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

1994/2106(COS) - 26/06/1996

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs adopted the report by Mr Fernand HERMAN. The report starts by reaffirming a series of principles: information is not just an ordinary commodity and the public authorities must guarantee its availability and pluralism; the information society must reduce, not increase, the risks of a two-tier society; a European regulatory authority and a strong regulatory framework need to be set up. It also highlights the role of the European Union (regulation, R&D and industrial policy measures) and the spheres of activity (in particular, public-interest activities such as health care, education and fighting social exclusion). It emphasizes the role of the public authorities which have, inter alia, to guide, encourage and coordinate investment initiatives in agreement with the private sector, promote European standards enabling interconnection, encourage the dissemination of multimedia products on a pan-European scale, taking account of specific linguistic and cultural characteristics, and formulate uniform rules for controlling mergers. The report adopted addresses four areas: societal consequences and the rights of the citizen; industrial policy and telecommunications; legal aspects, and intellectual property. In relation to industrial policy, the report stresses the need to ensure low-cost communications. Though liberalization could contribute to this objective and increase the supply of state-of-the-art products, it should not be based solely on the rules of competition but must be accompanied by a policy which fosters universal service, thereby encouraging access to telecommunications services and contents for all citizens. At international level, it should not lead to an opening up of European markets to third-country operators without reciprocity, with regard either to contents or networks and services. As a practical measure, it calls for information to be disseminated free of charge on line in all the official languages.