Telecommunications services, use of cable television networks

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The ESC acknowledged that the abolition of restrictions on the use of cable television networks would enable new telecommunications networks to be developed. It took the view, however, that the restrictions should not be abolished until a clearly-defined regulatory framework had been established, primarily with regard to the universal service. The financing of the universal service was a matter of fundamental importance; before any steps were taken to liberalise the use of cable television infrastructures, it should be clearly specified which service providers would have to contribute to the fund for financing the universal service. It was particularly important to determine the contribution of mobile communications suppliers to the funding of the universal service before liberalising the use of cable television networks. The ESC pointed to the different penetration levels of cable networks in the various EU Member States and the very patchy impact that the draft Directive would have. Implementation of the directive would also even create unfair competition for some national telecommunications undertakings; some of them would be exposed to real competition, while others would only be theoretically exposed to competition, as there were no cable television networks in their countries. The ESC noted that the schedule had been discussed by the Council on 17 November 1994. The Council had not taken a decision on the abolition of the restrictions on the use of cable television before 1 January 1998. For all the above reasons, the ESC considered that it would be premature to bring the directive into force by 1 January 1996. Bearing in mind the decision taken by the Council of Ministers, the different stages of development of cable television networks in the various Member States and the different impact that the draft Directive would have on the various Member States, the ESC took the view that each Member State should be free to decide whether it wished to implement the proposed measure before 1 January 1998.