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2014: EU telecom operators are ready to build a Smarter Europe ETNO's open letter to the Greek Presidency of the European Union

ETNO welcomes the priorities for the telecommunications sector set by the Greek Government for its presidency. ETNO will actively cooperate with the Greek presidency so that it can deliver by 30 June on these measures, which will be key for Europe's society and economy. One of the measures laid down in the Working Programme is the mid-term review of the "Digital Agenda for Europe". ETNO is committed to work with the Presidency to ensure that this review sets an ambitious agenda to unleash EU's potential to invest and innovate at continental and global levels, and inspire visionary leadership accordingly. Such a review must start by setting the priority of a profound revision of the rules for the e-communications sector. 2014 is the year in which we must speed up our effort towards building a Smarter Europe and ETNO is ready to help Europe becoming a fully connected continent.

The Zettabyte Era

In 2017, global IP traffic will reach 1.4 zettabytes per year¹. At ETNO, we represent those players who constitute the backbone of the digital revolution: telecommunication operators. Our networks, fixed and wireless, are the digital spine of Europe: they carry every day the communications of hundreds of millions of people, businesses and governments and generate high value in the provision of services like cloud, e-health, e-government, and many others. This means, for example, that the gigabyte equivalent of all movies ever made will cross Western Europe's backbone IP networks every 21 minutes.

A connected future

These numbers and their astonishing magnitude are telling of the fact that the future will be more and more connected and that this trend should be embraced.

For this reason, ETNO is ready to join the challenge to help Europe become a fully connected continent.

Policies and regulation have a crucial role to play in order to meet this challenge and need to keep pace. Some important milestones have already been achieved by the work of the EU Institutions, driven by the "Digital Agenda for Europe". ETNO welcomes the fact that the Greek Presidency has put several ICT-related files among its priorities, including the important work with the European Parliament to advance the Connected Continent Regulation and the Regulation on reducing the cost of broadband deployment.

ETNO is working with all the relevant actors to help improve these measures, so that they serve the overarching objective of boosting investments in Europe's next generation networks. In order for the EU to meet the growing need for very high speed networks, we need a policy environment that attracts private investments.

Towards a Smarter Europe

ETNO and its members recognize the Greek presidency's key role helping to shape the future ICT agenda of the Union and we will be supportive of the mid-term review of the "Digital Agenda for Europe".

¹ Figures in this paragraph are from the Cisco Visual Networking Index 2013.



We believe that a first, concrete and necessary step towards achieving a smarter Europe – where everyone and everything is connected – will be to carefully plan the review of the current electronic communications regulatory framework. The review must take stock of the rapidly evolving ICT landscape and the emergence of new services, so as to identify how the current telecoms regulatory framework must be reviewed to better respond to the rapidly changing environment. The status quo, in our view, is not fit for the reality that we are facing today and for the challenges ahead.

The future regulatory framework should ensure a level playing field among actors involved in today's value chain and remove regulation where it is no longer justified. Such a framework should also look at horizontal synergies with other policies, by recognizing that uniformity is needed across other EU policy areas, such as merger control, data protection or copyright review. All these elements together can represent a practical way to help unleash the potential of the EU's telecoms sector and investments in our future networks.

The mid-term review of the "Digital Agenda for Europe" should therefore go further than simply amending the rules of the past. The traditional paradigm regulating only networks no longer responds to the gigantic challenge of connecting our societies and economies and ensuring the interoperability of devices and the EU wide accessibility and portability of content. Leading EU experts – from the academia, the corporate, the institutional and the NGOs spheres – are starting to reflect on new ways to drive Europe's digital future. And that involves some out-of-the-box thinking.

We are one step away from the "Internet of Everything", where people, processes, data and things are brought together by connectivity and make networked connections even more relevant and valuable to our society. Data shows that, already today, there are more devices connected to the Internet than there are people in the world.

Where is Europe standing in all this? How can policymakers and stakeholders help? How can we ensure that Europe leads the way in connecting all household appliances to the Internet and how should policy makers respond to the newly converged technology environment? Or, again, how we can lead in revolutionizing the transport sector by having all vehicles connected? These are bold political objectives, especially at a time of change. And the Greek's Presidency work on the mid-term review of the "Digital Agenda for Europe" will offer a unique opportunity to include such a bold vision into EU's policy objectives.

ETNO will support all the efforts of the Greek Presidency in fostering the debate about the EU's digital future. This debate has never come at a better time, as Europeans and the EU Institutions start to shape the political agenda to lead us into the next decade. ETNO calls on the EU Greek Presidency to adopt a visionary approach to policy making, which reflects the exciting potential that telecoms and ICT services have to offer, and to act courageously to help move us towards a truly digital age.