

Press release

Eurofiber and Proximus create the joint venture Unifiber for the deployment of an open fibre optic network in Wallonia

Embargo - Thursday 29 July 2021, 8 a.m. – Eurofiber, the European specialist in the operation and management of fibre optic networks, has partnered with the telecom provider Proximus to found Unifiber, a joint venture whose aim is to deploy a fibre optic network in Wallonia. This will ensure very high-speed broadband access to at least 500,000 households and SMEs by 2028. This network will be open to all interested telecom providers on a non-discriminatory basis. The joint venture, which has just been approved by the European authorities, has a budget of more than 800 million euros over the next ten years to construct this state-of-the-art network and to connect households and SMEs.

In both the professional and the private domains, a strong and secure network connectivity is essential for certain activities to run smoothly: videoconferences, webinars, distance learning, gaming, video streaming, to name but a few. Very high-speed two-way broadband access is increasingly required to avoid long lag times and high levels of user frustration. This trend is set to increase with the generalisation of teleworking and the adoption of new technologies – such as 8K television – requiring a digital infrastructure that will stand the test of time. In this context, fibre offers all the attributes that the connectivity technology of the future will require – and that will underpin digital innovations for the next decades.

In the early 1980s, Belgium was a pioneer with its cable network and ADSL/VDSL technology – and the deployment of FttH (Fibre-to-the-Home), the latest generation of fibre technology, demonstrates that this commitment still exists today. 10% of houses can already be connected and the process is accelerating.

More than 800 million euros of investment

The creation of the joint venture Unifiber will provide at least 500,000 households and SMEs with access to fibre technology in Wallonia by 2028, which will guarantee them an ultra-fast, stable two-way broadband access with the provider of their choice. The network installed by Unifiber will be made available to all broadband Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in an open, transparent, and non-discriminatory manner. Moreover, the European competition authorities have just given their approval to Unifiber.

The preparations for the deployment of the Unifiber network will start mid-August in the municipalities of Waterloo and Morlanwelz.

The Morlanwelz town council welcomed the Unifiber project. In the coming weeks, the town's administrators will work with Unifiber to approve the licences which will enable the company to start work. Philippe Moureau, the mayor of Morlanwelz, commented: *'I am very happy that Unifiber chose us as the first municipality in Wallonia for its deployment of their FttH network. Fiber for all homes in our community will allow us to move towards a digital future.'*

This opinion is shared in the municipality of Waterloo where Unifiber has established its head office. *'We are pleased to welcome the new Walloon fibre optic provider to our town,'* stated Cédric Tumelaire, the municipality's deputy mayor with responsibility for Smart City. *'We are convinced that fibre will make it easier for many individuals and companies to connect to the internet. In view of the current health crisis and new forms of teleworking, we hope that this will enable our municipality to remain attractive and develop its economic activity.'*

Between 2022 and 2023, several tens of thousands of households will already be covered by the Unifiber network. From 2024 onwards, almost 100,000 households will be added each year. The objective is for Unifiber to have at least 500,000 households and SMEs connectable by 2028.

Unifiber will benefit from an investment of more than 800 million euros to construct this state-of-the-art network over the next ten years and to connect households and SMEs. This will enable the creation of approximately thirty direct and several hundred indirect jobs.

Digital Wallonia

Unifiber's investments will reinforce the Wallonia revival plan. Digital transformation, which includes the development of artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things (IoT) and automation, are among the priorities of the Walloon government – with a key focus on connectivity.

Fibre-to-the-home delivers a genuine added value:

- Fibre technology improves people's quality of life by providing what amounts to an unlimited two-way bandwidth, which is vital for thriving applications such as teleworking, video streaming, 4 and 8K television, gaming, eHealth, and distance learning.
- Fibre technology helps to drive employment and boost the economy and innovation.
- Fibre technology has a positive impact on the environment as it consumes less energy than cable and copper.

Nico Weymaere, the CEO of Unifiber, commented: *'The construction of this open-access network for telecommunication services in Wallonia will enable us to establish an infrastructure which offers Walloon residents and businesspeople everything they need to participate fully in the digital transformation process, thereby contributing to their region's prosperity.'*

Guillaume Boutin, the CEO of Proximus, stated: *'Our deployment of the fibre network is making good progress and the technology is now being installed in eighteen Belgian cities, with more than 600,000 households and companies already connectable. As already announced, our acceleration of the deployment of the technology is unique in Europe. I am delighted that we have established this partnership with Eurofiber which will accelerate the implementation of fibre networks in Wallonia. Not only that, our investment in Wallonia's digital infrastructure will enable us to support the economic revival, innovation, and employment, which is vital for our competitiveness, both in Wallonia and at the national level.'*

According to Alex Goldblum, the CEO of Eurofiber: *'We are delighted to be able to contribute to the digitalisation of the Walloon region and to partner with Proximus in this endeavour. We are excited that Walloon residents and businesspeople will be able to access the internet in the most rapid and reliable way possible.'*

About Eurofiber

Established in Belgium in 2000, Eurofiber conducted its early activities in the Netherlands, only to return later to Belgium. Based in Zaventem, Eurofiber now has a vast optic fibre network covering more than 38,000 kilometres in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany. Its fibre network and data centres enable Eurofiber to provide companies, organisations and public authorities in Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Germany with open connectivity and intelligent cloud solutions that will stand the test of time. Eurofiber's objective is to continue its expansion in Europe and broaden its portfolio. The deployment of Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) technology is a key contributor to this objective. Eurofiber and Vattenfall previously created a joint venture to connect 500,000 households and companies in Berlin.

Eurofiber is supported by its shareholders Antin Infrastructure Partners, a French investment fund specialising in infrastructure, and the PGGM Infrastructure Fund.

More information is available at www.eurofiber.com or www.eurofiber.be

About Proximus

The Proximus Group (Euronext Brussels: PROX) is a provider of digital services and communication solutions and is active on the Belgian and international markets. By offering communication and entertainment experiences to residential customers and facilitating the digital transformation of enterprises, it offers a whole range of digital possibilities to enable people to live better and work more efficiently. Its high-performing and interconnected fixed and mobile networks enable Proximus to offer access to data and digital services, at any time and place, as well as a broad range of multimedia content. A pioneer in the field of ICT innovation, Proximus offers integrated solutions based on IoT, data analytics, cloud and security.

Proximus' ambition is to become the benchmark provider in Europe, supported by its next-generation networks, a profoundly digital mentality, and a spirit of openness towards partnerships and ecosystems, while contributing to the creation of a digital Belgium that is inclusive, secure, sustainable, and prosperous.

In Belgium, the main products and services are marketed under the brands Proximus and Scarlet. The group is also active in Luxembourg as Proximus Luxembourg SA, which combines the Tango and Telindus Luxembourg brands, and in the Netherlands with Telindus Netherlands. The group's international carrier activities are managed by BICS, one of the main voice operators and the leading provider of mobile data services in the world.

With TeleSign, the group also owns a market leader enjoying strong growth, specialized in digital identity services. Its clients include the leading global internet brands, digital champions and cloud native companies.

At the end of 2020, the Proximus group generated a turnover of just under 5,479 million euros and employed 11,423 people, all of whom are committed to providing their customers with a superior experience.

More information is available at www.proximus.com and www.proximus.be.

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