

Satellite operators crucial to achieving broadband for all in Poland

Over a million businesses and households in rural areas could be connected to broadband Internet via satellite within 1 year

Warsaw, 13th July 2010 – The European Satellite Operators' Association (ESOA) has taken the initiative of informing Polish decision-makers about the benefits of satellite broadband to connect a large proportion of the country's citizens living in its remote and rural areas. ESOA Secretary General, Ms Aarti Holla, recently participated in the "Cities on Internet" annual broadband conference held in Zakopane, noting that satellite based Internet access should be considered as the ideal solution to bring connectivity to Poland. "Most pending broadband projects will only bring connectivity after 2014 at the earliest, but satellites can make a significant difference immediately, it's just a question of being ready to implement it", Ms Holla stated.

Despite having access to 1€ billion in EU funds and recent attempts at running long-term projects, Poland is still faced with significant digital exclusion of millions of households. With most of the current programmes about to reach their mid-term, only less than 10% of total funds have been committed to broadband access development according to a report published in May 2010 by the Polish Office of Electronic Communications (*Urząd Komunikacji Elektronicznej*). ESOA's Chairman and CEO of HellasSat (Greece), Christodoulos Protopapas, pointed out that "this situation clearly calls for a major review of priorities and objectives to speed up the process of connecting isolated citizens. Automatic de-commitment of funds is a risk that faces more than one Member State. Satellite is a solution that can help avoid this. This is also an important point that ESOA made to Commissioner Hahn yesterday."

The need for intervention was also underlined by Professor Danuta Hübner (MEP), Head of the Regional Policy Committee of the European Parliament and former Commissioner for Regional Policy. During her speech at the 'Cities on Internet' conference she demanded "openness to satellite-based solutions", praising the particularly short deployment time and numerous examples of satellite broadband used to cover isolated areas around Europe, the so-called "white spots".

"We need to change our mindsets and consider equally the possibilities offered by fiber-optic, radio and satellite based technologies. The slow implementation and the high level of under-utilization of EU funds by Poland highlights the need for actions that prioritise time to implement, and hence the real moment of digital inclusion of citizens. Today's satellite solutions for Internet access provide a solid alternative for areas which are hard to reach and that have low population density", said MEP Hübner.

ESOA's work in Poland has focussed on finding appropriate recognition for satellite-based services in both the administrative and regulatory context. Well aware of satellite technology, Tomasz Wątor from the Agency for Development of Mazovia ("ARMSA") and the Polish Cluster of Space Technologies last week established a "task force" on the occasion of the first "Satellite Round-Table" co-hosted by ESOA in Warsaw. The task force aims at becoming a driving force for the overall acceptance, awareness and consideration of satellite technology for EU co-financed projects dedicated to bring broadband access to remote areas. Its first step will be to engage with ministries, civil organizations and industry associations to define a nationwide programme for satellite-based Internet access that can make Poland one of the first Member States to actually achieve 100 percent broadband connectivity by 2013, the target set by the EU.

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Media contact: Fernando Anton fanton@cambre-associates.com

Office: +32 (0)2 645 79 97 Mobile: +32 (0)472 448869

About ESOA

ESOA is a Brussels-based trade association whose membership brings together all European satellite operators and supporting members including service providers, manufacturers and launch service providers. Set up in 2002, the association goals include raising awareness of commercial satellite technologies and ensuring that satellites benefit from the appropriate political, industrial and regulatory environment to fulfil their vital role in the delivery of global communications.

ESOA Members



ESOA supporting members



BACKGROUND

The most recent attempt by the EU to address its persistent digital divide is the Digital Agenda for Europe adopted in May 2010. This follows the 1€ billion made available to Member States to extend broadband connectivity to business and households in rural areas through the 2009 EU Economic Recovery Package (ERP). Public funding was aimed at areas that suffer from 'market failure' but funds are still being injecting into longer-term fibre-oriented projects rather than aiming to achieve the 100 percent total coverage deadline set by the EU for 2013.

The ability to commercially roll out satellite broadband does not depend on population density because satellite coverage exists irrespective of the number of users. Even a sole isolated user can be served at the same cost as a user in a densely populated area. All that is required is an initial investment in a satellite dish and terminal costing from 300 to 500 euros for purchase and installation and a monthly subscription, which competes on a par with other technologies. Download speeds of 10 to 20 Mbps are expected to become available in 2010 thanks to the launch of second generation dedicated broadband satellites that use a higher frequency band (Ka band).