



Comments from Bouygues Telecom to the RSPG public consultation on the « draft RSPG second opinion on 5G networks »

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Bouygues Telecom welcomes the opportunity to respond to the RSPG public consultation on the “draft RSPG second opinion on 5G networks”. Spectrum availability is key for the 5G promises to materialize and this draft opinion provides valuable considerations for policy makers to decide on the authorization framework.

Technology neutrality and coverage obligations

As an owner of spectrum licenses, we are committed to the principle of technology neutrality which is a key component of the regulatory framework for electronic communications in the European Union. Within the framework of technology neutrality regulators can set obligations to achieve policy objectives while leaving the licensee the possibility to choose which technology or set of technologies is the most suitable to address those obligations. In its draft version, the RSPG opinion refers to 5G-specific coverage obligations which could be interpreted as contradicting the principle of technology neutrality. While recognizing the importance of policy objectives to enhance coverage, we consider that the RSPG opinion should clarify that 5G coverage obligations refers to coverage obligations for services with higher performance requirements than today and that the obligations can be fulfilled using any technology. In particular, we don't think it is appropriate to mention the possible need to consider “regulatory intervention” to force the migration to 5G for countries where all the medium term sub-1GHz spectrum for ECS has already been awarded (page 16 of the draft opinion). The spectrum has been awarded following the technology neutrality principle with specific performance requirements and any technology restriction would be to the detriment of the predictability which is however vital for the mobile operators to invest and deploy networks.

Bouygues Telecom can confirm that “4G LTE and its evolutions will continue to develop in parallel to 5G deployments” as suggested in annex 1 (page 7). In rural areas, significant investments are being made to further deploy the LTE technology and the site configurations would allow to cope with an increase of the traffic or a modification of the usages without necessarily requiring a migration to a new technology. Especially in the sub-1GHz spectrum, the migration to 5G in the less dense areas may only be required in the mid-term when the usages will have significantly changed. Indeed, the improvement of 5G over 4G in sub-1GHz spectrum may be limited due to the narrow bandwidths and this limited improvement may not be needed in less dense areas in the short term. For example, considering the massive machine type communications (mMTC) use case, which will come after the enhanced mobile broadband (eMBB) use case, a sudden increase in the density of connected things in rural areas that could not be addressed by the current technologies (e.g. LTE NB-IoT) in the mid-term is unlikely.

We propose the following amendments to the point 2 of the draft RSPG opinion main body in order to (1) mention the technology neutrality principle (2) clearly state that the needs are not the same in all areas (3) clearly state that the 5G networks won't be homogeneous (already mentioned in the annex page 7):

2. The RSPG is of the opinion that the Commission, together with Member States, should take actions to fully support 5G related policy objectives in rural areas and wide coverage, taking into account (1) the principle of technology neutrality (2) the less stringent needs in rural areas because of a lower population density and therefore the absence of needs for homogeneous 5G networks (3) the role of satellite in achieving ubiquitous connectivity.

Spectrum availability

Thanks to the first RSPG Opinion on 5G, the band 3.6GHz has clearly been identified as the primary band for 5G in Europe. There is now a need for a strong message to Member States for them to engage in the clearance the band so that there can be an assignment of 100MHz per operator. This band is indeed a strong asset for Europe compared to other regions where less spectrum could be made available for 5G below 6GHz. The 5G promises, such as a significant improvement of the quality of service and the capability to enable ultra-reliable low latency communications, will only materialize if there is sufficient spectrum available in this range and if the spectrum is available in due time. The stakeholders would adequately be able to plan their investments may the Member States be required to produce a roadmap for the 5G spectrum availability by July 2018.

We propose to have the eighth point of the draft (addressing the need for defragmentation of the 3.6GHz band) moved first to clearly reflect that the spectrum availability in the primary 5G band is the biggest challenge, coming before the definition of licence conditions.

Backhauling

The 26GHz band is highly used in many Member States for the backhauling of mobile networks. The number of links in this band has significantly increased since 2010. It can't be expected that all these links can be moved to another band within few years. Therefore, there is a need to consider that the availability of the band for 5G services will be progressive or even that some portions of the band won't be available for 5G in the mid-term in order to keep some channels for the fixed links, at least at some locations. There will not always be a case for the migration from fixed link to fibre, either for economical or technical reasons and this migration would take several years.

We propose to clarify in the fifth bullet point of point 9 that Member States could decide on a continuing operation of fixed links in this band.

- Regulatory flexibility for the progressive release of the 26 GHz band will facilitate an efficient introduction of 5G without having an unnecessary negative impact on the current users of the band. Member States should ~~plan any migration of fixed links necessary for ensuring the availability of~~ make the band available for 5G, taking into account (1) the possible need to maintain some spectrum available for fixed links (2) the necessary time to migrate the fixed links if no spectrum is maintained available for them in the band (3) the geographical dimension of the market demand for 5G.