borders

In Eastern Europe, Russia (148th, -6) has fallen again because, since Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency, repression has been stepped up in response to an unprecedented wave of opposition protests. The country also continues to be marked by a failure to punish all those who have murdered or attacked journalists.

EU Parliament Demands Action

Concerned about threats to media freedom in Hungary and a number of other EU countries the European Parliament has repeatedly demanded EU measures. In recent months there have been new calls for action.

In December 2012 the Parliament adopted a [resolution on the situation of fundamental rights](#) in the European Union, in which it says that it "regrets the worsening situation of media freedom in various Member States" and calls on the Member States to respect, and the Commission to take appropriate measures "to monitor and enforce, media freedom and media pluralism".

The MEPs condemn the conditions under which some journalists work and the obstacles they face, and are particularly concerned that "some Member States are tempted to challenge the principle of the protection of journalistic sources and the ability of investigative journalists to investigate circles close to government." The Parliament adds that it "regrets deeply the attitude of the Commission, which refuses to make any legislative proposal to ensure media freedom and pluralism in accordance with Article 11 of the Charter (of Fundamental Rights)".

In February this year the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted an own-initiative report on "The EU Charter: standard settings for media freedom across the EU". A vote in Plenary is scheduled for 23 May.

In the report MEPs stress that the media are a "public watchdog" in a democracy and call on the EU and its member states "to respect and protect the fundamental right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media". Among other measures, MEPs want annual EU-wide

monitoring of media laws and measures, both to protect media freedom and to help prevent excessive media concentration.

This time, however, there are no calls for legal action. “MEPs acknowledge that the EU has the power to take legislative measures to guarantee and protect media freedom, but believe that non-legislative initiatives, such as monitoring, self-regulation and codes of conduct, are preferable, given that some of the most striking threats to media freedom in some member states come from newly-adopted laws”, explains the Civil Liberties Committee in its [press release](#).

The European Parliament is engaged in these matters through other channels too. In February the President of the Parliament, Martin Schultz, was among the first to sign a [European Citizens' Initiative \(ECI\) on media freedom and pluralism](#). (An ECI allows EU citizens to present a legislative proposal directly to the European Commission if they can collect at least one million signatures in at least seven member states). The proposed ECI calls for EU measures to ensure media pluralism. The deadline for reaching one million signatures is 1 November 2013.

EU Does Have Competencies to Ensure Media Pluralism

In the debate about what the EU should do to ensure media freedom and pluralism it is often said that the Union has very limited competencies to act in this field. This is not really true, according to [a recent report on this issue](#) produced at the request of the EU by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF). The [Centre](#) was established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advances Studies, at the European University Institute in 2012 with co-funding from the European Union.

“Even though the EU’s competencies with regard to media pluralism appear to be scattered in the European legal landscape, it is certainly not correct to affirm that the EU has no competencies in this field”, write the researchers, pointing to a number of legal bases in EU texts, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights and various articles in the Union’s Treaties.

The researchers also suggest that policymakers could consider the establishment of independent National Regulatory Authorities to be responsible for media freedom and media pluralism and for cooperation at a European level.

Furthermore, the EU Institutions could ask the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights to monitor the media freedom and pluralism situation in the EU. Moreover, or alternatively, the establishment of a new *ad hoc* Agency for the measurement and safeguarding of media freedom and pluralism and the protection of journalists in the EU could be an efficient soft law instrument, says the report.

Report by High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism

In October 2011 the European Commission convened a High Level Group to advise and provide recommendations for the promotion of media freedom and pluralism in Europe. In January this year the Group issued its [report](#).

Some quotes from the Group's recommendations:

“The EU should be considered competent to act to protect media freedom and pluralism at State level in order to guarantee the substance of the rights granted by the Treaties to EU citizens...”

“European and national competition authorities should take into account the specific value of media pluralism in the enforcement of competition rules. They should also take into account the increasing merging of different channels of communication and media access in the

definition of the relevant markets.”

“To reinforce European values of freedom and pluralism, the EU should designate, in the work programme and funding of the European fundamental rights agency, a monitoring role of national-level freedom and pluralism of the media.”

“All EU countries should have independent media councils with a politically and culturally balanced and socially diverse membership. .. Media councils should have real enforcement powers, such as the imposition of fines...(and) follow a set of European-wide standards and be monitored by the Commission to ensure that they comply with European values.”

“All EU countries should have enshrined in their legislation the principle of protection of journalistic sources, restrictions to this principle only being acceptable on the basis of a court order, compatible with the constitution of that country. ”

Some of the Group's recommendations have not gone down very well with certain stakeholders. The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) has criticised the proposal to grant more power to media councils to impose fines on journalists and media organisations, saying it could threaten press freedom. The EFJ also questioned the proposal that the Commission monitor media councils.

The European Publishers Council (EPC), too, has said it “will oppose the idea that the European Commission should regulate 'independent' national media councils”.

EFJ:

Journalists' Precarious Work Conditions Affect Press Freedom

To mark World Press Freedom Day, 3 May, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) underlined the need to promote journalism as a public good in an age of austerity, media restructuring and the unprecedented commercialisation of journalism.

The EFJ is alarmed by the growing precariousness of journalists, especially young men and women, which threatens professional standards, economic independence and their ability to respect standards of press freedom and pluralism.

“You can’t get free media and quality news if you neglect the professionals who need to report, investigate and inform the public” said EFJ President Arne König.

Media – general

EU-US Trade Deal – a new ACTA?

In February the EU and the United States decided to launch negotiations for a comprehensive trade and investment agreement, called the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP. This could create new business opportunities worth hundreds of billions of euros, which would in turn support hundreds of thousands of new jobs on both sides of the Atlantic, explains the Commission.

Once the EU Council of Ministers has approved its negotiating mandate the European Commission can start free trade talks with the US. Which areas the agreement should cover is currently a hotly disputed issue. Film people and civil society groups are among those wary of the new trade deal. “ It sounds like ACTA (the controversial Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement)”, some have said.

The TTIP will focus much on aligning rules and technical product standards. "The regulatory area is where the highest potential benefit lies with these trade negotiations", explains the EU Commission. This has brought fierce calls from many organisations representing the audiovisual sector – supported by France - to protect the European "cultural exception" and exempt the cultural industries from the trade talks.

Speaking in the European Parliament in March, EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht assured that member states could continue to support their cultural industries and the audiovisual sector in particular, "such as through broadcasting quotas or subsidies, as foreseen in the current EU directives".

In April Cinema organisations [called](#) on De Gucht to guarantee this formally in the negotiating mandate, reminding him that the European Commission "will need the unanimous support of the Council to be able to approve the negotiating mandate", a reminder of French President Francois Hollande's demand that this area be excluded from the negotiations.

Another controversial area of the trade talks is intellectual property rights (IPRs). In March more than 35 European and US civil society organisations issued [a declaration](#) asking for the exclusion of all forms of intellectual property rights from the upcoming trade agreement and that all negotiating or pre-negotiation texts be released. (Many of these organisations were among those that led massive protests against anti-piracy legislation in the United States called SOPA and PIPA which was defeated.)

The European Parliament is not formally involved in deciding the negotiating mandate for the trade deal. However, the issue has been discussed in the Parliament's International Trade Committee (INTA), which adopted a resolution on 25 April recommending the EU Council to authorize the start of the trade talks with the US in June.

The text includes an amendment calling for the exclusion of cultural and audiovisual services, also those on-line, from the negotiating mandate. The amendment was narrowly carried by 14 votes to 11, with 5 abstentions. Furthermore the resolution demands strong protection in "clearly defined areas of intellectual property rights" and a "high level of protection of personal data".

The text also calls on the European Commission to talk to the widest possible range of stakeholders, so that various interests can be taken into account. [Read more](#)

MEP Vital Moreira, who is responsible for the resolution and is also the INTA Committee's chairman, believes that the amendment regarding cultural and audiovisual services will be reversed when the Parliament takes its final vote on the declaration (scheduled for 22 May).

The EU member states' Trade Ministers are expected to authorize the Commission to start the talks in June.

Time to Update Audiovisual Media Services Directive?

The EU Commission has issued a [Green Paper](#) to open a broad, public discussion on the implications of the on-going transformation of the audiovisual media landscape. The consultation does not presuppose any specific outcome. Nonetheless, in the medium to long term it may have an impact on a number of legal instruments, including the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), says the Commission.

The Green Paper invites stakeholders and the wider public to share their views before the end of August 2013, on issues such as:

- Fostering the right conditions for dynamic EU businesses to deal with international (especially US) competition; especially given that competing players may be subject to different rules;
- Protecting European values (including media freedom) and user interests (e.g. protecting children). Do people expect higher protection for TV programmes than for internet content; and where is the line to be drawn?
- Single market and standards. How to promote the right technological environment?
- Financing. How will convergence and changing consumer behaviour influence how films, TV shows and other content is financed? How are different actors in the new value-chain contributing?
- Openness and media pluralism. Are the existing practices relating to premium content – for example, major sport events and successful recently released films - affecting market access and sustainable business operations? Are platforms sufficiently open?

In [a Memo](#) on the Green Paper the Commission highlights several rules in the Audiovisual Directive which may be outdated, such as the “quotas” for European works, the directive not applying to content delivered over the internet from countries outside the EU and different rules applying to linear (TV broadcasts) and non-linear (on-demand) services, including on advertising.

These and related issues are already being discussed in the European Parliament in connection with two forthcoming Parliamentary reports, one on the Implementation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the other on Connected TV.

Google Anti-Trust Investigation: Calls for Feedback on Google's Commitments

The European Commission has been investigating a number of complaints against Google's business practices and has reached the preliminary conclusion that Google may be abusing its dominant position in four areas. Google has recently made proposals to try to address the Commission's concerns. Interested parties are now invited to submit their comments to Google's commitments within a month (by 26 May).

Among the Commission's worries is the favourable treatment, within Google's web search results, of links to Google's own specialised web search services; the use by Google without consent of original content from third party web sites in its own specialised web search services; and agreements that oblige third party web sites (“publishers”) to obtain all or most of their online search advertisements from Google.

To address these concerns, Google offers, for example, for a period of 5 years, to label promoted links to its own specialised search services so that users can distinguish them from natural web search results; offer all websites the option to opt-out from the use of all their content in Google's specialised search services; and provide newspaper publishers with a mechanism allowing them to control on a web page per web page basis the display of their content in Google News.

If, following the market test, the commitments proposed by Google provide a satisfactory solution to the Commission's competition concerns, the Commission may adopt a decision to make them legally binding on Google. If a company breaks such commitments, the Commission can impose a fine of up to 10% of its annual worldwide turnover without having to find an infringement of the EU antitrust rules. [Read more](#)

Copyright

Much Criticism of Licenses for Europe Dialogue

The European Commission wants to ensure that copyright and licensing stay fit for purpose in the new digital context. In order to discuss these issues the Commission recently launched a “structured stakeholder dialogue” called [Licenses for Europe](#), whose main purpose is “to seek to deliver rapid progress in bringing content online through practical industry-led solutions”.

In recent months important stakeholder groups have voiced much criticism about this dialogue, not least with regard to its limited scope.

In February the European Consumers' Organisation BEUC wrote a [letter to EU Commissioner Barnier](#) informing him of the organisation's decision to step aside from the Licensing for Europe stakeholder dialogue. “Our principal reason is our concern that the framing of the dialogue and its limited scope will not allow stakeholders to constructively discuss the real problems consumers face with regards to creative content and thereby achieve concrete results”, it said.

“We consider the scope of the dialogue to be too narrow and limited to exploring industry-driven solutions within the existing legal framework...The real problems are due to a legal framework which has failed to keep pace with reality and the development of digital technologies. Licensing and technology cannot be the only solution. Reform of the copyright framework, including the Copyright Directive 2001/29 is urgently needed. The two issues cannot be addressed separately. ”

Similar complaints were expressed in a [letter to the EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso](#) the following day from a number of groups representing libraries, scientific and research institutions, consumers, digital rights groups, technology businesses, educational institutions and creators' representatives.

However, a month later not much seems to have changed judging by [a blog post](#) by the IP Policy Committee of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TADC). “We are continuously reminded that we should not speak of anything that is “outside the current legal framework..Whenever anyone speaks of fair use, exceptions or the non-applicability of copyright, he or she is called to order by the chair.”

Similar views were again expressed the following day in [a joint letter](#) to the relevant EU Commissioners from the European Digital Rights organisation EDRI and EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations), in which they strongly urge the Commission to broaden the scope of the discussion.

Private Copying Levies: Mixed Response to Mediator's Recommendations

At the end of January the mediation process on the controversial issue of private copying levies concluded with the mediator, former European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs António Vitorino, presenting his [Recommendations](#). Views on this issue, however, still seem to differ considerably.

Among Vitorino's recommendations were to collect levies in cross-border transactions in the Member State in which the final customer resides, and to shift the liability to pay levies from manufacturers and importers to retailers.

European organisations of authors, performers and producers – among them the Society of Audiovisual Authors (SAA) – were in no way pleased with the recommendations. “We strongly

disagree with the main orientations recommended by Mr Vitorino...Our main concern is that licensing is seen as a way of eradicating private copying levies, which is contrary to the model applied today in most EU countries where both systems are complementary", said the organisations in a joint rightholders' statement. [Read more \(see 6 February\)](#).

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), however, [seemed happy](#) with Mr Vitorino's report. In particular his pointing out that authors and performers suffer from a lack of bargaining power and his recommendation to introduce mandatory rules in copyright contract law or labour law to ensure authors and performers receive an adequate share of income generated from their works.

Mr. Vitorino's mediation does not seem to have helped much. He says that stakeholders were not able to bring their views closer on the most contentious issues and that drawing the divergent positions closer "will ultimately depend on the willingness of all stakeholders to commit themselves to finding workable compromise solutions", adding that discussions with Member States may be needed to find a sustainable and future-proof solution to the problems.

Privacy/Data Protection

Data Protection Reform: Thousands of Amendments in Parliament

The Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE) of the European Parliament - which is leading the Parliament's work on the [reform of EU data protection rules](#) - has not been idle in recent months. Two draft reports on this important and controversial legislative reform have been presented and now the MEPs are busy with the unenviable task of ploughing through the nearly 4000 amendments submitted. All under the onslaught of hordes of lobbyists.

In their draft reports, MEP Jan-Philipp Albrecht, rapporteur for the proposed Data Protection Regulation, and MEP Dimitrios Droutsas, rapporteur for the proposed Data Protection Directive for the law enforcement sector, stress the importance of users' rights and propose strengthening the concept of explicit consent for data. The Albrecht report furthermore calls on further reinforcing the "right to be forgotten" (the right to erase one's data if there are no legitimate grounds to retain it).

The importance of this right was also emphasised at the informal Justice Council meeting in January where ministers discussed the data protection reform.

Similar thoughts were expressed in March in the European Parliament's Legal Committee's Opinion on the data protection package. The "right to be forgotten", explicit consent before a person's data is collected and a ban on profiling on the basis of ethnic, religious or sexual orientation criteria are among the committee's main demands. [Read more](#)

Three other committees have adopted opinions on the data reform. The lead committee LIBE is scheduled to vote on the regulation as well as the directive at its meeting of 29-30 May. (All relevant Parliament documents can be found [here](#)).

On 17 September the data protection reform will be discussed at the [4th Annual European Data Protection and Privacy Conference](#) in Brussels. Among the confirmed speakers are two key policymakers: EU Commissioner Viviane Reding, who is responsible for the Commission proposals, and the Parliament's rapporteur for the General Data Protection Regulation, Jan-Phillip Albrecht.

What will the new data protection rules mean for the future shape of the European digital landscape? How can industry and governments prepare for the practical implementation of the

reforms? How best to ensure the interoperability of the new EU rules with privacy frameworks worldwide? are some of the questions to be discussed at the conference.

MEPs Warned Against Pressure from Industry

Since the reform of the EU's legal framework on data protection was proposed last year there has been an unprecedented level of lobbying in Brussels. In recent months the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), academics and various civil society organisations have warned the legislators not to be taken in by the lobbyists' arguments and have presented alternative views.

In March the EDPS, Peter Hustinx, warned the legislators "to guard against undue pressure from industry to lower the level of data protection that currently exists, and instead to seize the opportunity to offer stronger and more effective protection to citizens across the EU."

Commenting on various amendments proposed in Parliament the EDPS, for example, urged that the definition of explicit consent be maintained "as one of the cornerstones of the data protection framework" and stressed that pseudonymised data remains personal data and as such should be protected. [Read more](#)

The same month more than 100 leading European academics from disciplines such as Computer Science, Law, Economics and Business Administration brought forward some professional arguments "to contribute a more objective perspective to this heated debate".

In their [joint position](#) the academics reply to some arguments presented by lobbyists which they consider erroneous, for example that innovation and competition would be threatened by the new rules. They also argue that an opt-out principle is not enough - "explicit informed consent is indispensable" - and that the "legitimate interest" not only of companies but also of citizens should be respected.

At the end of April the European Consumer Organisation BEUC, too, commented on recurrent issues in the data reform debate, regretting, i.a., that a number of amendments have suggested making pseudonymisation a sufficient reason to make data processing legitimate. "We should ...endeavour to continue defend our standards against the proliferation of new (and not so new) business models based primarily on the (mis)use of our personal data", [said BEUC](#).

The following day a coalition of civil rights groups warned against "dangerous" amendments to the EU Commission's data protection proposals being considered in the European Parliament. The coalition issued a [report](#) written by members of the organisation European Digital Rights (EDRI) which highlights five problematic areas, for example the weakening of the definition of consent.

Sweden, US Concerned about New Data Protection Rules

Some governments, too, seem concerned about certain aspects of the EU data protection reform.

The main proposal is a regulation, which means that the new rules, once adopted, will apply directly in all member states without adaptation to national legislation. This has caused some concern in Sweden's Ministry of Justice about its possible effect on the right of access to official documents, which is considered a cornerstone of the Swedish constitution.

The EU Commission has said that the regulation does not prevent public access to documents and that it is seeking to resolve any outstanding issue with Sweden's Justice Minister Beatrice

Ask, reports EUobserver.

The United States has other types of concerns. The EU data protection reform has sparked much lobbying by American business groups and on 18 April the first formal US government consultation with the EU executive took place in Brussels.

After the meeting Ms Julie Brill, a senior official from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) – which is the US data privacy regulator and policymaker - told journalists that one of the reasons for her visit was to counter the impression of a lack of understanding about how robust the US [privacy] regime actually is. “We at the FTC share many of the same goals that are embedded in the proposed [EU] regulation,” Brill said but also alluded some differences of opinion.

One concern, for example, relates to enforceable codes of conduct. Brill said that the FTC had a lot of experience with the operation of such codes, and believed that voluntary schemes supervised by delegated authorities could be more effective than a more prescriptive legal approach.

Whatever the official line, views on privacy issues do differ in the United States and in Europe. Judging by [a recent article in the New York Times](#), however, attitudes seem to be starting to change in the US.

“In Europe, where press freedoms are less sacred and the right to privacy is more ensconced, the idea has taken hold that individuals have a “right to be forgotten” ...I sense that the idea is gaining traction here. Erasure laws seem to be proliferating”, writes the columnist Bill Keller describing growing demands from people wanting to erase old data about themselves remaining on the internet.

EDPS:

Data Protection Must Be Integral Part of EU Policy-Making

In January the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), Peter Hustinx presented a report outlining his strategy for 2013-2014. Among his priorities is “ to build awareness of data protection as a fundamental right and as a vital part of good public policy and administration for EU institutions”.

The EDPS wants to ensure that data protection will be an integral part of policy-making and legislation, in all areas where the EU has competence. In particular, he has identified activities that emphasise the accountability of policy makers and data controllers and activities that build on the crucial role of Data Protection Officers (DPOs). [Read more](#)

Telecom/Infrastructure

Calls for Action to Ensure Net Neutrality

In recent years the issue of net neutrality has been much discussed in Europe and many have called for EU measures to ensure it. The Commission has launched several public consultations on the issue but no concrete policy measures have materialized, which seems to frustrate advocacy groups as well the European Parliament.

In a [resolution on completing the digital single market](#) adopted in December 2012 the

Parliament “calls on the Commission to propose legislation to ensure net neutrality”. It reiterates its support for “an open internet where content and individual commercial services cannot be blocked”, emphasising that “the lack of net neutrality hurts businesses, consumers and society as a whole.” The Parliament considers that “additional measures are needed to ensure net neutrality” .

In January this year the issue was brought up again in the [report of the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism](#) convened by the EU Commission. “An open and non-discriminatory access to information by all citizens must be protected in the online sphere, if necessary by making use of competition law and/or enforcing a principle of network and net neutrality”, stresses the Group.

Now the Commission is preparing Recommendations on this issue. The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) and European Digital Rights (EDRi) however fear that the upcoming non-binding Recommendations on net neutrality will be based on “meaningless safeguards such as the possibility to switch operators and an obligation for each operator to have at least one full internet offer.”

“...the fact that operators are fully transparent about their discriminatory practices so end-users can switch to what interests them the most does not solve the problem. A choice between the lesser of two evils is not a choice that European citizens should face”. Nor will it help European innovators seeking to develop online services,” as it is of no use to them whatsoever to know that their services are being blocked or throttled in a transparent way or that users can easily switch suppliers. Investors will simply see a smaller marketplace for their services, point out the organisations in a [letter](#) sent to the European Commission in April.

What is needed, among other things, is clarity on which types of traffic management are legitimate and under what circumstances, say BEUC and EDRi.

Cybersecurity Top Priority

An issue increasingly focused upon by policymakers is cybersecurity. “Growing cyber-security threats and higher vulnerability of networks and systems may hinder the benefits brought about by the Internet... If we want to preserve and promote the benefits of the digital world, we must put cyber security on the top of the agenda”, stressed EU Commissioner for the Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes at a conference in November 2012.

Protection of cybersecurity may, however, have an impact on fundamental rights. At the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) in December 2012 such issues were discussed. “...there were continuing concerns over the vague language used in Article 5A in relation to 'network security', which was seen by many as legitimising censorship and sweeping surveillance practices by Member States”, reported European Digital Rights, which represents 32 privacy and civil rights organisations.

In early February this year the European Commission, together with the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, published a cybersecurity strategy and proposed a directive on network and information security (NIS).

According to the strategy paper, “cybersecurity can only be sound and effective if it is based on fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and EU core values”.

The Commission and the High Representative promise to “support the promotion and protection of fundamental rights, including access to information and freedom of expression” in cooperation with the EU member states. Whether such promises will be kept remains to be seen.

On May 21-23 these type of issues will be discussed at the [Stockholm Internet Forum](#). Among

the topics of discussion: Reconciling freedom and security in cyberspace and Global security and human rights in the internet age.

Commission Proposes Rules to Cut Broadband Installation Costs

In March the European Commission proposed new rules to cut by 30% the cost of installing high-speed Internet. Civil engineering, such as the digging up of roads to lay down fibre, accounts for up to 80% of the cost of deploying high-speed networks. This proposal may save companies €40 to 60 billion, says the Commission.

The construction in Europe of fibre networks lags far behind Asia and some parts of the United States, which worries policymakers who see the infrastructure as a key motor for economic growth. Neelie Kroes, EU Commissioner for the Digital Agenda, earlier proposed ambitious EU funding for broadband rollouts, but EU budget cuts hammered out in February cut such funding for rural projects to just €1 billion from €9.2 billion.

The [draft regulation](#) proposed in March aims to make broadband installation cheaper by tackling four main problem areas: Ensuring that new or renovated buildings are high-speed-broadband-ready; opening access to infrastructure on fair and reasonable terms and conditions; ending insufficient coordination of civil works; and simplifying complex and time-consuming permit granting.

The Rules would become directly applicable across the EU after adoption by the European Parliament and Council. [Read more](#)

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The Newsletter provides an up-date on policy developments at the European level. We concentrate on news from the European Union – current issues and trends in media policy, new proposals for legislation, debates in the European Parliament, recently taken or impending policy decisions and reactions among those concerned, new support programmes, EU studies in the field etc. There will also be some coverage of policy developments in the Council of Europe and at the international level. The newsletter will be published twice a year.