

MEPs and European business leaders meet in Latvia to debate EU approach to the “digital switchover”

First international conference on the switchover from analogue to digital television hosted in Riga

4th December 2006: Members of the European Parliament, representatives from Baltic governments and CEOs from Europe's leading telecommunications companies have met in Latvia to discuss the plans for the transition of analogue to digital television across Europe.

The inaugural “Digital Switchover and the EU” conference, hosted by the European Satellite Operators' Association (ESOA) and sponsored by SES SIRIUS, was established to highlight the key issues that must be addressed by member states and European broadcasters. The event was held in Riga, Latvia, and had a special focus on the Baltic States.

The key areas discussed included the legal basis for the switchover; the previous problems and successes of technology migration in Europe; an outline of the new opportunities presented by digital TV technology; and a review of the switchover solutions available in the EU. The conference also focused on exchanging experiences between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and setting a final date for when consumers will be able to receive the new, high-quality TV signal.

Speakers included Members of the European Parliament, those responsible for the switchover in each of the Baltic States, the CEOs of leading European telecommunications companies and representatives of the electronic mass media. Opening the conference, Per Norman, CEO of SES SIRIUS and member of the ESOA Board of Directors, said: “Satellite operators welcome the switchover to digital transmission. We have operated with digital technology since the inception of our industry, and we support the switchover because of the many benefits it will deliver to consumers across Europe.

“The conference has made a strong start in the transfer of knowledge and experience to the new member states, particularly the Baltic States, many of whom have not progressed their plans for the switchover. The primary output of today's conference is to help identify the most effective switchover solution for the new member states.”

Sarunas Birutis, a Lithuanian MEP, gave the EU perspective on going digital and switchover models in the EU; while Kai Struckmann of Brussels law firm White & Case in Brussels presented the legal aspects, highlighting the recent Commission decision that subsidising one transmission platform only could constitute illegal state aid. The solution offered by satellites was presented by Hans Fjosne, CEO of Telenor Satellite Broadcasting and member of the ESOA Board of Directors. The conference also featured a panel discussion amongst Maris Rutkis, Acting Chairman of the Board of Latvia State Radio and Television Centre, Ilmars Muuls, Technical Director of Latvia Television, Mindaugas Musnikas, Technical Development Engineer of Lithuania State Radio and Television Centre and Indrek Lepp, Member of the Board of LEVIRA.

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About ESOA

The members of ESOA are EADS SPACE Services, Eurasiasat, HellasSat, Hispasat, Inmarsat, SES New Skies, SES Sirius, SES GLOBAL, Telenor Broadcasting Holding and Telespazio. Arianespace, EADS SPACE, International Space Brokers and Mansat are supporting members of ESOA. More details can be found at <http://www.esoa.net>.

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