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Regulatory workshop highlights the importance of public policy in accelerating the deployment of fibre-to-the-home in Europe

BRUSSELS, 24 June 2010 – The FTTH Council Europe hosted a highly successful workshop with European policy makers in Brussels today to raise awareness of the issues and challenges surrounding the roll out of fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) in Europe.

Representatives from the European Commission, the European Parliament and National Regulatory Authorities attended this one-day event hosted by the FTTH Council Europe, where they discussed the advantages of fibre access networks and how clear and appropriate regulation can help to speed up the deployment of high-speed broadband.

The social and economic benefits of high-speed broadband are becoming clearer, and the Council has commissioned several studies to help quantify the benefits, which were discussed at the workshop. Applications such as home monitoring for the elderly or remote learning can lower the cost of government services and increase productivity. Three rural municipalities from Austria presented their FTTH project and outlined the direct benefits of fibre. This included the increase of population, the foundation of new companies and local communication services for elderly people.

Europe also needs FTTH if it is to achieve the targets set out in the EU2020 Strategy document and the European Digital Agenda, which proposes that 100 percent of households should have access to 30 Mbps broadband at by 2020 and 50 percent should have 100 Mbps in the same time frame. Fibre is the only future-proof infrastructure capable of supplying guaranteed bandwidths of 100 Mbps for both downloads and uploads.

The FTTH Council Europe believes that European authorities should take a more active role in supporting the deployment of fibre-based networks. Free markets and competition should be allowed to deliver fibre to the mass market, but that this approach will not bring fibre to everyone, particularly those in rural areas.

“We need to see some joined-up thinking if we are to achieve the ambitious targets set out in the EU2020 document and the Digital Agenda,” said Hartwig Tauber, Director General of the FTTH Council Europe. “We need Member States to describe their plans for FTTH in more detail, and explain how they are going to achieve those plans. This means identifying geographic areas where competition is expected to work simply by being facilitated, and recognizing areas where other interventions will need to be made. ”

“The European approach relies on private investment where commercially possible and state investment where it is not,” said Chris Holden, President of the FTTH Council Europe. “However,

where the division of these responsibilities is not clear, there is a danger that neither the private sector nor the state will act.”

The FTTH Council Europe pointed out that several countries, including France, the Netherlands and Portugal, have already taken big strides in terms of setting out a vision of how FTTH networks might develop and putting appropriate policy and regulatory measures in place.

Portugal has adopted a geographically segmented model. In urban areas, market forces are expected to deliver fibre, but public policy facilitates competition by lowering the barriers to entry in the market, and by opening up access to ducts and in-building wiring. In areas where the economic conditions don't support competitive deployment, the Portuguese government has incentivised the roll-out of a shared fibre infrastructure that all operators can access.

Different deployment models are being pursued in France and the Netherlands, but the common theme is the positive contribution from government and regulators. “Where public policy is clear, coherent and appropriate we see real progress in terms of FTTH network development and where it is not we see little or no progress,” Holden concluded.

Regulation is a priority theme for the Council this year, and will be discussed at the FTTH Conference in Milan, Italy, on 9 and 10 February 2011 www.ftthconference.eu.

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About the FTTH Council Europe:

The FTTH Council Europe is an industry organisation with a mission to accelerate the availability of fibre-based, ultra-high-speed access networks to consumers and businesses. The Council promotes this technology because it will deliver a flow of new services that enhances the quality of life, contributes to a better environment and increased economic competitiveness. The FTTH Council Europe consists of more than 130 member companies. www.ftthcouncil.eu

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