

European broadcasters to be more vocal in spectrum campaigns

Feb 10, 2015 by Toby Youell

The European broadcasting industry plans to focus on fostering a pan-European approach that considers digital terrestrial television (DTT) a crucial part of Europe's digital economy, says Olivier Huart, the new chairman of Broadcasting Networks Europe.

Spectrum is too serious a matter to be trusted to engineers

In the last few years, European broadcasters' lobbying efforts have [focussed](#) on the need to prevent a co-primary allocation of the lower UHF bands (470–694 MHz) to both mobile and broadcasting at WRC-15 at the end of this year. This campaign can claim some success in helping to convince the European Commission to push for a European Common Position at the WRC that favours retaining the frequencies for broadcasting; both its inter-governmental advisory group, the [RSPG](#), and a [report](#) it commissioned from a high level group chaired by Pascal Lamy recommended that the band be retained for DTT in the coming years.

Olivier Huart, the new chairman of Broadcasting Networks Europe (BNE), told *PolicyTracker* that his association has assembled six major players from across the broadcasting industry to try to convince the Commission to include a consideration of broadcasting in its "digital agenda". It is also trying to raise awareness of spectrum among Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

“Clemenceau once said war is too serious a matter to be trusted to generals,” he told us. “For us, spectrum is too serious a matter to be trusted to engineers. Behind the spectrum and the decisions around DTT and the allocation to x, y, and z, band of spectrum there's a whole ecosystem.” He argued that this ecosystem comprises around 14 million jobs and seven per cent of the EU's GDP.

The BNE recently gathered the Association of European Radio (AER), the wireless microphone group the APWPT, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the Global Union Federation for Media and Entertainment (UNI-MEI) for a “high level policy breakfast” chaired by Polish MEP Michal Boni.

According to Huart, the aim of the event was to demonstrate that “DTT is a pillar of the digital economy”.

Michal Boni acknowledged the importance of mobile broadband but also highlighted the importance of looking at “the bigger picture”. He said: “As policymakers we need to have an approach that looks at all the moving parts, supported by a strong common vision and commitments. I believe it is possible to achieve a comprehensive compromise package which ensures a win-win solution.”

Efforts to include the need for spectrum for broadcasters in the digital agenda are frustrated by already existing difficulties in agreeing common spectrum laws, and the fact that the new European Parliament is a largely unknown entity, Huart said.

In January this year, we [reported](#) that spectrum has been removed from the current round of legislation that is dealing with the digital agenda. Huart is surprised that EU member states have agreed to drop all efforts to coordinate spectrum assignments. “It's as if you were describing how the car industry should be organised without talking about the fuel,” he said.

Additionally, the majority of MEPs who were interested in spectrum, or at least the ones who filed amendments to the spectrum aspects of the Telecoms Single Market package, are no longer in the European Parliament. Commenting on the new Parliament, which now contains more eurosceptic MEPs, Huart said, “what I can smell and recognise is it's now time to be much more vocal now that we are united”.

He added that he wants to demonstrate to policymakers that even though spectrum appears to be a technocratic issue, the entire European broadcasting ecosystem relies on it and policymakers should pay attention to it.

“This is a new era for us”, he said. “We anticipate in the next few months to be much more vocal on this to demonstrate to MEPs that spectrum is too serious a matter to be trusted to engineers.”•