

Neelie Kroes

Vice-President of the European Commission responsible
for the Digital Agenda

**“Radio must not be left behind in the
digital revolution”**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In the North African revolutions we are currently witnessing, many commentators have stressed the role played by ICT technologies – in particular Internet's social networks and mobile phones: they have raised the spirit for resistance and greatly helped mobilise the democratic masses. They have also reported the news to the rest of the world, almost in real time.

Today, in front of the AER, I can recall that a similar role was played by radio in other revolutions: the 2nd World War or the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Well before the Internet, radio was the first technology that could reach anyone, anytime, across the borders.

Of course, radio continues to play this role today – and much more: it has become an essential part of our cultural and information landscape. And I want radio to be at the forefront of another revolution: the digital revolution.

There is no single way forward – radio can obviously be delivered over a wide variety of platforms and its programmes can be rich and varied. It is not for us in Brussels to dictate the pace or the way change should happen in this diverse sector. However, my role as European Commissioner for the Digital Agenda is to create the best conditions for those evolutions to happen.

Indeed, what I see in the current environment is a lack of consensus about the future of radio. Some people even question the fact that we really need digital radio or claim that radio is "a special case" which could exist forever on a combination of analogue and online services.

I also see no consensus on standards and roll-out that would give digital radio a fair chance to prove its worth.

I think we need to do better than that in Europe. We – and that includes everyone in this room – need to do the thinking that will enable us to envisage radio's future in Europe. I will not prejudge any issue, but nor will I accept that complacency should be our guide. We were not complacent about broadband when "dial-up" was considered by some as "good enough". We were not complacent about mobile phones when fixed line telephones seemed to be the norm for all. And we cannot be complacent about radio's future now.

While awareness of digital radio is low, the population is already well aware of the benefits of digital audio and they have had it in compact discs and iPods for years. We cannot forget the European aspects of this issue. My job is to help content providers scale up their offer at least to the Single Market size – and that cannot be done with FM analogue radio alone.

So, we must get to the bottom of the problems holding back the roll-out of digital radio. We must understand exactly why the legal frameworks for digital and online deployment are so disparate across Europe. We need to understand why the EU-wide consensus in 1986 that led to the technically impressive DAB standard has drifted to today's inertia. Is it because digital radio is the new 'betamax'? Or are the differences in success between GSM for mobile and DAB and DAB+ for radio due to a more complex set of issues? I think that there is great potential for digital radio, as the UK and Danish experiences demonstrate.

From the Commission's discussions with Member States, we have not yet reached clear-cut conclusions at European level on a number of fundamental questions: how can radio best participate in convergence? What incentives would encourage user and manufacturers to shift to the digital format?

I need your support to develop the right answers to those questions. They will probably cover not only technical issues (e.g. spectrum efficiency of second generation standards and interoperability), but also political and economic issues. The ecosystem of radio must change, to the benefit of the many of us who enjoy its programmes on a daily basis.

We must all think creatively. Let me give you just one example. In the absence of standards agreed by the market, in the absence of digital radio in 16 Member States, I welcome the efforts of the WorldDMB industry group. They have developed receiver specifications which integrate DAB, DAB-plus, and DMB standards in one receiver. This is possible because these are open standards!

It is also important that you make your voice heard in wider debates that will concern you alongside with other – sometimes quite powerful – players:

- the European spectrum policy programme is one, including the digital switch-off for TV broadcasting;
- the place of online advertisement is another one;
- finally, let's not forget the forthcoming proposal for a Directive on Collective Rights Management – and more generally Europe's wider strategy on copyright and other intellectual property rights.

In conclusion, let me say that I am optimistic that the radio Single Market has a digital future.

I am determined that you should have access to the full benefits of the Single Market.

To get there, we will need EU-wide coordination. Rest assured I am your ally in your efforts to give people the radio they want, how they want it.

Thank you for your attention.