

# DISCUSSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNET AND BROADBAND FOR ALL

Text of the letter sent to Ms Neelie Kroes, Vice-President of the  
European Commission

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Dear Vice-President,

I am writing on behalf of the European Consumers Organisation (BEUC) to express our disappointment that the discussions regarding the future of the Internet and broadband networks are taking place without the participation of consumers' representatives. It is regretful that the responsibility for the creation of a sustainable online environment and the development of business models has been assigned to a group of telecom and content providers, with no input from civil society.

Our concerns are amplified by the proposals put forward by the CEOs of the participating companies, according to which differentiation of traffic management on the basis of commercial interests and agreements between network and content providers should be promoted in order to foster innovation and competitiveness. BEUC cannot support or accept proposals by network operators that services and content providers shall have to pay for the use of the networks depending on the volume of data they deliver. From our point of view such an unbalanced financing system will lead to an unfair competition at content/ services level and will endanger net neutrality and the free choice of the consumer.

Net neutrality is one of the fundamental principles of the Internet that has significantly enhanced citizens' participation in society and access to knowledge and diversity, while promoting innovation, economic growth and democratic participation. However, net neutrality is currently threatened by network operators who aim to maximise their revenues through the prioritisation of content and the conclusion of exclusive agreements with content providers, let alone that the lines between network and content providers are fading away.

BEUC and its members have repeatedly drawn your attention to a series of net neutrality interferences that call for a regulatory approach by the European Commission. In its report, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) has also referred to specific cases that raise concerns. Nevertheless, the European Commission has so far failed to adopt a rigorous approach, thus allowing network operators to develop discriminatory practices and not to assume the responsibility of further investments in network capacity.

We strongly believe that the focus should be on accelerating investments in network capacity and ensuring the effective rolling out of new generation networks as the most effective response to increasing consumer demand for broadband services and the precondition for the establishment of a sustainable Internet environment. It is crucial that the EU focuses on the development of optical fibre is crucial, while ensuring that networks are open to competition on a non-discriminatory basis.

We urge you, as Vice-President responsible for the Digital Agenda to ensure that the future of broadband in the EU is characterised by consumer choice driving innovation, pricing transparency, fair cost-sharing and non-discrimination against new providers.

We would therefore encourage you to ensure that civil society is equally involved in the discussions around the future of the Internet. To this end, we would propose that a summit with civil society is organised to discuss the outcomes of the two CEOs Summits held so far. In addition, a public consultation around the proposals submitted by the industry representatives should be organised to allow for all stakeholders to have their views presented.

We would be happy to further discuss these issues at your best convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens  
Director General

C/c: Mr Anthony Whelan, Head of Cabinet  
Mr Robert Madelin, Director General DG Information Society