

Key Building Blocks for an Internet of Innovation

By VON Europe

As Europe welcomes a new Parliament and a new Treaty, and prepares for a new Commission, the proposed EU2020 Strategy arrives at a critical moment. For VON, the EU2020 Strategy should notably set the priorities and vision Europe has for the ICT sector for the next ten years, priorities which should in turn be reflected in the Digital Agenda

VON Europe believes that the following elements need to be put in place to ensure that the EU2020 Strategy for the future and its complement the Digital Agenda, build on Innovation and deliver tangible benefits to consumers, businesses and the economy as a whole:

EU2020 IS ABOUT CREATING A GENERATION OF INFORMED USERS, EMPOWERED BY THE INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL OF (Voice over)IP.



Voice over Internet protocol, referred to as “VoIP” has truly revolutionised the way people and businesses communicate: talking to each other is cheaper if not free, families can see each other through video-conferencing even when separated by thousands of kilometers, games become more interactive and Web 2.0 social networks switch from the virtual arena to real life. Many of these VoIP capabilities rely on software in combination with a user’s Internet access to enable a wide variety of innovative new ways to communicate. **These innovations have been rendered possible by a highly innovative Internet industry, and fostered by a sensible, light touch regulatory approach** that rightly considered that VoIP services and applications would bring consumers all over Europe substantial benefits. If VoIP had been strictly treated as traditional telephony services, these innovations would not have been possible.



However instead of embracing the innovative potential that the continuing development of these VoIP services will bring, **some policy-makers still prefer to limit this innovative potential**, by rigidly trying to apply to network-independent VoIP the exact same technical obligations as have been applied for decades to traditional telephony. By doing so, those policy-makers are not only ignoring the inherent different technical characteristics of VoIP but they are also denying their citizens its innovative potential.

Old telephony regulation should be reserved for those VoIP services offering a close replacement to traditional retail telephone services and where there is a risk of consumer confusion. The Commission should focus on ensuring VoIP users are informed when communicating over the Internet of any limitations such as lack of emergency calling and should not burden innovative services and applications with obsolete obligations!

CALL FOR ACTION - EU2020 STRATEGY:

- ▶ When adopting technical implementing measures related to the provision of access to emergency services, the Commission should ensure that due account is taken of the technical characteristics of VoIP (for those VoIP services that fall under the relevant obligations of access to emergency services).
 - Certain forms of VoIP will never be considered by their users as a replacement for traditional telephone services. For instance because they are part of software on a personal computer or games console, part of the software of a tablet, part of a smartphone which also has traditional mobile (GSM) connectivity, etc... It should be possible to take a sensible approach - at European level - in order not to unduly restrain the innovative potential of those VoIP capabilities.



- In future, certain relevant VoIP services hold the promise to dramatically improve citizens' access to emergency services. This will however require emergency services and other governmental organizations to be organizationally and technically adapted to the new environment. Unilaterally imposing obligations without taking into account the required changes on the side of emergency services and other governmental organizations would deprive citizens from better service and limit the innovative potential of VoIP in this area.
- ▶ The Electronic communications regulator BEREC should ensure that the reform brought about by the Telecoms package truly enables the single market for innovative information and communication solutions and services. Lessons should be learned from the regulatory experience with VoIP and the limitations it brought for pan-European supply. VoIP can contribute to enhance the competitiveness of the European Telecoms market, but only if not unduly restrained by a myriad of different national regulatory environments. A single market for network-independent electronic communications should be enabled by law and in practice.

2020 IS ABOUT RETHINKING NUMBERS IN AN ALL-IP WORLD, NOT CREATING CLUSTERS BY REGION OR DEGREE OF MOBILITY.



Phone numbers, mobile Vs fixed, geographic Vs non-geographic... **most national numbering plans, devised more than 30 years ago, are unlikely to be adequate to cope with new trends and developments.** Location information of geographic numbers is a legacy from the Plain Old Telephony Services, when habits were not what they are today. In recent years, people have become more flexible, ready and wanting to move and travel at any time. Mobile phones are slowly overtaking fixed phones and calling your plumber happens more often than not on his mobile phone, whilst a call given to a specific number could be forwarded to anywhere.



Numbers, including geographic numbers, should be eligible to be allocated to any provider or user, and be used by end users outside of the traditional telephone zones or other boundaries, including on a trans-national basis within the EU. VON Europe supports the view that geographical numbers are most suitable to open up VoIP to the mass consumers as consumers are highly familiar with those types of numbers and end user tariffs are the most transparent (or at least not less transparent than other types of numbers).

CALL FOR ACTION - EU2020 STRATEGY:

- ▶ The approach to numbering should not be one of obligations vs. rewards, whereby a VoIP provider can only get access to numbers if it fits into a label and abides by a series of constraints. Nor should it be one that is unable to encompass and embrace the imminent changes brought by convergence of all networks and the switch to an all-IP environment. **A well designed and forward looking numbering plan will accommodate growth in the market, bring consumer benefits and promote competition.**
- ▶ Policy makers should focus on ensuring the fullest possible retail price transparency and removing the link between geographic numbers and location, rather than creating additional obligations on usage of certain numbers. **Let users choose their number(s), keep it wherever they are and use it on the device(s) or services of their choice!**



i2020 IS ABOUT INCREASING AND PROMOTING CHOICE



Ensuring that consumers and businesses can continue to use the Internet to access lawful VoIP applications and services and devices is essential to promote choice, innovation and competition. VON Europe believes that a crucial challenge of the i2020 vision will be to continue to facilitate innovation by companies who are developing new applications and services, including VoIP, delivered via the Internet.

CALL FOR ACTION - EU2020 STRATEGY:

- ▶ Policy makers should ensure that consumers and businesses can continue to use the Internet applications, services and devices of their choice. Policymakers should resist any attempts, whether regulatory, commercial or competitive, to block or hinder unfettered access to VoIP (or similar technologies) and more generally to all legal Internet content, applications and services, including the underlying technology, and that prevents it from being utilised to its full potential
- ▶ A dialogue between all interested stakeholders should be initiated by the European institutions to ensure that European consumers benefit from a meaningful choice of innovative services and applications.

We thank you in advance for taking consideration of these views. Feel free to contact Caroline De Cock, Executive Director VON Europe, by phone (+ 32 (0)474 840515) or email (cdc@voneurope.eu) should you need further information.

ABOUT VON Europe: VON Europe consists of leading VoIP companies, on the cutting edge of developing and delivering voice innovations over Internet. The coalition, which includes iBasis, Google, Microsoft, Rebtel, Skype and Voxbone, works to advance regulatory policies that enable Europeans to take advantage of the full promise and potential of VoIP. The Coalition believes that with the right public policies, Internet based voice advances can make talking more affordable, businesses more productive, jobs more plentiful, the Internet more valuable, and Europeans more safe and secure.

More information on VON Europe can be found at www.voneurope.eu

