German EU Council Presidency, 2nd half 2020 – topics suggested by the German Broadband Association (BREKO)

Version: 3 May 2019

The German Broadband Association proposes three specific topics for the German EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2020. From the leading German fibre association's perspective, these proposals should be included in the Federal Government's strategy that is currently drafted for Germany's Council Presidency.

BREKO shares these thematic proposals with the German Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI), the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) and other relevant policy contacts.

1. Smart Europe

The aim of "Smart Europe" is the efficient and focused fibre-optic deployment throughout Europe. This should lay the foundation for the European gigabit society and is a prerequisite for Europe's aspiration to play a leadership role in 5G. Following "Smart City" and "Smart Country", it is time to also position "Smart Europe" as a topic within the EU, from BREKO's perspective.

The proposed actions of this approach focus on a comprehensive smart governance package that includes e-governance, reduces bureaucracy efforts, strengthens administrative systems and increases security.

There are several flagship models for fibre-based e-governance in Europe, for example in Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. Their fibre infrastructure and digitised management systems are already far ahead of countries like Germany.

From our point of view, BMVI and BMWi could harness this campaign in order to promote "Smart Governance" also in Germany.

2. Smart Cyber Security

This topic is closely linked to "Smart Europe".

The importance of cyber-security that increases along with digitisation has a growing impact on both the private and the public sector. This impact should not be underestimated:

In business, the interconnectedness between IT and production processes grows in the context of "Industry 4.0" and digitisation. One of the consequences is that cyber-attacks can shut down the entire production process.

With the increase of digitisation, the public sector is also more and more vulnerable to cyber-attacks. This is true for intelligent systems such as "Smart City", for private households such as "Smart Metering", for transport infrastructures in areas such as automated driving and for the digitisation of the signal control of railway traffic routes.

The challenge is mainly to strike a balance between the rising demand in network and IT security and usability.

From BREKO's point of view, one part of the solution are standardisation bodies. Furthermore, the greatest possible variety of system manufacturers and network operators can make a significant contribution to cybersecurity. Decentralised networks thus become a safety factor since the subnetworks have different structures and the network operators work with different manufacturers. As a result, the networks are less vulnerable and the potential damage in the event of a successful cyber-attack can be limited, since a) it does not entirely depend on a single network and b) redundant network structures can be used for compensation in many cases.

Regarding system manufacturers, diversity is by far smaller at this stage. There is also a strong dependence on US and Chinese companies. Therefore, Europe must catch up rapidly.

3. Skilled workforce for fibre networks

The aim of this approach is to eliminate the shortage of skilled workers in the fibre roll-out in Germany and in other affected countries, while reducing youth unemployment in some EU countries in parallel. We see this as a win-win situation. Meaningful measures could ultimately be taken to create a digital European labour market.

We suggest a Europe-wide campaign under the leadership of the BMWI. The job placement of young jobseekers from countries which are most affected by high youth unemployment, such as Spain, Portugal and France, is the centrepiece of this campaign. Through town twinning agreements and specific trainings in fibre construction, young jobseekers could be trained and employed in countries with a shortage in fibre construction workers, such as Germany. Hence, the missing capacities in IT and underground construction workers would be compensated in undersupplied countries.

As of today, there are substantial differences in youth unemployment among EU Member States, ranging from Spain with 38% to Germany with 6% as best in class. Under the coordination of the BMWI and in cooperation with suitable partners such as the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, the project could be effectively managed through municipalities' twinning programmes.

Special attention should be paid to the recruitment of skilled workers from other countries, the need to provide language courses and job trainings, and the possibilities arising from robotics/automatics and automatic construction machinery (AI).

We consider this topic with generally positive connotations as suitable for associated media coverage.