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## Press Release

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### PHOENIX CENTER FINDS THAT FRANCE IS NO BROADBAND NIRVANA

#### *Simple Price Comparisons Do Not Accurately Reflect Network Quality, Availability, and Adoption*

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Recently, mainly based on price comparisons, there have been several claims that France has superior broadband compared to service offerings available in the United States. The root of these claims is the argument that the French government imposes significant regulation upon Internet Service Providers. In a new analysis released today entitled *Is France a Broadband Nirvana? A Look at the Data*, Phoenix Center Chief Economist Dr. George S. Ford takes on these claims and finds them wanting.

First, Dr. Ford analyzes the European Union’s (“EU’s”) latest data on high-speed broadband availability and adoption for its 28 member nations. France ranks dead last in the EU for availability of very-high speed networks, and ranks 26<sup>th</sup> of 28 member nations in adoption. Accounting for income and population density, France’s poor performance remains. In fact, France is one of the wealthiest and most densely populated nations in the EU.

Next, Dr. Ford uses Ookla data on broadband speeds to compare the relative performance of Internet networks in the U.S. and France following the surge in Internet use from COVID-19 shelter-in-place policies. Dr. Ford finds that France’s average fixed speed declined by 6.4% (a statistically-significant effect) in April-2020, despite Netflix and Amazon throttling video services there. In contrast, no meaningful change in speed was observed for the United States. For mobile services, France’s average download speed fell by a statistically-significant 6.8%, while mobile speeds in the U.S. rose by a statistically-significant 2.5%.

As Dr. Ford’s analysis reveals, France’s high-speed networks are, relative to other EU members and the U.S., under-deployed and under-subscribed. Also, France’s broadband networks have slowed under the weight of rising traffic caused by behavioral changes from the COVID pandemic, though the networks in the U.S. have proven resilient. As such, argues Dr. Ford, “before jumping too quickly on the ‘greener grass’ narrative, it is essential to get a firmer grasp on France’s sub-standard broadband performance, which may in fact be the result of its praised regulatory policies.”

“A nation’s broadband performance is not unidimensional. Price is important, but quality, availability, and adoption are also relevant aspects of performance,” says study author and Phoenix Center Chief Economist Dr. George S. Ford. “Pointing out price differences, no matter how large, is no substitute for a more comprehensive assessment.”

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A full copy of PHOENIX CENTER POLICY PERSPECTIVE NO. 20-03, *Is France a Broadband Nirvana? A Look at the Data*, may be downloaded free from the Phoenix Center's web page at: <https://www.phoenix-center.org/perspectives/Perspective20-03Final.pdf>.

*The Phoenix Center is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that studies broad public-policy issues related to governance, social and economic conditions, with a particular emphasis on the law and economics of the digital age.*