

Commission expects most broadcasting in the EU to be digital by 2010

The European Commission today urged EU Member States to accelerate the switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting. Digital broadcasting provides improved picture quality, better sound, better portable and mobile reception, more TV and radio channels and enhanced information services. As digital broadcasting uses spectrum more efficiently, it would also free up spectrum capacity for other uses, such as new broadcasting and mobile telephony services, which will in turn stimulate innovation and growth in the TV and electronic communications industries. The Commission expects the transition to digital to be well advanced by 2010 and proposes a deadline of early 2012 for phasing out traditional analogue terrestrial broadcasting. The Commission also calls for a co-ordinated approach to making freed-up spectrum available across the EU.

Information Society and Media Commissioner Reding said: *“By recommending 2012 as EU deadline for the digital switch-off, I would like to give a political signal to market participants and customers alike that digital TV will soon be a reality. The sooner we complete switchover, the sooner our citizens and businesses will benefit. Pan-European co-ordination of spectrum use will then give our citizens access to new services that combine mobile telephony and broadcasting, such as mobile ‘datacasting’ of videos, or multimedia content. Most EU Member States that have already decided a switch-off date have chosen 2010. Six others have chosen 2012 at the latest.”*

Most TV viewers in the EU are expected to buy at least one digital receiver between now and 2010. These receivers are either separate set-top boxes or are an integral component of modern TV sets. The Commission estimates the EU market for digital TV receivers alone at up to 20 million units per annum. Digital TV and the additional new services will contribute to increased market competition between various electronic communication network operators and to faster innovation e.g. from broadcasters, network operators and from developers of interactive applications.

Digital TV broadcasting needs only one-third to one-half of the spectrum required for analogue, based on today's services and coverage¹. The economic value of freed-up prime spectrum (the "digital dividend"), depends on how it is used (not necessarily for broadcasting) and who "owns" or uses it.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Member States</i>
A (switch-off date end 2010 or earlier)	AU, DE, ES, FI, IT, MT, SE
B (switch-off date: end 2012 or earlier)	BE², EL, SI, SK, UK, HU

NB. Member Status not included in groups A or B have either not responded to the Commission or have not communicated a date.

The Communication on accelerating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting can be found at:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/ecomm/useful_information/library/communic_reports/index_en.htm

¹ Source : Spectrum Management in the Field of Broadcasting (Aegis/IDATE/Indepen. 2004)

² In Flanders