European Regional Bureau Newsletter

Internet Access

EU: Informal agreement reached on WiFi4EU

- On May 29, the Council of the European Union's Maltese Presidency reached an informal agreement with the European Parliament on the EU-sponsored scheme "WiFi4EU". The initiative promotes free Internet in public spaces, including hospitals and parks, to make fast Internet available for all EU citizens.
- Under the agreement, the European Commission, Parliament and Council will work together to ensure €120 million in funding is provided for setting up wireless hotspots across the EU in 6,000 to 8,000 municipalities by 2020.
- The European Parliament and the Council will formally approve the new legislation shortly, and the text is expected to be officially published and enter into force after the summer.

EU: EESC's opinion on Artificial Intelligence

- On May 30, the European Economic and Social Committee's section responsible for the Single Market, published Catelijne Muller's (NL – Workers' Group) own-initiative opinion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on jobs and the society as whole.
- The EESC identified 11 areas that need to be further addressed (including privacy and standards to labour, and access), and called for a "human-in command approach to AI", in order for people to maintain full control over machines.
- The EESC opinion calls for a "European AI infrastructure with open source learning environments that respect privacy, real-life test environments and high-quality data sets for developing and training AI systems". It also suggests that a European AI certification or label should be considered to encourage the development of sustainable AI, and help build a European competitive advantage.

EU: VP Andrus Ansip on the Digital Single Market

- On May 30, the European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) held an exchange of views with Andrus Ansip, European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market.
- VP Andrus Ansip gave an overview of the current state of play of the Digital Single Market Strategy, saying a lot of further effort was needed in the fields of cybersecurity and data, as well on files such as radio spectrum, 5G and the Internet of Things (IoT).

- In particular, VP Andrus Ansip explained that deeper cooperation in the field of spectrum was necessary, but that several Member States were opposing EU efforts to act on this. He said that timing, the intakes of the spectrum adoption auctions, the durations of licenses and the coverage of rural areas were all important issues. He added that a duration of 25 years for spectrum licenses would not be enough but the European Commission proposes 25 years as a minimum.

EU: Wholesale roaming markets: information on the state of play
- The Presidency of the Council of the European Union provided an update on the state of play on the proposal on the rules for wholesale roaming markets on May 31. The document comes ahead of the introduction on June 15 of the roam-like-at-home (RLAH) principle foreseen in the Regulation on open Internet access.
- The proposal should ensure that the level of wholesale roaming charges enables the sustainable provision of RLAH in the EU without distorting the domestic visited and home markets.
- The text of the Regulation has now been finalised and it will be published in the Official Journal of the EU on June 9 2017 to enable the application of RLAH in the EU.

EU: VP Ansip blog on the end of roaming fees
- The European Commission Vice President's blog post looked forward to the end of roaming surcharges, due on June 15. He welcomed the development, saying that it was "good news for holidaymakers, businesses - in fact, for everyone. It means that when people travel in the EU, they can call, send text messages and surf on their mobile at the same price that they pay at home".
- He warned however that some operators had announced tariff changes that were likely not to be compatible with the rules, or were using the introduction of RLAH to raise domestic prices. He claimed that provisions and exceptions had been built into the new rules meant that no company in Europe had "a reason to use the end of roaming surcharges as an excuse to raise prices".

EU: Digitising European Industry, the European gigabit society and 5G
- On June 1, during the plenary session in Brussels, the draft reports on digitisation of industry and on the European gigabit society and 5G, were adopted. The reports were jointly debated in-house the day before.
- The report on Digitising European Industry, whose rapporteur is Reinhard Butikofer (Greens, DE), calls for the development of an integrated Industrial Digitalisation Strategy (IDS) for the EU. It also notes that infrastructure, investment, innovation and skills are the enabling conditions required for successful industrial digitisation. The report was adopted with 571 votes in favour, 32 against and 35 abstentions.
- The report on Internet connectivity for growth, competitiveness and cohesion: European gigabit society and 5G addresses ways to ensure an efficient rollout of 5G solutions. Rapporteur Michal Boni (EPP, PL)'s report emphasises the benefits that digital skills and infrastructure can bring to the EU as a whole. The report was adopted with 516 votes in favour, 65 against and 42 abstentions.

Trust

Global: G7 leaders call on tech giants to tackle terrorism

- During the Summit in Sicily on May 26, Theresa May called for Internet companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter to better target extremist messages online, including by developing technology which automatically identifies and removes messages that incite violence. The statement comes after the bombing attack in Manchester.

- The leaders have also agreed a range of steps the G7 could take to strengthen its work with tech companies on this vital agenda, as they want "companies to develop tools to identify and remove harmful materials automatically". More details are expected to be available in the near future.

EU: Council of the EU close to reaching general approach on the proposal for a regulation on the protection of individuals and personal data

- On May 24, the Maltese presidency suggested a general approach on the proposal for a regulation on the protection of individuals. The document covers the processing and the free movement of personal data by EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies.

- According to the text, the regulation should apply to the processing of personal data, "wholly or partially by automated means", and to the processing of "personal data which form part of a filing system or are intended to form part of a filing system". The Maltese presidency suggests the rules of the proposal should be aligned as far as possible with those of the GDPR with a common entry into force on 25 May 2018.

- The proposal also sets out the provisions on the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) and suggests it should not cover the processing of personal data by the Court of Justice, to safeguard the latter's independence.

EU: JURI Committee: exchange of views on e-Privacy

- On May 29, the European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI) held a discussion on the European Commission's proposal on a Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications.

- MEPs were not satisfied with the proposal, claiming that it overlapped with several other files including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the European Electronic Communication Code, leading to an inconsistent and incoherent legal framework. The debate also underlined that an agreement on this proposal could be as difficult to reach as was the case for the GDPR.

Belgium: Belgian Home Affairs Minister wants EU data retention fix

- On May 31, at Politico's Connected Citizens Summit in Berlin, the Belgian Minister for Home Affairs, Jan Jambon, claimed that the EU needed to act to restore data retention law in Europe.

- In December, the ECJ struck down significant parts of the UK's new Investigatory Powers Act, targeting the indiscriminate gathering and retention of citizen's data. The Court said the Investigatory Powers Act went beyond the limits of EU data retention and protection laws and exceeded the limits of a democratic society.

- The Belgium minister claimed the ECJ ruling made investigations more difficult, stating that "if the criminals have more tools than the security services have, we have a problem".

EU: European Commission's information note on cybersecurity

- On May 31, The Council of the European Union released an information note, initially developed by the European Commission on cybersecurity. The note stresses the need to boost cooperation in this domain.
- Recently, the so-called WannaCry cyberattack affected organizations and citizens worldwide. The cyberattack was unprecedented in scale and its impact was mitigated by actions taken by an individual researcher. This was the first time where EU Member States exchanged information under the mechanism for operational cooperation under the Directive on measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems (NIS Directive).
- The European Commission believes that joint efforts from the EU community are essential to fight cybercrime. A review of the Cybersecurity Strategy is planned for September 2017.

EU: EPRS Blog on Cybersecurity in The EU Common Security And Defence Policy (CSDP)

- The European Parliamentary Research Service blog post looks at a study recently carried out by the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA). The study looks at three main areas: policies; capacity building; and the integration of cyber in CSDP missions.
- The study looks at five key policy options in regards to cybersecurity and the common security and defence policy: Maintain coherent cyberpolicies and strategies at the EU level; Promote cyberculture; develop cyberskills; enhance legal and regulatory frameworks; and develop standards, organisations and capabilities