

Mr. Carles Mulet
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Senado de España
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Proposición de Ley de medidas urgentes para el impulso de la radiodifusión sonora digital terrestre. (622/000034)

Dear Senador Mulet,

WorldDAB welcomes the proposal by Compromís for the Spanish Government to debate implementation of legislation for the digitisation of broadcast radio. I would like to take this opportunity to explain why we strongly support you in this initiative.

Radio plays an important social, cultural and democratic role across Europe, reaching 85% of European citizens every week. However, to remain relevant in the digital age, radio must adapt. The challenge is that innovation is constrained by the limited capacity of FM spectrum.

Digital Radio in Europe

To address this situation, broadcasters across Europe have been adopting DAB+. The standard is now firmly established as the core future platform for radio in Europe. By adopting DAB+, Spain will join the expanding network of European nations that have already rolled out digital radio services.

Key highlights include:

- Germany launched DAB+ in 2011 with a range of national, regional and local services. A second national multiplex will launch in October 2020 - bringing 16 new DAB+ commercial radio stations to listeners across the country
- Italy launched DAB+ in 2014 and now has three national and numerous local DAB+ multiplexes on air, covering over 83% of the population. Italy was also the first country to introduce national regulation mandating digital radio in all new receivers.
- The UK has had digital radio for over 20 years with three national multiplexes helping to drive audience growth (nearly 60% of all listening is on a digital platform) and advertising revenues (up 30% between 2013 and 2019)
- In France, DAB+ is on air in nine major cities and the large commercial radio groups M6, Lagardère, Les Echos, NRJ and Next Radio, and public broadcaster Radio France, will launch national DAB+ in 2021.
- In addition, to the largest European markets, national DAB+ services are also available in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

- These national developments have been underpinned by The European Electronic Communications Code (EECC), which will require all new car radios sold in the EU to be able to receive digital terrestrial radio from the end of 2020 - including in Spain

Drivers of change

The uptake of DAB+ across Europe has been driven by clear benefits for all stakeholders: listeners, broadcasters and society.

Benefits for listeners

DAB+ offers two key benefits for listeners:

- greater choice - allowing as many as six times as many national stations compared to FM
- clearer, more consistent audio quality - particularly when FM is overcrowded, or listeners are on the move

In addition, the expansion of DAB+ across Europe means that DAB+ receivers are much more accessible than in the past. Not only will DAB+ be available in all new car radios from the end of 2020, but consumer DAB+ receivers are more affordable than in the past, with low cost receivers now available for less than 20 euros.

Benefits for broadcasters

There is an urgent need for radio to innovate. Digital giants such as Amazon, Apple, Spotify and YouTube are invading radio's space and FM spectrum is full. The additional capacity provided by DAB+ gives broadcasters the opportunity to strengthen their offer to listeners.

The alternative of relying exclusively on online streaming for new services is problematic for several reasons: the dissemination costs for broadcasters on the web are many times higher than with DAB+, listeners must have an efficient internet connection, and there is no guarantee that network neutrality will be maintained.

In contrast, DAB+ offers broadcasters a robust, anonymous (i.e. not monitored), free-to air platform, with lower distribution costs and no reliance on third party gatekeepers. Successful launches in established markets have shown that DAB+ allows broadcasters the opportunity to expand their geographic coverage, launch new services, extend brands and grow audiences, with a corresponding growth in revenue.

In short, radio needs a multiplatform strategy (DAB+, hybrid, radioplayer and apps, podcasts and smart speakers), with DAB+ as the digital backbone.

Benefits for society

DAB+ delivers the following benefits for society: reliability in emergencies, media plurality, spectrum efficiency, lower costs and emissions and enhanced traffic information that is broadcast free to air.

The keys to a successful deployment of DAB+

In closing I would like to say a few words about the lessons learnt from the experiences of other countries. In every market, the key to success is a coherent strategy supported by all players, with commitment and collaboration across the ecosystem.

Building a successful DAB+ platform is a long-term endeavour, and in the markets that have already launched, we have seen that the goal is achieved when all players are focused on delivering an outcome which benefits all stakeholders. With this foundation, it will be possible to build a strong, successful platform for Spanish radio, which benefits broadcasters and the listeners.

I congratulate you on taking these steps toward protecting radio's future and I offer you WorldDAB's support and assistance as Spain progresses towards a digital future for radio.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Hannon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Patrick Hannon

President, WorldDAB

Appendix

DAB+ status across Europe

Established markets where national launches of DAB+ have taken place are:

- UK (DAB/DAB+)
- Norway
- Switzerland (2009)
- Denmark (switched from DAB to DAB+ in 2017)
- Germany (2011)
- The Netherlands (2013)
- Italy (2014), Slovenia (2016)
- Czech Republic (2017)
- Belgium (2018)
- Austria (2019)
- Slovenia (2019)

Norway switched off FM in favour of DAB+ in 2017 and Switzerland is on track to switch off FM by end 2024, possibly earlier. In France, regional launches in major cities are ongoing, and national DAB+ services will launch in summer 2021. In Sweden, both the public and commercial radio sectors have in the last year declared a renewed interest in developing DAB.

Other European countries with DAB+ services include Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

Beyond Europe, Tunisia launched national services in 2019, and both Algeria and South Africa are taking steps in preparation for the commercial launch of DAB+. DAB+ is also well established in Australia, led by the commercial radio sector.

DAB+ receivers – home and automotive

DAB+ receivers for the home are now mass market, with prices from as low as €20. The European Electronic Communications Code (EECC), adopted in December 2018, means that all new car radios in the EU, including Spain, will be capable of receiving digital terrestrial radio by the end of 2020. Italy and France have legislation in place to comply with the directive, with their respective regulations also covering consumer receivers, and Germany has amended its Telecoms law to be in line with the EECC. In other EU countries the process of implementing the EECC into national law is well underway. DAB+ receivers with a screen offer the ability to show drivers additional information such as weather updates, traffic and travel information or incident reports.