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RADIO SPECTRUM POLICY GROUP

Opinion

On the targeted consultation on the 2030 Digital Compass

1. Introduction

The Radio Spectrum Policy Group (RSPG) gathers high-level governmental experts of EU Member States. The RSPG provides the European Commission, Parliament and the Council with strategic advice on high-level policy matters in relation to spectrum and a forum for a fruitful exchange on effective and efficient management and use of radio spectrum.

Since 2003 the RSPG has provided timely and relevant advice on strategic policy issues to policymakers supporting implementation of EU policy in order to reap the full potential of spectrum for the sustainable development of Europe's economy and society. The RSPG is standing on a solid base of cooperation between the national experts on spectrum policy, management, harmonisation and licensing. The RSPG triggers spectrum harmonisation initiatives and develops spectrum policy further to interactions with relevant stakeholders (through workshops, public consultation, etc.).

Europe is today facing COVID-19, a societal and economic challenge of unprecedented scale. Connectivity and technological advance are cornerstones of economic recovery. The challenges in spectrum policy have shifted over time but the need for clear long-term spectrum policy direction is as valid as ever. Efficient use of radio spectrum supporting EU policies while maximising societal value is the overarching target.

This Opinion represents the RSPG's input to the European Commission's targeted consultation on the 2030 Digital Compass issued on June 22, 2021, in relation to spectrum matters. In order to give relevant support to the further process, the RSPG here provides input and context for some issues in the questionnaire that are at the heart of the RSPG.

The RSPG is ready to respond to any request from the European Commission, Parliament and the Council based on the further elaboration on these topics. The RSPG is currently engaged in drafting its work program for 2022-23 with Member States and the Commission. This work program will be submitted for public consultation in autumn of 2021. In particular, it may address strategic spectrum issues for 6G and any issues to support EU public policies such as the Digital Decade 2030 as appropriate. The RSPG is ready to further engage with stakeholders on strategic spectrum issues through public consultations and workshops or other means that are fit for purpose.

In this Opinion the RSPG elaborates on potential actions relating to the topics of spectrum roadmaps and initiatives, spectrum management and availability and of support mechanisms for spectrum awards. These issues are partly addressed in questions 18, 52 and 53 and in a few other questions in the ongoing consultation.

2. Spectrum Roadmaps and Initiatives

Radio spectrum is an extremely valuable natural resource that has unique properties. It is indestructible, limited, non-movable, political and universal. It requires European and often global harmonisation even though its use is often very local.

The RSPG fully agrees that radio spectrum is a key enabler of the Digital Decade 2030 targets. For example, to reach universal broadband coverage, digital transformation, CO₂-footprint reduction or efficient transportation, spectrum is a key asset.

The RSPG strongly supports the development of long-term roadmaps for spectrum harmonisation in the Union, which can also serve as tools to facilitate European leadership in spectrum.

The RSPG recently published recommendations on long term European radio spectrum policy on strategies for spectrum sharing, and on spectrum needs for future wireless broadband networks and other domains supporting EU public policies. These deliverables¹ should form the basis for future roadmaps or initiatives.

The RSPG has wide experience of developing strategic spectrum roadmaps and initiatives supporting EU policies². This process should be replicated when considering any spectrum initiatives supporting the Digital Decade 2030 targets.

This process involving RSPG, which paved the way for successful 5G spectrum harmonisation and availability in Europe, based on a first 5G deliverable³ identifying spectrum bands and other deliverables supporting the implementation in Europe, should be thoroughly considered for any future roadmaps or other initiatives.

The success of the European Union 5G roadmap, based on three RSPG⁴ deliverables has had global reach and has laid a sound foundation for the developments we now see, both within the EU and around the world. In particular the latter proves that the current processes put the EU in the world leadership. Potential future spectrum roadmaps could include RSPG recommendations on 6G spectrum, sub-700 MHz developments, spectrum sharing, enabling innovation and cross border initiatives (e.g. verticals, multi-country coordination, etc.). Further to this, a Terahertz strategy could be developed on EU level.

Further to any EU strategic action plans, implementation paths through EC mandates to CEPT for spectrum harmonisation and to ETSI on standardisation continue to be appropriate. In addition, the current EU framework includes provisions⁵ to ensure timely availability of harmonised spectrum which is important to stimulate trials, innovation and meeting market demand.

Stakeholders' support for the solid European spectrum governance model is strong. This has recently been confirmed by stakeholders during the public consultation on the RSPG radio spectrum policy deliverable⁶.

¹ RSPG21-033, RSPG21-022, RSPG21-024, RSPG21-031

² <https://rspg-spectrum.eu/rspg-opinions-main-deliverables/>

³ RSPG16-032

⁴ RSPG16-032, RSPG18-005, RSPG19-007

⁵ Article 53 & 54 Directive (EU) 2018/1972

⁶ <https://rspg-spectrum.eu/public-consultations/>

This European spectrum governance model is a key pillar for European Spectrum harmonisation, triggered by the RSPG in a leading role in coordination and cooperation between Member States.

3. Support Mechanisms for Spectrum Awards

Member States collaboration, cooperation on authorisations and awards, on cross-border coordination and handling of delicate bilateral and multilateral policy issues in the spectrum domain is one of the founding principles of the RSPG.

The RSPG is ready to lead and support any relevant Digital Decade 2030 target initiatives as appropriate, addressed by an active cooperation process on spectrum awards and authorisations between Member States and through stakeholder interactions via workshops and other relevant fora.

Since 2003, the RSPG has engaged in active and fruitful Member State cooperation on awards of harmonised spectrum. Parts of this has now been implemented in legislations⁷. The RSPG intends to publish its first report on Peer Review early 2022.

Further to the adoption of the Connectivity Toolbox in response to the EC recommendation⁸, EU Member States are engaged in the implementation of national roadmaps⁹.

A well-established co-operative process between Member States is key to implementing harmonised spectrum at national borders and, if needed, to solve difficult negotiations regarding cross-border issues as part of spectrum management. For example, the RSPG work on coordination and initiatives supporting the 700 MHz spectrum clearance and migration of broadcasting service below 694 MHz can be seen as a role model. It demonstrates that cooperation and coordination work very well.

RSPG is engaged in active cooperation with BEREC on Peer Review, EMF and network issues.

Mechanisms to assist national authorities in undertaking the authorisation process could be developed by RSPG and other bodies such as BEREC.

However, the informal and very voluntary dimension of sharing of experiences, lessons learned, successes and failures between Member States as peers remains as important as ever.

⁷ Art 35 Directive (EU) 2018/1972

⁸ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/connectivity-toolbox-member-states-agree-best-practices-boost-timely-deployment-5g-and-fibre>

⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/items/710991>