Series of guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks

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Despite numerous difficulties, the Conciliation Committee has reached an agreement on trans-European telecommunications networks (report by Mr Karsten HOPPENSTEDT (EPP, D). The texts adopted have been edited by legal experts, and the main points are set out below. The networks may take a variety of forms, e.g. links between universities and research centres or networks linking up all health sector players (doctors, hospitals, laboratories, etc) across the Community. The proposal for a decision is aimed at establishing guidelines on the objectives, priorities and main thrust of the measures proposed in the field of trans-European telecommunications networks. Parliament has secured a satisfactory outcome on a number of technical aspects: - concentration solely on real applications using networks that are available to and can be used by a wide section of the population, - the social consequences of deploying the networks (e.g. as regards teleworking) are to be assessed, - the transnational nature of the projects is to be guaranteed, - account is to be taken of linguistic needs and the specific needs of less-developed regions, - not only is cultural heritage to be safeguarded, but creative endeavours are also to be stimulated. The agreement also provides for an exhaustive list of priority projects to be drawn up from amongst the projects of common interest. This comprises generic services (European directories, trans-European 'kiosks', electronic signatures, etc.) and applications of collective interest in the sphere of distance education and training, services to SMEs and telematics in the fields of transport, the environment, health and culture. Satellite communications have been the subject of lengthy bargaining with the Council. They did not feature in amendments by Parliament or in the Council's common position but were the subject of proposals put forward by the Commission during the conciliation procedure. By designating satellite communications as a project of common interest the Conciliation Committee has displayed an innovative approach to this subject. Institutional matters were by far the thorniest problem, as it was necessary to reconcile the special nature of the rapidly evolving telecommunications sector with the interests of Parliament, namely its concern to retain the power of codecision as regards the identification of projects of common interest. The solution found provides the Commission with some leeway, gives it the flexibility that is essential for issuing invitations to tender, and the projects of common interest are identified in Annex I, which is to be revised, under the codecision procedure, at the end of a three-year period. However, the projects are to be specified (i.e. specific projects chosen) by a committee on the basis of a work programme drawn up by the Commission.