

Brussels, 22 September 2003

## Digital broadcasting and switchover

***The European Commission has adopted, at the initiative of Commissioner Erkki Liikanen, responsible for Enterprise and the Information Society, a Communication on the transition to digital broadcasting. This Communication addresses a key issue for Member States in their move towards the Information Society: which approach to take for the migration to digital broadcasting. The Communication also raises a strategic issue for the EU, concerning the future reuse of valuable radio spectrum currently used for analogue television.***

The Communication on Digital Switchover (“transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, from digital switchover to analogue switch-off”) sets out a guide for Member States on the difficult task of migrating to digital radio and television transmission, and ultimately switching off analogue transmission, in a consumer-friendly fashion. It also launches a policy debate on how to make best use of the radio spectrum made available after analogue broadcasting is switched off.

“We are not considering intrusive measures like a harmonised date for turning off analogue television across the EU or forcing consumers to buy digital television sets”, stated Commissioner Liikanen. “Progress with digital television varies widely across Member States - from 3% household penetration to 40% - so a ‘one size fits all’ policy at EU level would be inappropriate. But we are actively monitoring national processes, and benchmarking exercises will run for some years. We want to ensure that national switchover policies provide incentives for consumers to migrate to digital television voluntarily. We must also start discussing the spectrum aspects now, given their complexity and long term implications.”

The eEurope 2005 Action Plan requires Member States to publish their switchover plans – including a possible date for ending analogue television – by end 2003. This will make sure that consumers have enough information and adequate warning to become acquainted with all the possibilities of new digital TV services and to upgrade their equipment. Based on a study of results to date, the Communication advises Member States on the policy pitfalls to avoid and identifies items that should be part of national switchover plans. National measures should be transparent, proportionate, timely, and technologically neutral so as to avoid unduly discriminating against certain parties and distorting competition in the market.

The Communication also launches a policy debate on how the spectrum recovered once analogue broadcasting is turned off could be reused in a transparent and fair way. There are differing views on this among industry players, and it will be important to establish a policy approach that does justice both to the economic potential of spectrum release and other public policy objectives. The Commission proposes to take up the issue with Member States within the recently established Community spectrum policy framework set out in the new regulatory framework for electronic communications.