

Broadband Platform report calls for more investment to tackle the digital divide

The Broadband Platform set up between the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and European Commission's DG CNECT held its second meeting on 2 February. The discussions focalised on the role of Broadband Competence Offices and on boosting broadband investment in view of the discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of the European Union.

The meeting was co-chaired by **Alin Nica** (RO/EPP), vice-chair of the CoR's SEDEC commission, and **Claire Bury**, deputy director-general of DG CNECT. They highlighted the good cooperation between both institutions through the Broadband Platform and pointed to the importance of connectivity in Europe and the main initiatives that the European Commission had adopted as part of the Digital Single Market strategy, especially the Gigabit Society communication and the Electronic Communications Code.

Broadband Platform members – regional and local politicians from EU Member States – showed great interest in the functioning of the European Commission's [Broadband Competence Offices](#), especially the 73 regional ones, where it was noted that a lack of data at regional level represented a major problem. The inflexibility of state aid schemes was raised again as a main concern in several Member States as well as speed and reliable coverage, especially in rural areas, and the need for more expertise.

These concerns and the work of the Broadband Platform are reflected in a [report](#) prepared by **Mart Vörklaev** (EE/ALDE) that was adopted by the CoR's SEDEC commission on 21 February. The document recalls that in the current programming period EUR 14 billion is available from the ESI funds for creating broadband infrastructure. Therefore cohesion policy must continue to play a key role in boosting broadband connectivity, in combination and synergy with loan financing from the European Investment Bank and other development banks.

The document also emphasizes that broadband development plans should be developed jointly between telecommunications companies, the national level and local and regional authorities. In the interests of competition, the separation of services from the network (unbundling) is considered necessary in the same way as in the energy sector. Vörklaev's opinion will be adopted at the CoR plenary session on 22–23 March.

The next Broadband Platform meeting is set to take place in autumn 2018 around the DG CNECT's Broadband Days.