

European Regional Bureau Newsletter



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Internet Access

EU: Commission responds to claims it is worsening the digital divide with WiFi4EU programme

- The Commission responded this week to a [parliamentary question](#) submitted by a group of Italian MEPs from the 5 Star Movement criticising the Commission's handling of the 'WiFi4EU' call for applications.
- The WiFi4EU programme provides €120m of funding between 2017-2019 to build free wi-fi networks in EU municipalities. Over 18,000 local authorities registered for the first call and 5,000 applications were received in the first few seconds. The online portal was quickly closed and the call cancelled due to alleged technical problems.
- The MEPs, including Fabio Castaldo (Vice-President of the European Parliament), asked the EC back in June whether it would review its approach based on a first-come-first-serve basis, unfairly allowing bidding municipalities with the best digital infrastructure to secure the funds, paradoxically worsening the digital divide for rural areas, argue the parliamentarians.
- The EC responded to say it would carry out a review of its methodology for the next call (expected in Autumn 2018) but strongly refuted the claim it was worsening the digital divide, saying it had no evidence that its methodology has impacted rural areas differently.

Sweden: Digital skills programmes at the forefront

- The Swedish government is rolling out this year a digital reboot to its nationwide education system. Courses on programming and digital literacy will aim to give its future workers a competitive edge against those trained in the USA and China.
- Sweden is already one of the world's most tech savvy [nations](#). The World Economic Forum's "Network Readiness Index" places it third, behind Singapore and Finland, thanks to widespread access to high-speed Internet, and a well-educated, largely tech-literate population.
- Since the 1990s, the Swedish government has been working to widen Internet access. Measures like subsidizing the cost of personal computers for every family and investing heavily in broadband networks are credited for having created a successful online gaming industry, including the company King, responsible for the mobile gaming hit Candy Crush, and digital giants like music-streaming site Spotify.
- Alongside programming and coding, the skills taught to Swedish school children include critical online thinking and awareness of fake news. The use of tablets is encouraged as is the use of custom-built online libraries to share arts & crafts projects with teachers and parents.

Baltics: Expansion of 5G testing corridor for automated driving

- Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have [agreed](#) to develop an experimental 5G cross-border corridor that will allow for the large-scale testing of autonomous vehicles on motorways.
- The 'Via Baltica – North' agreement will extend the pan-European network of 5G corridors, which was initiated by the European Commission.

Trust**EU: MEPs adopt free flow of non-personal data Regulation**

- The European Parliament adopted in a session plenary on Thursday [proposals](#) facilitating the free flow of non-personal data.
- The measures prohibit national rules requiring that data be stored or processed in a specific Member State. Non-personal data includes: machine-generated data or commercial data, such as big data analytics, data on precision farming, or data on maintenance needs for industrial machines.
- Mariya Gabriel, the Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, welcomed the adoption of the rules by parliamentarians, saying: "This Regulation does for non-personal data what the General Data Protection Regulation has already done for personal data: free and safe movement across the European Union."
- The Commission expects the regulation to lead to a 4% increase – or €739bn – in EU GDP until 2020 as it opens up access to data for European start-ups and SMEs.
- For the rapporteur, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (EPP, SE): "This regulation de-facto establishes data as the fifth freedom on the EU Single Market. By removing borders, burdens and barriers such as data localisation rules, we enable a level playing field for European companies to compete globally"
- The new law, approved by MEPs 520 votes to 81, is due to be approved by the EU Council of Ministers on 6 November and will enter into force six months after its publication in the EU Official Journal.

EU: MEPs adopt stronger child protection rules with Audio-Visual Media Services Directive

- New rules for broadcasters (Sky, Canal+), video-on-demand and video-sharing platforms (Netflix, YouTube, Facebook) will apply to ensure that minors are better protected against gratuitous violence and pornography, including more stringent rules on online advertising and the availability of European content in video-on-demand.
- Video-sharing platforms will now have more responsibility for the speed of their reactions when content is reported. While not including a provision for the automatic filtering of upload content, platforms will need to create a transparent and easy-to-use mechanism to allow users to report and flag content.
- The new law also includes strict rules on advertising, product placement in children's TV programmes and content available on video-on-demand platforms.
- DIGITALEUROPE, representing Europe's tech industry, welcomed the measures for setting out a "moderate and future-proof framework" while calling on Member States to try and avoid overly prescriptive provisions in implementing the directive.

EU: Commission plans one-year GDPR evaluation for June 2019

- The EU's Justice Commissioner Věra Jourová announced this week that the European Commission will release a full evaluation of the EU's flagship privacy regulation, GDPR, in June 2019.
- Speaking to reporters, the Commissioner said "I will manage to do a year-after assessment. It will be in June next year. I would like to know how it works in practice".

- Jourová said it would be the task of the next Commission, which will take office after next year's EU elections, to enforce the rules.

EU: Facebook data breach “first test” for GDPR

- Justice Commissioner Jourová put pressure on Facebook to disclose further details of the security breach that impacted around 90 million users last week. Jourová urged Facebook to comply fully with Ireland's Data Protection Commission (DPC) and disclose whether EU users were affected by the breach and how their data was impacted.
- The DPC said that “less than 10 percent” of the users affected by the breach are believed to be EU accounts. The speed of Facebook's disclosure process suggests that the threat of GDPR fines (up to 4 percent of overall turnover) sharpened minds at the company.
- The security team discovered the breach Tuesday, notified authorities Wednesday and on Friday morning asked affected users to log back in for security purposes. Commissioner Jourová [tweeted](#) that the data breach would be the “first test case” for GDPR.

Germany: Only a quarter of German firms compliant with GDPR

- According to a [report](#) published last week by the German tech association, Bitkom, Germany has made “little progress” towards implementing the EU's new data privacy rules, GDPR.
- Of the 500 companies included in the survey, only one in four were fully compliant with GDPR. 40 percent were “mostly” compliant, 30 percent were “partially compliant” and five percent had just started the process.
- The report argues that most companies underestimated the implementation of GDPR.