

Interoperability of digital interactive television services

2007/2152(INI) - 04/10/2007

The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the initiative report by Henri **WEBER** (PES, FR) on the interoperability of digital interactive television services.

The report affirms that the new audiovisual technologies should allow the broadcasting of pluralist information and quality programmes, accessible to an ever increasing number of citizens. It points out that respect for the pluralism of information and diversity of content is not automatically guaranteed by technological progress but must be implemented by the national and European public authorities through an active, steadfast and vigilant policy.

The committee report maintains that the success, in as short a time as possible, of the transition from analog to digital is a prerequisite and a priority. It is concerned about possible delays in meeting the 2012 deadline. The committee urges the Commission to support the Member States in drawing up a common plan of action at Community level and invites the Member States are called upon to speed up the transfer to digital television, taking account of market demand and topographical and regional demographic factors, and calls on those Member States which have not yet drawn up a national plan for the full switchover to digital television to do so by the end of 2008.

The committee reiterates that imposing a single standard by legal means is not the right solution but only a final sanction, but does not approve of market intervention alone as a means of resolving the problem of interactivity. It shares the Commission's view that it would be advisable to continue promoting open standards such as MHP or MHEG-5, which are recognised by European standards bodies, in relation to the switchover to digital and the interoperability of services, and maintains that these open standards are the most appropriate ones for ensuring the technological neutrality of networks and the free movement of information, respecting the special necessities of countries where frequency capacities are limited.

The Commission is urged to continue actively to promote the introduction of open European digital television standards in all regions of the world and to encourage international cooperation in this area, thereby ensuring the widest possible access to digital content. According to the report, the Commission should help the Member States and local authorities, by disseminating best practices, to exploit the potential of the new technologies in order to communicate with their citizens more effectively.

MEPs insist that the measures taken by the Member States which lead to the expansion of digital interactive television services must comply with the rules on state aid. It considers it essential to provide consumers with more information on the opportunities offered by digital platforms and the necessary equipment, so that they are able to make informed technical and cultural choices.

The report invites the Commission and the Member States to inform the public about future developments in digital interactive television services, and recommends that digital television service providers take active steps to inform users about existing interactive services. It stresses the importance of discussing at European level the social and cultural implications of the digital society and the adaptation of national education systems to the cultural and social changes brought about by the new technologies. It is considered essential, therefore, for the Commission to submit a report on the results of the exchanges of good practices, forums and working groups among stakeholders, including consumers', users' and viewers' associations.

Lastly, the report points out that the European audiovisual model is based on a creative dichotomy between public and private audiovisual services, and stresses that under no circumstances should the new technologies disturb that balance by weakening the competitiveness of the public sector.