

2nd Albanian Telecom Forum
Tirana 7.12.2010
Albania on the road to Broadband

Dear Minister, dear President of the Albanian Regulator, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for your kind invitation, which is a great honor to me and EETT, the Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission. Our presence here demonstrates our willingness to disseminate the Greek regulatory experience together with the European “best practices” in Albania.

This event demonstrates in the most definite way the Albanian authorities’ commitment to broadband development, in an environment that safeguards competition, promotes innovation and encourages investment. As the President of the Hellenic Regulator, I most welcome this commitment, since broadband infrastructure is a fundamental enabler of a nation’s economic growth. It is also critical in respect to the citizens’ participation to the worldwide Information Society, in terms of access to digital services, educational content, healthcare, tele-working, on line entertainment services and so on. We live in an era that the world has become an interconnected neighborhood. Broadband is no more a luxury but a critical national infrastructure.

Since actions speak louder than words, EETT has fully appreciated the crucial importance of the widespread and affordable broadband services. Consequently, we have made an enormous and persistent effort to reduce the gap between Greece and the rest of Europe. We achieved this by using competition in a liberalized market as the main vehicle for promoting innovation. The results so far have been spectacular: within a period of 5 years we have seen broadband prices in Greece fall dramatically (from above 100 Euro to well below 20 Euro per month for a 1Mbps connection). We have also seen nominal access speeds rapidly increase (from under 500 Kbps to above 10 Mbps). Moreover, broadband penetration has soared from 1% to 20% of the population, making Greece one of the fastest growing broadband markets in Europe.

We are confident that what has happened in Greece can also happen in your country. We have found all the regulatory tools that were needed within the harmonized European Framework: from licensing and numbering regimes that

do not pose any barriers to entry, to a market analysis process to safeguard fair competition among operators.

We have moved step by step from introducing service - based competition with the use of carrier selection and preselection to paving the way for infrastructure - based competition with the unbundling of the local loop. We are preparing spectrum auctions for the provision of 3G services in the 900 MHz band and for mobile broadband to cover remote and rural areas in our country.

Our strong belief is that the European Regulatory Framework provides a clear path and all the necessary tools for developing a competitive and dynamic electronic communications market. This can drive economic development in all sectors and can propel the society towards digital economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union, as the European Commission has documented in various papers and policy reports, has recognized that being competitive in the global Information Society is a challenging target, particularly taking into account the rapid developments in both the technological and business fronts. In this respect, the European Commission has recently published the Digital Agenda 2020, laying down the vision for Digital Europe and a roadmap to achieve it. The digital agenda addresses a variety of thematic areas, including:

- The creation of a common, harmonized digital market across Europe
- The improved interoperability and use of standards
- The uptake of research and higher education,
- The bridging of the digital “divide”, with the acquisition of digital competencies by all Europeans
- The strengthening of security and trust to e-services,

Key targets of the Digital Agenda are to achieve until 2020 high speed broadband coverage (above 30Mbps) for all households in the EU and ultra-high speed coverage (above 100Mbps) for at least 50% of the households in Europe.

We are a firm advocate of fully embracing and adopting the common European practice, because we have seen it work in practice. Staying however afoot with Europe is a tough target not only for Albania but for Greece as well. Achieving it requires a coherent and holistic national strategy, founded on five pillars:

- Competition is the main vehicle that drives investment and innovation. In Greece competition has driven mobile penetration earlier and more recently broadband development.
- Investment in broadband infrastructure is an absolute prerequisite for economic development.
- The complementary use of wired and wireless infrastructures is necessary to cater for different needs and to stimulate broadband development not only in densely populated areas but also in less favoured ones.
- Accessibility and affordability for all are fundamental, since broadband should be a public good and nobody should be excluded from the Information Society.
- Last but not least, broadband development should be seen not as a goal but as the means for delivering services, since this is the only way to experience its true benefits for the economy and the society.

In such a national broadband deployment plan, all stakeholders need to contribute, as they have complementary roles:

- The Policy Makers, i.e. the Government and the Parliament, by instigating the appropriate policies and taking measures to promote investments and by ensuring the effective use of national resources, frequencies, numbers and rights of way.
- The Regulator by safeguarding competition and encouraging investment and innovation.
- The Telecommunications Industry by investing in new technologies and mainly in people, who are able to deliver consumer-centric services that enrich user choices, enhance competition and promote the Information Society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In a global environment full of political and economic challenges, there is no safer investment than a competitive, dynamic and innovation-driven telecommunications sector.

I am convinced that the Greek telecommunications industry, already present in your country, will contribute to the development of the Albanian market in both the fixed and wireless sectors.

From our part, and especially under our quality as BEREC Vice-Chair 2011, we are ready to further support the Albanian Telecommunications Regulator,

as we already did with regard to licensing, by providing our common experience in the county-wide broadband deployment and assist you to integrate the European regulatory principles and positive experience to the local market.

This offer is driven from our firm belief that a thriving Albanian economy, capitalizing on the benefits of the Information Society, will constitute an important building block towards bringing prosperity in the Western Balkans.

Thank you