



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
Directorate-General Information Society and Media  
Electronic Communications Policy

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **FOR THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE HARMONISATION OF NUMBERING RESOURCES FOR THE PROVISION OF BUSINESS SERVICES**

***Consultation***

Publication date: 6 December 2010

Closing Date for Responses: 28 February 2011

*This document does not represent an official position of the European Commission, but is intended to stimulate debate on the part of the stakeholders and the public. It does not prejudge the form or content of any future proposal by the European Commission.*

## 1. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The revised EU regulatory framework for electronic communications aims at enhancing the single market *inter alia* by way of harmonisation of numbering resources. In addition, the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) identifies further harmonisation in the area of numbering as one of the key issues for reinforcing the single market for telecommunications services. In particular, it highlights that improved harmonisation of numbering regimes on the basis of the framework could help European manufacturers and retailers by facilitating sales, after-sales and customer enquiry services over a single Europe-wide number.

Against this background, this questionnaire is intended to gather views of a wide range of stakeholders on the market demand for 'European' telephone numbers and on the most appropriate way in which they could contribute to meeting the DAE goals.

The Commission invites written comments on the questions raised in this document, to be submitted by **28 February 2011**.

## 2. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Telephone numbers are used to identify uniquely the called party. They are and remain an important identifier in electronic communications. Telephone numbers in the EU are administered nationally by the national regulatory authorities, which allocate numbers in accordance with their national numbering plans. Further to identifying an individual holder of a telephone number, numbers also convey additional information, e.g. to indicate the geographic location of the number holder or that a number is used for premium rate services. Internationally, each country is identified by a country code which is administered by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). An attempt to introduce a European code was made in 2000, when a code 3883 was assigned by the ITU to 24 European countries to implement a European telephony numbering space (ETNS). The objective of the ETNS was to promote pan-European services by making numbers available in circumstances where neither national nor global numbers were suitable or available. It was meant to allow pan-European companies, organisations and individuals to facilitate Europe-wide access to their services. In practice, however, the ETNS never really took up and the code has been reclaimed as of 31 December 2010 by ITU.

There are thus currently no European wide numbers available for businesses wanting to be reachable across the borders. Consequently companies need to rely on national geographic or non-geographic numbers. In order to call these numbers from abroad a consumer has to make an international call, dialling first the country code of the called country. Given that prices charged for international calls are still well above those for national calls consumers associate country codes with high prices<sup>1</sup>. International calls are also often outside the flat rate packages offered by telecoms providers. Therefore, in order to facilitate consumers' access to their services many cross-border businesses have

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<sup>1</sup> On average prices for international calls within the EU are more than twice as high as those for national calls. See 15<sup>th</sup> Progress Report on the Single European Electronic Communications Market, [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/policy/ecomm/library/communications\\_reports/annualreports/15th/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecomm/library/communications_reports/annualreports/15th/index_en.htm)

a specific national telephone number for access in each Member State where they are active. Companies often also use non-geographic numbers which are often difficult to reach from other Member States, e.g. because companies choose to limit access to these numbers from abroad for economic reasons. Consumers in these cases find themselves often in a situation where they cannot reach the service they desire unless an alternative geographic number is provided for international access.

This fragmentation has negative consequences on the development of the internal market by causing extra costs for businesses and consumers. It also causes extra inconvenience and frustration on the part of consumers in cross-border situations. The current numbering arrangements also provide telecoms operators with a means to apply price discrimination – important price differences between national and international calls which cannot be explained by costs are a clear indication of this pricing behaviour.

### **3. HARMONISATION OF NUMBERING RESOURCES – TWO OPTIONS**

The EU regulatory framework provides essentially two routes to enhance harmonised numbering. One means is to introduce further harmonisation to national numbering under Article 10(4) of the Framework Directive. Another route is to take measures aimed at enhancing the take up of the European telephone access code under the European Telephone Numbering Space (ETNS).

#### **3.1. Harmonisation under Article 10(4) of the Framework Directive**

Article 10(4) of the Framework Directive<sup>2</sup> provides a general legal background for the EU harmonisation of specific numbers or numbering ranges. Member States are requested to support such harmonisation where it promotes the functioning of the internal market and the development of pan-European services. The Commission may take appropriate technical implementing measures on this matter. Furthermore, Article 28 of the Universal Service Directive<sup>3</sup> requires Member States to ensure that relevant national authorities shall take all necessary steps to ensure that end-users are able to i) access and use services using non-geographic numbers within the Community and ii) access all numbers provided in the Community<sup>4</sup>.

Based on Article 10(4), for instance, a new EU-wide short numbering range (e.g. 115 xxx) could be reserved for business services by way of a Commission Decision. Such numbers would be commercial numbers, accessible, e.g. for travelling business and private users on a national basis for the local branch of large companies. Under this approach, any harmonized number would first have to be reserved individually at EU

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<sup>2</sup> Directive 2002/21/EC of March 2002 on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive) as amended by Directive 2009/140/EC of 25 November 2009 and Regulation 544/2009 of 18 June 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Directive 2002/22/EC of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive) as amended by Directive 2009/136/EC of 25 November 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The only exception is where a called subscriber has chosen for commercial reasons to limit access by calling parties located in specific geographical areas. In practice, in many occasions non-geographic numbers in one Member States are not reachable from other Member States.

level and then implemented (i.e. reserved in national numbering plans and assigned to the individual undertaking concerned separately at a Member State level). The advantage of such numbers is that they would be reasonably short and thus easy to remember. They would also provide a single identifier for a given company.

### **3.2. ETNS**

As regards ETNS, Article 27 of the amended Universal Service Directive enhances the previous rules regarding the European telephone access code. In particular, Article 27(2) provides that a legal entity, established within the Community and designated by the Commission, shall have sole responsibility for the management, including number assignment, and promotion of the ETNS. The Commission shall adopt the necessary implementing rules. Article 27(3) addresses one of the shortcomings of the 'old' ETNS i.e. the high prices for calling ETNS numbers. In particular, it provides that Member States shall ensure that operators allowing calls to and from ETNS handle these calls at rates similar to those applied for calls to and from other Member States. This means, however, that calls to the ETNS would still be priced at the higher level of international calls (cf. Footnote 1).

## **4. MAIN ISSUES FOR CONSULTATION**

### **4.1 Fragmented numbering schemes**

As explained above, Europe's numbering resources are still attributed at the Member State level, with national rather than Europe-wide numbering schemes. As a consequence, businesses do not have a single European number on which they can be reached by their European customers.

**Question 1:** How does the fact that numbering assignment schemes are purely national impede the development of the single market? What are the advantages and disadvantages of purely national numbers?

**Question 2:** How do you see the need for further harmonisation on numbering resources?

**Question 3:** In terms of your activity (e.g. company providing products and services to the European citizens/end customer/provider of electronic communications service and networks/public authority) do you see any benefits of having a single European telephone number? How do Internet and the increasing use of on-line shopping affect this demand?

### **4.2. Harmonisation of numbering resources under Article 10(4) of Framework Directive**

Article 10(4) provides a possibility to introduce further harmonisation for example by reserving a new EU-wide short numbering range, such as 115 xxx, for business services.

Under this approach, any harmonized number would first be reserved individually at EU level for a particular company or organization and then implemented (i.e. reserved in national numbering plans and assigned to individual businesses) separately at Member State level.

**Question 4:** How could the short number (sub)ranges for a harmonized European use best facilitate cross-border business activities? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach? Which features should they have?

**Question 5:** What would be the benefits of a short number range in terms of marketing and branding of products and services? What would be the impact of such a number on marketing and advertising costs?

**Question 6:** Which stakeholders in particular could benefit from a single European number?

**Question 7:** How could the reservation process explained above affect the take-up of a new harmonised EU-wide numbering range?

**Question 8:** How can we ensure that the reserved numbers are effectively used across the Member States?

**Question 9:** How can it be ensured that calling a short number is competitive in terms of pricing compared to the use of other numbers? What should the pricing structure look like to make a short number a success?

#### **4.2.1 Market demand and future options for a single European number under the ETNS**

The demand for the ETNS did not materialize in the past. A number of arguments have been presented to explain the lack of demand. These arguments vary from the complexity caused by the large number of necessary interconnection agreements leading to high transaction costs and the difficulty of developing sustainable business plans. In addition, there was uncertainty about the level of tariffs charged.

Despite the past experience, it is possible that with an appropriate configuration a number of benefits could be identified for a fully functioning and efficient ETNS. The European identity is a vital characteristic on which ETNS should be built. In particular, European businesses can be expected to benefit from such an identity in terms of marketing and branding inasmuch as the ETNS allows pan-European organisations to present their businesses as being associated more with Europe. Also marketing and advertising costs for companies operating across Member States might be reduced. Furthermore, businesses should have the chance to increase their availability to their customers by making it easier to be reached. Indeed, ETNS might benefit those businesses who want their customers to have the convenience of calling a single number from any location in Europe. This is particularly the case for businesses such as travel and financial services which cater to customers who travel internationally within Europe.

**Question 10:** Could the +3883 code prove useful for building a European numbering identity? How could a single European-wide number best facilitate cross-border business activities? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

**Question 11:** What would be the benefits of a single European number in terms of marketing and branding of products and services? What would be the impact of such a number on marketing and advertising costs?

**Question 12:** Which stakeholders in particular could benefit from a single European number?

Market demand determines the success of the ETNS. This demand depends on the communications applications or services available in using the number and the costs of implementing these applications. It is important to note that the ETNS is implemented by way of a shared country code (+3883), which determines to a large extent the services available. The services cannot duplicate global services for which Country Codes for global services have been assigned<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, premium rate, shared cost or freephone services cannot at present be provided over +3883.

A study commissioned by the services of DG INFSO in 2009 outlined three options for the future ETNS:

- ETNS as a medium-long non-geographic European number (+3883 + 8 digits) used by private citizens and organisations/businesses as an alternative to a national number to provide a European identity.
- ETNS as a reasonably short non-geographic European number (3833 + 5 digits) dedicated to organisations/businesses only for reaching call centres/contact points in organisations/businesses that want a European identity
- ETNS as a European number which provides an access point to subscribers' contact details such as email, phone number or web page.

Further details on the proposed options are presented in an excerpt from the final study report which is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/policy/ecomm/doc/library/public\\_consult/numb\\_harm/study.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecomm/doc/library/public_consult/numb_harm/study.pdf)

**Question 13:** What are the requirements for an attractive ETNS (e.g. in terms of technical arrangements, number length etc)? What kind of services should be available under the ETNS? Would any of the options outlined in the study referred to above prove a suitable model for the ETNS? What would be an alternative approach?

**Question 14:** To what extent does the fact that premium rate, shared cost or freephone services cannot be provided over +3883 affect the attractiveness of the ETNS?

**Questions 15:** Should the ETNS number be reserved to businesses/organisations only or

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<sup>5</sup> Currently the global service code assigned by ITU are: i) +800 (International Freephone Service), +808 (International Shared Cost Service), iii) +878 (Universal Personal Telecommunications, iv) +979 International Premium rate Service.

should it be available both to private and business users?

**Question 16:** How can it be ensured that calling an ETNS number is competitive in terms of pricing compared to the use of other numbers? What should the pricing structure look like to make the ETNS a success?

#### **4.2.2 Management of the ETNS**

Article 27(2) of the Universal Service Directive provides that "*a legal entity, established within the Community and designated by the Commission, shall have sole responsibility for the management, including number assignment, and promotion of the European Telephony Numbering Space (ETNS). The Commission shall adopt the necessary implementing rules.*"

**Question 17:** What should be the role and tasks of the entity? What would be the most appropriate management model for the ETNS?

**Question 18:** Which form of organization would be most suitable for managing the ETNS? Should the ETNS manager be a public body or should it be a commercial entity?

**Question 19:** What is the most appropriate model for financing of the ETNS management?

#### **4.3. Any other issues**

Respondents are invited to raise any other issues relating to harmonisation of numbering resources that they might want to address in this consultation. In particular, should you consider that none of the above options are appropriate or they are insufficient could you indicate what the defects are? Respondents are also invited to present alternative approaches to numbering policy that would best contribute to the development of single market.

#### **5. RESPONSES**

Responses to this public consultation should reach the European Commission by 28 February 2011 at [info-numbering-harmonisation@ec.europa.eu](mailto:info-numbering-harmonisation@ec.europa.eu) . See Annex I for further information on submitting your response.

## **Responding to the consultation**

The Commission invites written views and comments on the issues raised in this document, to be submitted by 28 February 2011.

Contributions, together with the identity of the contributor, may be published on the website of the Directorate-General for Information Society and Media, unless the contributor objects to publication of personal or confidential data on the grounds that such publication would harm his or her legitimate interest. For more details, please see the Commission's general statement on personal data protection<sup>6</sup> as well as the specific privacy statement for this consultation<sup>7</sup>.

Please give the name of a contact person in your organisation for any questions on your contribution. Please note that we do not need a hard copy in addition to the electronic version.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/geninfo/legal\\_notices\\_en.htm#personaldata](http://ec.europa.eu/geninfo/legal_notices_en.htm#personaldata)

<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/policy/ecommm/library/public\\_consult/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecommm/library/public_consult/index.htm)