

Telecommunications: interconnection, universal service and interoperability of networks and services, open network provision ONP

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The rapporteur, Mrs Read (PSE, UK), said that most of the amendments were of a technical nature, though this did not mean that they were not based on a coherent philosophy: the aim of the directive was to ensure a universal service for telephone users at an acceptable cost and in accordance with a set of clear rules for the industry. Commissioner Bangemann began by declaring that the Commission could take over 45 of the 70 amendments tabled. He went on to point out that the universal service did not mean a public service and with this in mind he supported the rapporteur's definition by emphasising that the universal service should provide each citizen with the same quality of service at an affordable price. Mr Bangemann also said that there was no contradiction between a universal service and the rules of the market, since the latter was not a jungle where there were no holds barred. Rather the market could be regarded as an instrument that formed an integral part of a mass of instructions that were fixed in relation to other objectives lying outside the sphere of the market, such as social justice and the protection of the environment. He also gave examples of the deregulation and improvement of the universal service, as in the case of Scotland and Sweden. With regard to interconnection, he declared that he was in favour of environmental considerations being included when setting up new installations. This was why Amendment No 44 was preferable to Amendment No 70, because it provided that the interconnection agreements would include conditions on compliance with town and country planning requirements. Finally, the Commissioner reaffirmed his confidence in the new technical opportunities being made available, provided they proved to be of more practical use to consumers than had been the case in the past.