

Contribution from the Regulatory Authority of Poland

Regulatory Activities For Promoting Universal Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Poland

Public administration may carry out various activities in order to promote universal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). Several of them, recognized by the Office of Telecommunications and Post Regulation, include among the others definition of the universal service, ICTs promotion in the rural areas, affordability of services and e-government.

Definition of Universal Service

The main activity which was carried out in Poland in order to enhance universal access to information and communication technologies was defining universal service. According to the currently binding regulation the following services has been included in the definition of the universal service:

- Fixed line private residential voice telephony services
- Fixed line public payphone voice telephony services
- Fax services
- Emergency services
- Special services for the impaired or elderly
- Directory services
- Data transmission in the voice lines through a modem

The operator with a significant market power is obliged to provide above-mentioned services to any customer applying.

ICTs Promotion in the Rural Areas

The regulation in the field of telecommunications should aim, among the others, at liquidation of the gap between the rural and urban areas in terms of the infrastructure development.

Under the EU assistance program Phare 2000, the Office of Telecommunications and Post Regulation and Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology are carrying out a twinning project on Universal Service in Telecommunications. The main aim of the project is elaboration of the strategy to implement universal service in the rural areas in Poland and adoption of the European legislation regarding universal service.

Part of the program is a pilotage project aiming at development of telecommunications infrastructure, services and Information Society applications in two rural regions. The project includes enhancement of the infrastructure development. Under this project multi-technology infrastructure is being implemented, including PSTN network based on copper cable, radio local loop (LMDS) and network based on the satellite access. Local telecommunications operators have been involved in the project and they participate in the network development providing co-funding of 25% of the total cost.

Second part of the project is development of services and Information Society applications within the regions covered. These activities include: eGovernment, Telecenters and tele-

education and e-cadastre. Moreover, relevant trainings for citizens, companies and civil servants are being provided.

The pilotage project shall form basis for further similar activities in the scope of the whole country.

Affordability of Services

Another issue concerns economic aspect of the access, meaning prices of the services which would not make barriers for the users. Fully developed competition in the telecommunications market will result in achieving such a level of prices. However, before the competition is achieved, the regulator needs to intervene in the market. Both Telecommunications Law and the EU Directive on open network provision in voice telephony and universal service, supply the regulator with such powers but do not define “affordable price”. Thus it is substantial for the regulation of universal service to elaborate methodology for estimation of prices affordability in the case of universal services and define criteria used for assessment of prices offered by telecommunications operators. In order to carry out this task, the regulator shall analyze the market thoroughly.

Moreover, public consultations regarding expenditures on telecommunications services are required, which will result in:

- collection of data on usage of fixed line and mobile telephony services as well as the usage of Internet, which will allow to set a national basket of services,
- identification of the barriers of access to the universal service,
- identification of users’ preferences as well as developments of these preferences,
- identification of the correlation between decisions made by the operators and the opinions and behavior of their customers.

In addition, possible actions regarding price regulation that are within the scope of activities of the regulator authority in Poland include regulation of interconnection prices and implementation of the cost based model for the interconnection services, which will result in competition enhancement.

E-government

Another area requiring development in order to strengthen access to information is the content of the Internet. One of the measures of the Information Society development is the scope of activities which are dealt with through the Internet.

From the side of the public administration, this issue has been approached by introduction of the electronic circulation system for documents within the public administration. Establishment of the system of electronic circulation of documents are currently in progress in Poland and requires involvement and cooperation of numerous governmental institutions and other public administration bodies.

Another activity in this field which is carried out consists in enhancing contacts between public administration and customers. The recent project of the amendments to the Polish legislation urges public administration to strengthen provision of the information available on line as well as enabling citizens electronic contact and services from the e-government area.

Content development is essential in order to enhance demand for ICTs in the society and result in growth in the Internet development and information provision.

