Mobile and wireless communications UMTS: strategy and policy orientations

1997/2128(COS) - 15/10/1997 - Document attached to the procedure

Following the debate launched by the European Commission on the future of UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunications System) (COM (97)217 of 29 May 1997), the Commission presented the outcome of this public consultation and a Community action plan based on the results of the consultation. Two questions in particular were singled out for attention in the light of the results and the summary of comments received: 1) clarification of the system for granting UMTS licences; 2) the availability of radio frequencies as and when they were needed. The comments highlighted the fact that the relevant authorities need to take urgent action in this sector if UMTS is to develop efficiently and maintain the competitiveness of European industry in this sector. At the same time, the Member States and the economic players in question felt that basic consumer interests needed to be safeguarded. In particular, roaming of mobile multimedia services needed to be guaranteed at European level on the basis of a common, open, competitive radio interface standard at international level which would enable Europe to participate fully in the global "wireless information society", in the same way as it currently benefited from GSM in voice communications. The Commission has drawn up the outlines (based on the replies received) of the action which it intends to take over coming years with a view to creating a favourable environment for the continuing development of UMTS. The strategy revolves around a proposal for a decision on UMTS which aims to: - define rights and obligations when negotiating roaming agreements, insofar as they are not covered by the interconnection directive; - determine the conditions for granting licences with a view to guaranteeing the availability of pan-European services based on ETSI standards; - design a method which will allow the allocation of frequencies to UMTS to be coordinated at Community level. The Commission hopes to submit this proposal during January 1998 (so that it can be adopted at the beginning of 1999). The ERC would then be authorized to negotiate the allocation of new frequencies to the sector and the section of the spectrum allocated to UMTS could be extended again around October 1999. Apart from the strictly regulatory aspects of the allocation of frequencies, the Commission is also planning standardization (in cooperation with the ETSI) and R&D (under the fifth framework programme for research). Other initiatives are also planned at international level, in particular in the form of a proposal for a UMTS standard prepared by the ETSI (standard IMT2000 (ITU)). Finally, the Commission is planning to review the regulatory environment for telecommunications as a whole by the end of the century.