

GROUPE CANAL+ COMMENTS ON RSPG DRAFT OPINION ON THE INTRODUCTION OF MULTIMEDIA SERVICES

A consultation was launched by the Radio Spectrum Policy Group on 15 May 2006 regarding a draft opinion on the introduction of multimedia services in particular in the frequency bands allocated to the broadcasting services.

Groupe CANAL+ is pleased to be given the opportunity to comment on the draft opinion of the RSPG.

The concept of multimedia services as dealt with by the RSPG draft opinion covers "the coming together of the traditional broadcasting (point to area coverage) and communication services (one to one) in a mobile environment". The principal question dealt with by the draft opinion concerns the use of the digital dividend for applications of multimedia services as a direct consequence of the switchover to digital broadcasting.

The draft opinion analyses the technical, practical and regulatory issues that arise in relation to the launch of multimedia services in the spectrum bands from 174 MHz to 2.69GHz.

Groupe CANAL+ has already launched a number of services which could be considered to fall within the definition of multimedia services, and has been involved in commercial tests of DVB-H services. Consequently, Groupe CANAL+ is well placed to provide the RSPG with some conclusions and reflections in respect of multimedia services and their successful introduction into the market, with a view to ensuring the achievement of the Lisbon agenda to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy with improved employment and social cohesion by 2010, and the i2010 initiative, which views spectrum as an important area.

Groupe CANAL+ considers that several criteria have to be taken into account to select a frequency band and a technology to launch multimedia services: standardization of the technology, short-term availability of commercial products (platforms & terminals), and availability of a minimum amount of frequencies to enable the largest service offer.

According to these criteria, DVB-H in UHF bands IV/V (470-862 MHz) seems to be the best choice to launch multimedia services in France before the analogue switch-off.

This is illustrated by the following points :

- Frequencies have been found in UHF bands IV/V to operate a multimedia service in most major French cities besides analogue and digital broadcast terrestrial TV services.
- DVB-H was conceived to be used in UHF bands IV/V without impacting broadcast TV services (same channel bandwidth; frequency independent) and its good spectral efficiency allows the broadcast of more services than with other technologies.
- DVB-H technology is now mature and commercial solutions are already available. The DVB-H standard was published end 2004, and selected by ETSI as a European standard for Mobile TV.

Moreover, DVB-H in UHF bands IV/V also seems to be a good choice to launch multimedia services in Europe before the analogue switch-off :

- In Italy, TIM (with Mediaset) and 3 Italia are currently in the last step before the commercial launch of DVB-H services in UHF bands IV/V.
- In Finland, Digita has been granted a DVB-H licence in UHF bands IV/V.
- In Germany, the Hamburg Institute for New Media recently launched a call for proposals to operate a DVB-H service in UHF bands IV/V.

Finally, additional frequencies will become available in UHF bands IV/V after the analogue switch-off, enabling further roll-outs of DVB-H multimedia services.

However, there might be cases where frequencies cannot be found in UHF bands IV/V for DVB-H. In such cases, other technologies and/or frequency bands have to be studied. In particular, CANAL+ Group has been assessing other scenarios with respect to the maturity of the technology and the availability of spectrum.

- VHF band III (174-230 MHz)
 - This band does not seem adapted for multimedia services. Indeed, physics limitations would require the use of external antennae in mobile devices. This risks creating frustration from end users and impacting product acceptance by consumers since all mobile phones now use integrated antennae.
 - Moreover, the DVB-H standard would require adaptations in order to function in this frequency band.
- L band (1452-1479,5 MHz)
 - The use of this band for multimedia services would require an evolution of the current regulatory framework (Maastricht Special Arrangement), as well as coordination with other actors already using this frequency band (Worldspace).
 - Moreover, the DVB-H standard would need to be adapted in order to function in this frequency band.
- Other bands (1479,5-1492 MHz, 1980-2010 MHz and 2170-2200 MHz)
 - These bands might be appropriate for new hybrid satellite/terrestrial mobile TV systems.
 - However the corresponding technologies are not ready yet. Standardization efforts are being conducted within the DVB (sub-group DVB-SSP).
 - Moreover, the regulatory framework remains complex, seeming unlikely to provide operators with the requisite legal certainty for the launch of such new services.

CONCLUSION

Groupe CANAL+ agrees with the draft opinion that "any European action to enable the development of multimedia services must be taken in a way that does not distort the use of spectrum as a whole, promotes and does not distort competition, encourages innovation and maximises benefits across the European Union. At the same time it is important that Member States are still able to pursue goals such as ensuring cultural diversity and media pluralism".

However, as indicated above the most appropriate solution for the introduction of multimedia services appears to lie in the UHF bands IV/V, and the RSPG's suggestion that a minimum amount of spectrum should be reserved for the provision of multimedia services in bands 174 – 230 MHz and 470 – 862 MHz should be reviewed in the light of these comments.