

GSR13 Consultation

Contribution from the Communications Regulation Commission of Bulgaria

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE REGULATOR: THE REGULATOR AS PARTNER FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are one of the main drivers for the deployment of a competitive economy, based on knowledge and innovation.

On the European level the priorities in the area of ICT are outlined in EUROPE 2020 – a strategy for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth, having the goal to prepare the EU economy for the challenges of the next decade and more specifically in one of its leading initiatives – the Program in the area of the digital technologies in Europe, known as the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE)¹, which is directly related with solving the problems in the area of information technologies and internet.

The main goal of the Digital Agenda for Europe is to derive sustainable economic and social benefits from the common digital market, based on high-speed and ultrahigh-speed internet and interoperable applications, in outlining the way for harvesting to a maximum extent of the social and economic potential of ICT mainly through internet – a vital environment for economic and public activity. The successful execution of the Digital Agenda shall stimulate the innovations, the economic growth and improvements of everyday life both for the citizens and for the undertakings. The broader implementation and more effective use of digital technologies shall secure better quality of life for the Europeans through improved healthcare, safer and more efficient transport solutions, a cleaner environment, new media possibilities and facilitated access to public services and cultural content.

As an EU Member State, the Republic of Bulgaria has elaborated a National program „Digital Bulgaria 2015”. The document provides guidelines for development of the information society in Bulgaria in legislative, technology, economic and social aspect and defines development parameters in compliance with the common European approach.

The ever increasing penetration of the new technologies and services in people’s everyday life can be made a success only with the joint efforts and active participation of everyone – the institutions, the business and the citizens. Decisive for the penetration of the new technologies are the effective use and the development of the accompanying infrastructure and the creation of possibility for the development of the services, for example application of new services platforms as cloud computing and mobile applications, to which the regulation goals and strategies should be devoted. With the new information and communication services the most important directions of the regulatory work should be focused on securing of high level of quality and protecting the security of these services, as well as on consumer protection. The wireless broadband access for example plays a key role in securing coverage of remote and rural areas.

The regulatory policy of the sector regulator in Bulgaria – the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) is in compliance with the common European framework and the National program „Digital Bulgaria 2015”. It is aimed towards stimulating the competition on the market and the deployment of Next Generation Networks (NGN), including mobile networks, and securing of a smooth transition to them in view of the effective use of the radio frequency

¹ COM(2010)245 final of 19 May 2010, Communication of the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions, Program in the area of the digital technologies for Europe („Digital Agenda for Europe“)

spectrum and development of the broadband services provision to the benefit of Bulgarian consumers, including in the remote and rural areas.

The Bulgarian telecommunications are part of the common European market and Bulgaria participates in the execution of the Digital Agenda for Europe, which is invariably related to the market development. An important priority are the market analyses. They are the main instrument, through which CRC creates the necessary conditions for stimulation of the competition on the market. All of the analyses undergo broad public consultation, by means of which the transparency, openness and predictability of the regulatory actions are guaranteed. Through the market analyses CRC regulates the behavior of the undertakings with significant market power, and imposes specific obligations on them, including also price limitations. It is an indisputable fact that the telecommunications in Bulgaria are the sector, in which a significant price decrease is observed. In such a way, CRC as regulator successfully fulfils its mission and main goal – securing of diverse, quality, modern and most of all affordable electronic communications services for the consumers, also in support of the social inclusion.

The efforts of the undertakings are also aimed in compliance with the development goals of the digital future, incorporated in Strategy 2020 of the European Union, for the securing of broadband services for all European citizens. Extremely strong is the aspiration towards the development of the mobile broadband access in Bulgaria. The increase in its consumption in the recent years is an impetus for the mobile undertakings to invest in their networks in more modern technologies for high-speed data transfer. In this regard they are aggressively providing offers with mobile internet and in bundles with other services, as well as the most recent generation of phones to the consumers. The growing interest of the undertakings in the consumers and the accompanying problems, related to the violation of their rights as clients influences also the activity of CRC. The number of complaints against the operators has increased many times and the problems encountered motivated the regulator to take an active stand in view of applying of mechanisms for better protection of the consumer interests. As a result the consumers are already more clearly informed or the duration of the contracts, the conditions for their renewal, the respective defaults and the nature of the service for which they are subscribing.

CRC took part in the execution of one of the main priorities in the activity of the Bulgarian government – the implementation of the „e-government”, as the first Bulgarian sector regulator, providing 39 electronic administrative services. Through this platform the access to administrative services and public data bases was facilitated. The project was distinguished also with an international award in the category „Public services” by an international jury, which included representatives of the Council of the European professional information societies - CEPIS, the European trade chamber - EEIG, the Serbian information technologies association - JISA, regional trade and industry chambers, distinguished IT experts.

In the international aspect CRC participates in the activity of the specialized organizations in the area of communications on global and European level. As a member of the Body of European Regulators of Electronic Communications, it performs regular exchange of information and experience with the national regulatory authorities of the EU Member States and with the European Commission. The active participation of CRC in the process of work at global and European level is of significant importance for reinforcing its role as reliable and effective partner. The exchange of experience, knowledge and ideas is extremely useful in facing the new challenges in the changing telecommunications world in which the geographic boundaries are losing their significance.