

GIGAEurope welcomes adoption of the ‘Path to the Digital Decade’ Policy Programme

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GIGAEurope welcomes the commitments made by Member States to achieve the ambitious 2030 Digital Decade targets in the fields of connectivity, digital skills, and digital transformation of businesses & public services.

With the adoption of the Digital Decade Policy Programme (‘the Digital Decade’), The EU sends a strong and positive signal to society and the business community that digital transformation will be inclusive and it will contain prospects for personal development, innovation, and economic growth for all.

Representing private operators who build, operate and invest in gigabit communications networks, GIGAEurope supports the 2030 connectivity target of all end users being covered by a Gigabit network and all populated areas covered by next generation wireless high-speed networks, with at least 5G equivalent performance.

Reaching the connectivity targets is key to ensuring the strategic and socio-economic objectives of the EU Digital Strategy. By providing secure, resilient, and high-quality connectivity for all economic sectors at scale, network operators facilitate the digital transformation of European businesses, enable the green and digital transition of society, and increase the global competitiveness of European industry.

Attracting more private investment into European fixed Gigabit networks and 5G is urgent and critical to the success of Europe’s digital strategy. Whilst the Digital Decade sets a clear direction for these investments, private infrastructure investors also require long-term legal security and a clear perspective with regards to return on investment through a positive, enabling policy environment that is reflected in Member States’ strategic roadmaps.

In this regard, GIGAEurope particularly supports the emphasis placed, in the provisional agreement of the Digital Decade Policy Programme, on the principle of technology neutrality to guide national and EU policies for stimulating roll-out and deployment of Gigabit infrastructures & 5G networks. The fastest way of ensuring full Gigabit coverage in the EU is to avoid picking technology winners, thereby capturing the dynamics of market-based competition between gigabit-capable network technologies. It also allows optimal connectivity solutions to be found and tailored to the variety of local infrastructure situations across the EU. Gigabit-capable network solutions vary and can include fibre, HFC - Hybrid Fibre Coax (Docsis 3.1 and 4.0), 5G or any other future ecosystem, satellite, and next generation Wi-Fi. The latest Digital Economy and Society Index already shows positive progress towards reaching the 2030 targets. Fixed very high-capacity network coverage is now 70%, while 5G coverage is 66%. GIGAEurope believes that, in the process of delivering on the last stretch to 100%, the EU should maintain its technology neutral approach. This means that HFC should be

listed among the Gigabit-capable connectivity technologies, as an example of technology that already provides Gigabit speeds.

GIGAEurope also welcomes the new holistic initiative from the European Commission to align pending elements of the European legal framework, governing broadband infrastructure build, which are still under revision. The forthcoming 'Connectivity Infrastructure Act' ('the Act') is an opportunity to reduce the cost and administrative burden associated with local broadband network roll-out. The revised Broadband Cost Reduction Directive may also build on cost reduction best practices identified in the EU Connectivity Toolbox. The Commission may use the Act to reflect the recent reports on the implementation of the Toolbox and encourage more Member States to implement best practices also related to radio spectrum. GIGAEurope believes this would be the fastest way to achieve concrete advancements of fixed and wireless connectivity for EU citizens. Revised broadband state aid guidelines should protect existing private investment in gigabit-capable infrastructures against overbuild by state-subsidized networks and against de facto foreclosure of commercially attractive infrastructure markets by undue public funding.

Addressing the obstacles to attract private investment into the roll-out of European digital infrastructure is a matter of great urgency. At present, the pace of private investment in European connectivity is a point of concern, particularly regarding 5G roll-out. The Digital Decade targets, paired with the Connectivity Infrastructure Act, may provide a much-anticipated boost of confidence for private investment in digital infrastructures in order to reach the 2030 connectivity targets.
