

TV would make better use of spectrum than mobiles - study

Radio broadcasters publish a study opposing a new allocation of frequencies to mobiles, at a time when the EU must specify its position

By Nathalie Steiwer • 04 November 2014 Last updated 14:31



Terrestrial television would produce four times as much value as mobile operators with the same radio frequencies, claims a [study](#) by Aetha Consulting Limited commissioned by radio broadcasters. The argument is timely, just as decisions are about to be taken regarding the division of frequency bands between radio broadcasters and mobile operators (see box).

According to this study, the allocation of frequencies below the 700 MHz band to terrestrial television would represent a value of €38 billion compared with €10 billion for allocation to mobiles.

This approximate analysis takes into account the cost of technical migration from terrestrial television to the internet with changes of equipment in all households and the duplication of transmission platforms.

This transition would be all the more counterproductive, consider analysts, given that terrestrial television remains a very economical means of broadcasting content to more than 250 million viewers. It also remains the principal media for watching “live” programmes, in particular sport: in the United Kingdom, six out of ten programmes watched in 2013 were live transmissions.

The challenge posed by this study is clear: to gather votes in order for the European Union to defend the rights of radio broadcasters on the 470-694 MHz band during the next World Radio Communication Conference (see box).

The future decision of the WRC would not be binding, but “it represents a strong signal for future investment in terrestrial television,” commented Jean-Pierre Faisant, Communications Group president for Broadcast Network Europe. For the time being, “the mobile industry itself has not yet inscribed mobile television services in these standardisation priorities,” he remarked.

The arrival of Günther Oettinger as commissioner for the digital economy brings a glimmer of hope to radio broadcasters. “He said during his hearing that he supported the conclusions of the Lamy report on frequencies, which is already positive in itself,” remarked Ludovico Benvenuti BNE member. Besides his political experience, Oettinger is also quite close to radio broadcasters. “We hope that he will consider the content industry as a pillar of digital development,” commented Benvenuti.

Key moment for digital dividend

With new technologies, digital television is occupying less space on the radio spectrum, thus freeing up frequencies. Thanks to this 'digital dividend', mobile operators have already obtained the 800 MHz frequency band. The 700 MHz frequency band was promised to them in 2012 but the timing remains to be specified.

A decision should be taken for the so-called co-primary allocation of the 470-694 MHz band, during the next World Radio Communication Conference, WRC-15, in November 2015 in Geneva.

Pascal Lamy, chairman of the High Level Group on the future of UHF frequencies, had [recommended](#) in August that the EU make the transfer of the 700 MHz band in 2020 and assures radio broadcasters that they can keep frequencies below this until 2030. He urged member states to adopt a common position for the 2015 WRC.

France, Germany and Italy are pleading against the allocation of 470-694 MHz to mobiles. On the other hand, Sweden and Finland, where terrestrial television is not predominant, would essentially be in favour of this. The political group on spectrum, RSPG, is expected to specify the EU's position in a draft opinion to be presented on 12 November in Brussels. A consultation will then be launched prior to publication of the definitive opinion in February 2015.