Europe's way to the information society: an action plan

1994/2106(COS) - 14/11/1994

The committee adopted the report by Mr HERMAN, stressing that this was an interim report intended to influence the decision taken at Essen in this sector. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs adopted most of the 56 amendments tabled, despite the fact that, in a bid for efficiency, the rapporteur had only supported half of them. In particular, the interim report pointed out that: - the change brought about by the transition to the information society would only prove its worth if its overall impact on employment turned out to be positive; - without an adequate framework, the development of information superhighways risked creating a gulf between those who were able to master this technological tool and those who were not; - European cultural specificities needed to be respected, especially in the use of languages on the networks. Clearly, the European Union needed a high-speed telecommunications infrastructure, but only if certain conditions were met, one of the first being the controlled liberalisation of infrastructures in order to stimulate competition and reduce costs. However, liberalisation should not be at the price of geographical coverage (geographically isolated users should benefit from the same charges) or a universal service. In addition, licences should only be granted to commercial service providers which also provided cultural and social services and non-profit-making bodies could, if necessary, be given access to the basic services provided by these commercial service providers. Given the revolution which the transition to the information society risked provoking, the report stressed the need to establish uniform rules at Community level, especially as regards: - the allocation of licences; - interconnection; - access for users and service providers; - charging; - security and protection; - protection and remuneration of intellectual property etc. Community rules were also needed in order to control concentrations at both infrastructure and service level. The report called for a European regulatory authority to be set up quickly in order to ensure that all these tasks were carried out properly. As far as standards are concerned, the report stressed that it was up to the public authorities to promote standards, both by example and by financial incentive; joint standards were essential to optimum interconnection. Finally, as far as applications are concerned, the report considered that market forces would not be able to satisfy a series of social needs and the national and Community authorities needed to play a voluntary role in this area. They would need to provide the necessary funds in the form of direct funding or contributions from commercial service providers. Uniform Community rules were also needed in order to control concentrations at both infrastructure and service level. The report called for a European regulatory authority to be set up quickly in order to ensure that all these tasks were carried out properly. As far as standards are concerned, the report stressed that it was up to the public authorities to promote standards, both by example and by financial incentive; joint standards were essential to optimum interconnection. Finally, as far as applications are concerned, the report considered that market forces would not be able to satisfy a series of social needs and the national and Community authorities needed to play a voluntary role in this area. They would need to provide the necessary funds in the form of direct funding or contributions from commercial service providers.