

## Telecommunications

# Internet for the masses

## A law facilitating investment in telecoms infrastructure comes into effect soon, but will it change things?

A new law, devised to reduce barriers to investment in telecommunications networks, will enter into force next month.

According to Anna Streżyńska, president of watchdog organization the Office of Electronic Communications, the most important aspect of the legislation is the fact that it officially charges local authorities with making telecoms network investments.

Jacek Wilczewski, a specialist in telecommunications law at Grynhoff Woźny Maliński, estimates that Poland has over zł.5 billion in EU funds earmarked for broadband infrastructure. This money has to be spent by 2015. "There's less and less time to contract these projects and the money remains virtually untouched," he said. "The bill gives local governments tools to speed up investment, but we'll see how they use them."

The law also speeds up the investment process, obliging energy and sewage companies to make their infrastructure

available for telecommunications networks and obliging road-builders to furnish cable ducts alongside new or re-paved streets.

Other elements of the legislation empower local governments to co-finance internet services in cases where it is unprofitable for a telecoms operator to extend its network to a given location, as well as to lower or refund internet fees and buy computers for citizens that can't afford them.

"The law is construed in a way to keep local authorities from competing with telecommunication entrepreneurs,

because the operators are to provide the service to end users," Magdalena Gaj, deputy minister of infrastructure, explained in a recent interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The goal is to provide internet access for 95 percent of the population by 2015.

Ireneusz Piecuch, a telecommunications expert at CMS Cameron McKenna, is cautious about the impact of the law. "I'm not a critic, but I'm not very enthusiastic either – it's a big step towards abolishing a series of administrative barriers, but it does not solve all the problems," he said. **MO**

### In need of facilitation

**Broadband subscribers per 100 people in selected OECD countries, December 2009**

	IDs
1 Netherlands	37.1
2 Denmark	37.1
3 Switzerland	35.6
4 Norway	33.9
5 Korea	33.5
– OECD average	23.3
26 Czech Republic	12.9
<b>27 Poland</b>	<b>12.1</b>
28 Slovakia	11.6
31 Turkey	9.0

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development