

European Regional Bureau Newsletter



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[Frédéric Donck \(ERB\)](#)

Internet Access

Germany: Deutsche Telekom goes to court over new 5G rules

- Germany's largest telecoms operator Deutsche Telekom, along with two other significant network providers, have filed a [lawsuit](#) against the German government over the conditions for participating in a 5G auction.
- The lawsuit follows the decision of the German federal network agency to revise the preconditions needed for participating in the auctions while allowing new market entrants to use their infrastructure.
- German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier criticised the telecom companies, saying "mobile providers need to fulfil their promises, otherwise the state will draw consequences", referring to Germany's patchy phone coverage he added that much more work on network development must still be done "every dead spot is an absurdity in a high-technology country like Germany".

France: Edouard Philippe pledges to improve Internet connectivity

- The French Prime Minister [announced](#) on December 27 2018 that his government will spend €620 million to help regions and departments increase high-speed broadband coverage, an initiative that forms part of Emmanuel Macron's plan to dedicate €3.3 billion to Internet access & connectivity measures during his five-year mandate.
- The government aims to ensure the whole country has broadband access by 2020, and high-speed broadband access by 2022.
- Meanwhile, several 5G pilot projects are underway in France's regions led by the main telecom operators Bouygues Telecom, SFR and Orange. A [map](#) of the projects recently released by the telecoms regulator ARCEP shows at least 10 projects spread across France, centring on urban areas like Paris, Lille, Grenoble, and Toulouse, but also in smaller cities such as Douai, Vélizy and Pau.

Finland: Country rolls out nation-wide AI skills scheme

- In a bid to improve online access, the Finnish government has announced its support for a popular grass-roots programme to teach citizens basic AI skills at university.
- What began as a free university course called “[Elements of AI](#)” at the University of Helsinki, created in partnership with consultancy Reaktor, was expanded for marketing purposes to businesses, as the organisers invited Finland’s largest employers to help train at least 1 percent of Finland’s population in AI in what became dubbed as the “AI challenge”.
- The Finnish government has now agreed to back the nation-wide campaign to ensure the training of 1 percent of Finland’s 5.5m population (55,000) in the basic concepts of AI, raising awareness among citizens rather than focusing only on training the next generation of computer scientists.

Trust

Global: Facebook continues to dominate, despite scandals

- Despite numerous scandals in 2018 Facebook retained its strong online presence, according to [data](#) gathered by news website Politico.
- Recent reports find that three out of the five most used social media websites last year were either Facebook products (Facebook or Messenger) or owned by the company (WhatsApp).
- In terms of online presence, Facebook ranked first with 2.2 billion active users in 2018 ahead of Google’s YouTube’s 1.9 billion users.

Global: Huawei slams critics in New Year’s message

- Chinese Telecom giant Huawei has pushed back against critics in the United States and Europe over security concerns. Huawei’s rotating chairman Guo Ping declared in a [blog post](#) that ‘Huawei has never and will never present a security threat’ and criticised Western governments who fear implementing 5G network with its equipment.
- Despite security concerns, Huawei sold in 2018 more than 200 million smartphones – a 14 percent share of world market – growing its revenue by 21 percent over the period, signing 26 commercial 5G contract and shipping over 10,000 5G base stations globally.

EU: European Commission pushes to finalise remaining digital legislation in 2019

- As President Jean-Claude Juncker’s Commission mandate approaches its end, policy-makers are examining its progress since the ‘Digital Single Market’ Agenda was launched in 2015.
- Important successes include the adoption of the General Data Protection Agreement and an agreement on a Cybersecurity Act. However, three important files remain on the table with no clear date on when they will be sealed and adopted: the ePrivacy Regulation, the eEvidence Regulation and the Copyright Directive. The first two are making very slow progress in the Council as Member

States disagree on the extent of new security measures, while the copyright talks remain in sensitive political talks despite being in the final stage of negotiations.

- Other pending files also include the “fairness in platform-to-business relations” [Regulation](#), for which the Parliament and Council disagree on the extent of any possible compromise. MEPs have strengthened the Commission’s initial proposal, but Member States want to keep it ‘light-touch’.
- With the European elections looming on May 23-26 2019, suspending all parliamentary work for several weeks before and after as the political parties pursue their campaign, the EU’s institutions have less than five months to close all negotiations. Following that, work will continue under the leadership of a new college of commissioners and a new Parliament.

EU: Romanian Presidency hopes to reach agreement on key e-Privacy Regulation

- The Romanian Government, which assumed the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU on January 1 2019, [wants](#) Member States to adopt a common position on the e-Privacy Regulation by 7 June. The file has been stuck in the Council for the last two years as none of the last three rotating presidencies (Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria) managed to forge a consensus.
- A key proposal in the European Commission’s attempt to improve online trust for citizens, the Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications was [presented](#) in January 2017 as complementary legislation to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), expanding the EU’s existing privacy rules to new providers of electronic communications services, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Gmail, and Viber.
- Should the Romanian Presidency succeed in reaching an agreement among Member States, it will have to then agree its position with the European Parliament, which will be electing a whole new set of MEPs in May, a fact likely to lengthen the three-part trilogue discussions beyond the presidency’s mandate.

Finland: Nordic country ready for GDPR

- Finland’s new Data Protection Act took [effect](#) on 1 January, six months after the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force, making it officially compliant with the EU’s new rules. The Act gives the country’s data protection chief new powers to fine corporations for breaches and strengthen children’s data security.
- Finland was with Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Slovenia, Spain and Portugal, amongst the Member States that had not yet adapted their legislation to GDPR.