European Parliament vote in Net Neutrality

Last Tuesday, 27 October, the European Parliament voted net neutrality principles into European law. Net neutrality means that all internet service users will get the same level of internet speed and openness, regardless of the content they wish to access. No content can be blocked, and throttling is now outlawed. It would create a level playing field not only for those who access it, but for small businesses who use the internet as a method of connecting with customers.

However, there has been some concern over the perceived vagueness, and possible loopholes, of the legislation. It is said that companies could use their larger incomes and brand clout to cut deals with internet service providers (ISPs) to give clients preferential speeds and access to their sites. ISPs can also, based on speculation, slow down traffic whenever they like. Zero-rating is a concern to app and service providers, where larger companies can strike deals with mobile ISPs, in particular, to provide access to their apps without deducting data and thus making it much more attractive to users.

Amendments aimed at getting rid of these loopholes were rejected last week.

The Telecom Single Market package also includes the provisions that will abolish roaming charges across the EU by 2017.

Alex White TD, Minister for Communications, speaking at Ireland’s first Internet Day, welcomed the vote as a way to promote the freedom of expression afforded by the internet. However, this insurance of freedom of speech is dependent on the way the rules will be implemented, as criticism of the programme has said.

The rules will now be transposed into guidelines by the Body of European Regulators of Electronic Communications (BEREC), which are expected in the next nine months.

Arc Adoption closes

Arc Adoption, one of only two adoption agencies that facilitate inter-country adoptions, has closed. The closure leaves more than sixty couples, who had already started the long process of an inter-country adoption, at a loss for options. Only eleven of these cases will be taken on by the Adoption Authority.

Arc has closed due to the decision by the Department of Children to withdraw its funding from the agency. Its founder, Shane Downer, was pessimistic about the future of the situation. “The Adoption Authority has no effective contingency plan,” he said.

Clients will be refunded any fees they had paid that had not been used already. Clients pay anywhere from €16,000 to €40,000, including fees from the country of adoption. In 2011, the Adoption Agency made it mandatory for potential parents to use adoption agencies for inter-country adoption in order to help prevent issues such as human trafficking.
Ban on zero-hour contracts forthcoming

In the early months of the year, Dunnes Stores were in the spotlight as issues arose over their use of zero-hour contracts. Next week, the Cabinet will consider new reforms that will ban employers from employing people on zero- or low-hour contracts. In a survey carried out by the Young Workers Network, it came to light that 89% of those under 35 struggle to make ends meet.

Minister for Business and Employment, Ged Nash TD, commissioned a report by an expert group that looked at the extent of zero- and low hour work. It is expected that the group will also recommend a new minimum amount of time required for calling employees into work, or cancelling previously arranged work. This is expected to be increased from 24 hours to 72 hours. Cancellation in extreme circumstances is allowed in shorter periods of time. Currently, employees are only entitled to be paid one-quarter of the hours they are contracted every week, if they work less than the minimum amount.

One further recommendation is that the new rules may be electively suspended in some sectors, where trade unions and employers agree upon it, and set out alternative structures. Sectors such as education and social care will see a big impact from these new rules.

The Minister may call a short public consultation on the recommendations of the expert group, possibly early in 2016.

Higher standards in early childcare is a key issue

In Budget 2016, free pre-school eligibility was extended to children aged between three and five-and-a-half, and there was an increase made to the number of subsidised places in childcare for children from low-income and disadvantaged homes with working parents.

These efforts are made with the aim of increasing the value and quality of pre-school care in Ireland. In addition to these, there is forthcoming legislation which will require those working with children at a pre-school level to have a level 5 qualification to do so. Dr James Reilly TD said the legislation is to be “published shortly”.

The Government will make a further investment of €85m to early childhood care and education. Dr Reilly said further, “The investment required is considerable; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that Ireland’s investment in this area currently represents 0.5 per cent of GDP. This compares to an average across the OECD of 0.8 per cent, and Unicef’s international benchmark of 1 per cent of GDP.”

A fund will be set up to help current professionals bring their skills and qualifications up to the necessary level.
Certificate in Regulatory Investigations, Inspections and Prosecutions

2.5 day course

Wednesday 11 November - 9:30am-4pm,
Thursday 12 November - 9:30am-4pm, and
Thursday 19 November - 9am-1pm

One major challenge in writing reports and preparing comprehensive, legally robust pieces of evidence is in situations where it is difficult to determine facts. This training programme will examine best practice in dealing with these situations and in collating evidence and producing reports that require staff to address cultural disparities and how to distinguish facts from inferences and opinions.

The course aims to provide each participant with an understanding of best practice procedures in taking witness statements and using evidence to prepare reports for legal proceedings. This training aims to build upon participant’s knowledge of the processes involved in the collection and presentation of evidence and to provide a comprehensive understanding for all participants of varying experience of the rules, principles and legislation that members of the Public Sector are bound to adhere to.

Modules will include simulations and workshops along with the presentation of theory. Our programme takes into account that some learners may be new to this role or need an update on current legislation and best practice approaches to the taking of witness statements etc and as such our modules are tailored to offer a range of options and advice to suit the varying needs of each participant, depending upon their experience.

To book, call Paula on 819 8500 or click here
This Week at Public Affairs Ireland

Training

Certificate in Public Financial Management
3 day course
Tuesday 3rd November,
Tuesday 10th November, and
Tuesday 17th November
9am to 4pm, daily
PAI Main Office

Writing for the Web
04 November 2015
9am to 1pm
PAI Main Office

On the Blog

Will a new Investor Court System be introduced as part of TTIP talks between the EU and USA?
Tom Ferris
Read here

“When will we lead the Revolution?”
PAI editor Shauna Nimmo
Read here

A run-down of Budget 2016
PAI editor Shauna Nimmo
Read here

IMF shows confidence in Ireland’s economic prospects
Tom Ferris
Read here
This week in Dáil Éireann

**Tuesday 03 November**

- 2.00 p.m. Questions (Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade)
- 3.15 p.m. Leaders Questions
- 3.36 p.m. Questions (Taoiseach)
- 4.36 p.m. Order of Business
  
  Motion re Services by the Defence Forces with the UN in 2014 (referral to Committee without Debate)

- 5.06 p.m. Statements on Northern Ireland (to conclude within 2 hours 30 mins)
- 7.36 p.m. Topical Issues
- 8.24 p.m. Private Members Business - Sinn Féin
- 9.54 p.m. Dáil Adjourns

**Wednesday 04 November**

- 9.30 a.m. Questions (Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation)
- 10.45 a.m. Social Welfare Bill 2015 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage (Resumed to Adjourn at 6.30pm if not previously concluded) (Department of Social Protection)
- 10.50 a.m. Finance Bill 2015 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage (Department of Finance)
- 12.00 noon Leaders Questions
- 12.21 p.m. Order of Business
- 12.51 p.m. SOS (1 hour)
- 1.51 p.m. Topical Issues
- 2.39 p.m. Social Welfare Bill 2015 - Second Stage (Resumed to adjourn at 6.30pm if not previously concluded) (Department of Social Protection)
- 8.30 p.m. Private Members Business - Sinn Féin
- 10.00 p.m. Dáil Adjourns

**Thursday 05 November**

- 9.30 a.m. Questions (Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government)
- 10.45 a.m. Finance Bill 2015 - Second Stage Resumed (Department of Finance)
  
  Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Bill 2015 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation)

- 12.00 noon Leaders Questions
- 12.21 p.m. Order of Business
  
  Morning Business Continued

- 4.42 p.m. Topical Issues
- 5.30 p.m. Dáil Adjourns
### Tuesday 03 November

<table>
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<tr>
<td>2.30 p.m.</td>
<td>Commencement Matters</td>
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<td>3.30 p.m.</td>
<td>Order of Business</td>
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<td>Estimate provision for the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund allocation for 2015 – Referral to Committee without debate (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.00 p.m.</td>
<td>National Cultural Institutions (National Concert Hall) Bill 2015 – Second Stage (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht)</td>
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<td>7.00 p.m.</td>
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### Wednesday 04 November

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<td>1.00 p.m.</td>
<td>Childcare (Amendment) Bill 2015 – Order for Second Stage and Second Stage (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.00 p.m.</td>
<td>Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2014 – Committee Stage (Department of Health)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.00 p.m.</td>
<td>Private Members Business - National Mortgage and Housing Corporation Bill 2015 – Second Stage (Senator Sean Barrett)</td>
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<td>12.45 p.m.</td>
<td>Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015 – Committee, Report and Final Stages (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government)</td>
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Tuesday 03 November

Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Joint)
CR2, LH 2000 1.30 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: The potential to increase employment by upskilling and reskilling people in Pharmaceutical, MedTech and Food-Based education
[Representatives from Innopharma Labs]

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Joint)
CR3, LH 2000 2 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: The Dairy Industry
Session A:
[Representatives from Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)];
Session B:
[Representatives from Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers’ Association (ICSA)]; and
Session C:
[Representatives from Macra na Feirme]

Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 2.15 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Session A: 2.15 p.m.
Mid-Year Review of the 2015 Estimates for Public Services - Vote 34 (Environment, Community and Local Government); Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government; Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Housing, Planning and Coordination of the Construction 2020 Strategy; and Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Rural Economic Development issues; and Session B: 7 p.m.
Policy issues arising from the Cemetery Management Bill 2013 and related matters [Ms. Mary Hurley, Assistant Secretary and Mr. David Dalton, Principal Officer, Community Division, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; Representatives from the Cemetery Industry: Mr. David Pierce, Pierce Monuments; Mr. John Sweeney, Craft Monuments and Mr. Gerry Brennan, Headstones Ireland]

Environment, Community and Local Government (Select sub)
CR4, LH 2000 4 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Dublin Docklands Development Authority (Dissolution) Bill 2015 [Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government]

Finance (Select sub)
CR2, LH 2000 5.15 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: (i) Motion re Intergovernmental Agreement on the Transfer and Mutualisation of Contributions to the Single Resolution Fund; and (ii) Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2015 [Minister for Finance]

Thursday 05 November

Health and Children (Joint)
CR2, LH 2000 9.30 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: Pre-Legislative Scrutiny on the General Scheme of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2015 (resumed)
Session A: 9.30 a.m.
[Ms. Helen Gilmartin, Adoptive Parents Association of Ireland; Ms. Rhoda Mac Manus, Adoption Loss; Ms. Susan Lohan, Adoption Rights Alliance; Ms. Margaret Dröme, CEO, Treoir; and Mr. Paul Redmond, Coalition of Mothers and BabyHome Survivors]; and Session B: 11.15 a.m.
[Dr. Conor O’Mahony, University College Cork; Dr. Fergus Ryan, NUI Maynooth; Ms. Kathy McMahon, Irish First Mothers Group; Mr. Tom Walsh and Ms. Mary Slattery, Know My Own; Ms. Patricia White, Social Worker, Post Adoption Service, Barnardos; and Ms. Deirdre Pemberton, Council of Irish Adoption Agencies]

Public Accounts
CR3, LH 2000 10 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: (i) Business of the Committee; and (ii) 2014 Annual Report and Appropriation Accounts of the Comptroller and Auditor General:
   a. Vote 24: Justice and Equality
   b. Vote 21: Prisons
   c. Chapter 9: Development of Prison Accommodation in Dublin
[Officials from the Department of Justice and Equality; and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform]

Transport and Communications (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 2.30 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: DART Underground and Expansion Projects [Representatives of National Transport Authority]