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EU: Council Presidency to miss year-end deadline for cross-border spectrum agreements

- As a concrete objective to be achieved throughout its Council Presidency that commenced 1 January, Malta aims to shift the 7000 Mhz band of spectrum from broadcasters to phone companies to help accelerate 5G. This is in line with the Commission's position, who wants all Member States to detach their 700 MHz spectrum band by 2020 to encourage telecom operators to invest in 5G technology.
- However, the Malta itself will likely miss the year-end deadline to conclude cross-border coordination agreements for this spectrum band, set by the European Commission as part of its proposal. In general, Malta's spectrum is out of sync with the rest of the EU, with less than 40% of it aligned.

Sweden: Fight over net neutrality

- The Swedish post and telecoms authority told telecoms provider Telia to remove its zero-rating status from a series of social media sites or face formal action.
- Telia reacted by arguing that its services comply with the EU framework. It claimed that the Swedish authority took an overly narrow perspective, not considering the positive impact of the zero-rating offer on competition and the adverse effect a ban would have on users.

UK: Former Ofcom Director Recommends the Government invest in 4G rather than follow 5G hype

- In the Autumn Statement, Chancellor Philipp Hammond announced that the UK would provide £700m funding for 5G to make the UK a world leader in the technology.
- Former Director of Ofcom Professor William Webb recommends the UK instead invest the money in 4G, as a recent study by the National Infrastructure Committee showed that 4G coverage in the UK was worse than that of Albania.
- Webb argues that mobile operators will have to bear most of the 5G investment costs, having to spend around £3bn each. He claims that although they are reluctant to make these investments, operators won't publicly criticise the deployment of 5G in case they are refused access to spectrum in response.

Trust

EU: Telecoms set to win over e-Privacy Directive

- The European Commission's release of the e-Privacy Directive is expected Wednesday, 11 January. Meant to protect Europeans' privacy, the Directive mainly targets telecoms companies but also affects communication apps like WhatsApp or Skype.
- Following lobbying from telecoms companies, the final text may allow these companies to use certain type of data currently off-limits and therefore compete with software companies on services such as mapping.

EU: Commission shies away from new Regulation for free flow of data

- Critics say the Commission's effort to create an EU without data localisation restrictions, expected to be released 11 January, has been watered down as the Commission is afraid of provoking larger Member States.
- Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, believes most data should already flow freely across Europe thanks to the Service Directive. However, Member States have widely failed to implement the Services Directive. In November, the Commission listed Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania and Spain as culprits in this regard.
- In light of this, the Commission is shying away from introducing additional layers of regulation specifically for data flows. The proposal that will be released on 11 January is now expected to be entirely non-legislative.

France: Fear of election hacking

- With national elections approaching, France is increasing its investment in cybersecurity following the hacking scandal that hit the Democratic Party during the US elections.
- But whereas the State increases its protection, Socialist security chief Sebastien Pietrasanta warned that political decision-makers and their staff lack both skills in cybersecurity and the means to protect their communication. Roughly 1 million people submit their votes electronically, rendering the democratic process itself a weak spot for cyber-attacks.
- In the past, France has repeatedly identified the Islamic State group as being behind hacking operations, including a major attack on the TV5Monde channel in 2015.

Other

China: Apple removes New York Times App from China Apple store

- At the request of Chinese authorities, Apple has removed the New York Times app from its store in China. The authorities argued that the app violated local regulations.
- It is not the first time that Apple has been requested by the Chinese government to carry out certain actions. In the past, the company was asked to place data centres in the country to store Chinese users' information. The Chinese market accounts for a fifth of Apple's sales.
- The New York Times asked Apple to reconsider its position, with spokesperson Eileen Murphy calling the Chinese authorities' request "part of their wider attempt to prevent readers in China from accessing independent news coverage by The New York Times of that country".