

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

1995/0207(COD) - 29/02/1996 - Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report

While welcoming the Commission's proposal, the ESC makes a number of points that need to be taken into account: - the need to ensure that differences in national rules are kept to a minimum on the basis of a legislative framework applicable across the EU; - the proposed Directive is rather ambiguous, especially concerning the definition of public networks and services; - the issues of interconnection and interoperability are juxtaposed with the provision of universal services, which may in future lead to problems when operators have to interpret the provisions in practice. The ESC takes the view, therefore that it would be better if a Directive of this importance were clearer and actually defined and delimited the terms used. Its structure should also be more methodical and logical. The Committee also hopes that the current process of liberalizing telecommunications in the EU will be founded on efficiency, competitiveness, solidarity, while at the same time respecting the "European Social Model" and ensuring adequate protection for consumers. Regarding the Commission's more specific proposals, the Committee feels, inter alia, that the regulatory framework for the telecommunications sector needs to be balanced, non-discriminatory and should maintain equality of opportunity for all market players. It calls for the Commission to propose codes of conduct which set objective limits for fair and unfair competition, and for more clarity in references to universal service, although it is aware that the Commission will publish a communication - to which it looks forward with interest - on this subject in the near future. The Committee also suggests that the idea of organizations which have "significant market power" should be defined at Community level, taking account of existing Community case-law in this area.