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Digital Networks Act



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The European Commission has introduced the Digital Networks Act (DNA), a legislative proposal designed to modernise and unify the European Union's connectivity regulations to meet the goals of the 2030 Digital Decade. This act is set to replace the 2018 Electronic Communications Code to better support advanced technologies like AI and Cloud computing. It seeks to transition Europe from legacy systems to a unified, secure infrastructure powered by fiber, 5G, 6G, and cloud-integrated networks.

Rationale

The DNA argues that individual Member States cannot effectively address the current digital fragmentation alone. By moving from a patchwork of national directives to a unified EU Regulation, the act aims to provide the scale necessary for European companies to compete globally, particularly in high-stakes areas like 5G/6G, cloud computing, and AI-driven infrastructure.

Strategically, the DNA prioritises spectrum management and satellite connectivity as pillars of European autonomy. Because satellite signals and radio waves naturally cross borders, the proposal introduces a coordinated EU-wide authorisation process to replace slow, inconsistent national licensing. While the EU sets the high-level framework for the rapid transition from legacy copper to high-speed fiber networks, it respects the principle of subsidiarity by leaving the specific timing and local implementation to National Regulatory Authorities¹ who understand their unique domestic markets.

To ensure proportionality, the DNA avoids "one-size-fits-all" overreach by focusing only on critical market bottlenecks. It upgrades existing advisory bodies—transforming the Radio Spectrum Policy Group into the Radio Spectrum Policy Body (RSPB)—while ensuring they remain advisory rather than legally binding to maintain a balance of power. Furthermore, the act proposes simplified consumer protection and Universal Service Obligations, ensuring that while the technology evolves, essential internet access remains affordable and accessible to all EU citizens, including vulnerable groups.

Key Objectives

1. The first objective of this legislative proposal is to create a true Single Market. By replacing the current "patchwork" of national rules with a single Regulation, the DNA removes barriers that prevent European operators from scaling up and competing globally.
2. It also aims to boost strategic autonomy by prioritising satellite connectivity for remote areas and defence, while strengthening resilience against security threats like drone interference and signal jamming.
3. It shall also simplify the legal landscape by merging several existing laws into one streamlined framework to reduce compliance costs and accelerate innovation.

¹ In Malta's case this is the Malta Communications Authority

4. Finally, the European Commission aims to incentivise investment to foster an "AI-ready" continent by encouraging massive private investment in the high-speed, secure connectivity required for modern industry and e-government services.

Strengthening the EU Single Market

As aforementioned, the DNA aims to remove cross-border barriers to help operators scale and innovate within a unified market. Key measures include a One-Stop Registration - allowing companies to provide services across the entire EU while registering in just one Member State. The proposal also establishes an EU-level authorisation framework for satellite services and granting longer, renewable spectrum licenses to provide operators with greater predictability, as well as a "use it or share it" policy to ensure all available frequencies are utilised efficiently. The proposal also calls for further Industry Cooperation by creating a voluntary mechanism for collaboration between connectivity providers and cloud or content application players.

Infrastructure Transition and Modernisation

To meet future digital demands, the EU is prioritising high-capacity fibre and mobile networks over outdated infrastructure. The act mandates a transition away from legacy copper networks between 2030 and 2035. Member States are required to submit detailed plans for this migration by 2029. The process includes protections to ensure service continuity and clear communication during network switch-offs.

Security, Resilience, and Net Neutrality

The proposal emphasises the importance of a secure connectivity ecosystem that reduces external dependencies. To this end, an EU-level strategy will be established to manage risks from natural disasters and foreign interference. Selection criteria are to be established for pan-EU satellite communications will prioritise security and resilience. The DNA maintains core net neutrality principles while clarifying "Open Internet" rules to provide legal certainty for innovative services.

Regulatory Simplification

The Commission's hope is that by reducing administrative burdens and reporting requirements, the DNA intends to free up corporate resources for innovation and investment. It provides greater flexibility for business-to-business (B2B) relationships while maintaining high standards for consumer protection.

Next Steps

The proposal now moves to the European Parliament and the Council for formal approval. President von der Leyen has expressed a goal of achieving a fully integrated Single Market for connectivity by 2028.

The Maltese Perspective

Given that Malta has already an established system of Fibre-to-the-Home coverage, the EU's phase-out of copper networks by 2030 is not expected to affect Maltese businesses in terms of infrastructure disruption and additional costs. In terms of this legislative proposal, Maltese businesses are encouraged to monitor further guidelines from the Malta Communications Authority in terms of relevant updates in view of this Act's implementation -especially in the case of the 'One-Stop Registration'.

The Proposal and its annexes can be accessed [here](#).

Disclaimer: This is a policy brief to create awareness about the legislative proposal and for information purposes. It is not an official position of the Malta Business Bureau.

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