Information society: convergence and regulation of telecommunications, media and technologies. Green paper

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OBJECTIVE: presentation of a Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology (IT) sectors with a view to launching a debate on the best way of regulating this new generation of electronic communications media. SUBSTANCE: The Green Paper analyses the phenomenon of convergence and its implications for regulation in the fields of telecommunications, the media and IT. The implications of these developments are far-reaching. Convergence is not just about technology. It is also about services and new ways of doing business (electronic commerce) and of interacting with society. The changes described in the Green Paper have the potential to substantially improve the quality of life of Europe's citizens, to better integrate Europe's regions into the heart of the European economy, and to make businesses more competitive on global and national markets. The convergent services identified include the following: 1) access to Internet services using a television set, thanks to such systems as Web TV; 2) access to electronic mail and the World Wide Web (Internet) with the aid of TV decoders and mobile telephones; 3) transmission of radio and television programmes over the Internet; 4) provision of voice telephony services over the Internet. The global character of the communications platforms available (especially Internet) will make possible a greater opening-up and integration in the world economy. At the same time, the low cost of establishing a presence on the World Wide Web will enable businesses to contact potential customers throughout a region and even worldwide in a way barely dreamed of at present. If Europe can take advantage of these opportunities by creating an environment which favours, rather than acting as a brake on, change, a powerful vehicle for job creation could result, as could new market access opportunities for businesses and consumers. If, however, it fails or responds sluggishly, this will genuinely threaten competitiveness. The Green Paper is intended to launch a debate with all sectors concerned in this field, with the aim of identifying the needs for a regulatory framework. It deliberately sets out to raise issues, in addition to which it reviews actual or potential barriers to convergence and seeks to suggest solutions. Among the main subjects raised in the questionnaire addressed to interested parties are problems of definition, access to markets and authorisations, access to networks, to access systems and to content, access to the frequency spectrum, standards, charges and consumers' interests. The document formulates the principles on which a future Community regulatory framework in this field should be based. Replies to the Commission are expected within 5 months (a period expiring in June 1998), after which the Commission will produce a communication summarising the replies received.