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European project SABER activities ready to start: 26 partners, representing 13 countries

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Almost ten million households still have no access to broadband in the EU, according to the Digital Agenda for Europe scorecard. Although 95.7% of EU households are connected, only 78.4% in rural areas actually have access to broadband.

In order to tackle the digital divide, the European project SABER (SATellite Broadband for European Regions) has been initiated to provide local and regional authorities with practical guidance on connecting residual user demand with public funds and quality satellite solutions.

Partially funded by the European Commission, with 510.000 euro, the SABER project is a Thematic Network on the "Contribution of satellite systems to 100% EU broadband coverage "in the frame of the "Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme-ICT Policy Support Programme" (CIP-ICT PSP).

Led by CSI Piemonte, the 24 month project involves 26 partners including Astrium, Eutelsat, SES Broadband Services and 21 regional authorities and ICT public and private organizations supporting regions in broadband deployment representing 13 countries. The project partners cover all the broadband value chain and have extended experience in publicly funded deployments.

The scope of the project is notably to create the conditions for the most efficient and effective contribution of satellite-based services to supporting the objectives set for the Digital Agenda for Europe and Europe 2020, including assistance in the use of 2007-2013 EU unspent funds.

This will result in the development of practical guidelines on the cost benefit analysis of satellite broadband, public aid, business models, funding options and solutions to non-technological roadblocks. These outcomes will be regularly disseminated across Europe through workshops, conferences and publications.

The first SABER workshop is being held in Cork, on February 19th, upon the Irish presidency of the EU Council. Discussions between partners and external stakeholders, including the European association NEREUS, will aim at providing guidelines on satellite services procurement.

The activities will run in three consecutive streams: an early stream for European regions ready for deployment in the short term, a main stream to support regions in achieving the 2013 Digital Agenda objectives, and finally a future stream to support 2020 objectives.

"The SABER project – explains Davide Zappalà, President of CSI Piemonte – confirms CSI leading role in innovation, also in Europe, thanks to the experience acquired by employing satellite services and the regional development broadband program WI-PIE".

"We are witnessing – continues Stefano de Capitani, CSI General Director – to an increasing awareness of the importance of the Digital Agenda at European and national level and thus to the actual initiatives aimed to allow a leap forward in the relationship between Public Administration and citizens and business through a fair use of modern technologies".