

The European Commission Is ‘Irresponsible’ in Not Addressing 5G Health Risks

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The European Commission is “irresponsible” in not addressing the health risks associated with the future rollout of next-generation mobile network, Bulgarian MEP Ivo Hristov has said.

His comments echo concerns recently highlighted by EU telecoms ministers, related to “non-technical” elements of 5G cybersecurity, as the debate continues around Europe’s ability to keep pace with the rest of the world on 5G deployment.

However, discussion over the potential health risks of establishing denser network infrastructures consisting of considerably higher capacities has recently surfaced as a growing concern among Parliamentarians in Brussels.

Speaking at an event at the European Parliament on Tuesday (10 December), S&D’s Hristov hit out at the Commission for failing to conduct a health impact assessment report on 5G, despite warnings being highlighted by many in the scientific community.

“Currently the EU has no assessment of the human health risk of the introduction of 5G technology,” he said. “The European Commission took the position that such an assessment was not necessary, despite warnings of the scientific community. I find this irresponsible.”

He added that he has asked the Parliament’s Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) Panel to prepare a study of the potential effects on health and the environment from the introduction of 5G networks.

Hristov’s point was supported on Tuesday by a contingency of Green MEPs who came out in force to challenge various telecom industry representatives, keen on making sure that Europe doesn’t lag further behind in its deployment of 5G network infrastructure.

5G technologies were described as an “inevitability” by Prof. Vladimir Poulkov, head of the intelligent communications infrastructure R&D Laboratory at Sofia Tech Park.

Poulkov said there were “forces at play” that would mean 5G deployment in the EU would become a necessity in order to keep up with the demand for higher capacity data transfers and speeds, something, he said, may help with wider goals in reducing Europe’s energy consumption.

This point in particular was heavily refuted by Paul Lannoye, former MEP and chairman of the Environmental Group Grappe, who claimed that there are no benefits whatsoever to the application of 5G in the energy sector.

In terms of the environment, Lannoye referred to several scientific studies that claim radio waves emitted from 5G transmitters could negatively impact insect populations, causing disruption to natural ecosystems.

Along this axis, German Green MEP Klaus Buchner was keen to highlight the importance that the EU follow its own commitments in exercising the 'precautionary principle' with regards to the future deployment of 5G across the bloc, which involves potentially taking preventive action in the face of uncertainty or possible risk.

Enshrined in Article 191 of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU's precautionary principle states that "environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source."

In 2016, the European Commission put forward plans to provide an EU-wide commercial launch of commercial 5G by 2020, with additional targets to cover urban areas by 2025.

However, these plans have faced a series of potential setbacks, thus far principally concerning the security of 5G network infrastructure, and allowing third-party access to the bloc's next-generation telecommunications networks.

Last week, EU ministers adopted [conclusions](#) concerning the importance and security of 5G technology, stressing that an approach to 5G cybersecurity should be comprehensive and risk-based, while also taking into account 'non-technical factors'.

Europe currently finds itself under pressure to take a stance on the involvement of China's Huawei in the EU's 5G networks. The US has already signed agreements with several EU member states including Poland and Romania, stressing that they will work together on a 5G approach.

Meanwhile, Bulgaria Prime Minister Boyko Borissov has recently met with US President Donald Trump in Washington, and the two released a joint statement saying that the "United States and Bulgaria declare the shared desire to strengthen cooperation" in the field of 5G.

More broadly, in order to reach Bulgaria's 2023 targets for connectivity and e-government, the country's Minister of Transport, Information Technology and Communications, Rosen Zhelyazkov, recently said that people need to be won around on some of the issues currently holding up the wider rollout of 5G infrastructures, such as security and health.

For Bulgarian MEP Hristov, however, these issues should be at the top of the list.

"It is the irreversibility of the process that should cause us to pay attention to fifth-generation mobile networks," he said on Tuesday. "Along with the numerous advantages, I believe that we should pay serious attention to the possible risks related to cybersecurity and potential effects on the environment and human health."

For the Commission at least, it appears that security rather than health is the most

important issue.

An October report from the Commission about the coordinated risk assessment of 5G networks noted that “threats posed by states or state-backed actors are perceived to be of highest relevance,” and member states have now been tasked with working on a set of risk alleviating measures to mitigate the cybersecurity risks outlined in the report.

EU nations will work alongside the Commission and ENISA, the European Agency for Cybersecurity, in the drawing up of the plans, which are set to be ready by the end of December this year.

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