Navigation by satellite: trans-European positioning network GNSS

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OBJECTIVE: to propose a European strategy for global navigation satellite systems (GNSS).
SUBSTANCE: in presenting its Communication the Commission calls on the Member States to agree by early 1999 on the strategy which the Union should adopt with regard to navigation systems and satellite positioning, an expanding world market which could be worth $50 billion within 7 years, with many applications in the transport sector but also in agriculture and in oil and gas exploration. The key strategic issue is how best to ensure an effective EU role in long-term development of GNSS. The Commission considers that three options can be envisaged: - joint development of GNSS by all the major players; - the EU developing a GNSS with one or more international partners (in particular the United States, Japan and Russia); - independent development by the EU of its own system as an alternative to the two existing systems (the American GPS system and the Russian GLONASS system). The Commission considers that in the long term the ideal would be to cooperate with all the Union's international partners, provided however that this cooperation takes place on an equitable basis and that the Union's interests are respected. To this end the Commission calls on the Member States to work together and start consultations with the main international operators with a view to studying the possibility of achieving an acceptable joint system based on the following criteria: - full European participation in the design, development and operation of the system; - guarantees from the outset that the system (on which Europe will depend for certain vital and safety-related applications) will not be withdrawn or disrupted unilaterally by one party; - an opportunity for European industry to compete equally in all segments of the market, with equal access to the basic technologies. If these conditions are not met, the Union should opt for the establishment of an independent European GNSS, taking into account the technological developments which might substantially reduce the cost of development of such a system. The financing of a European GNSS system (which should cost between ECU 400 million and ECU 400 billion, depending on quality) could be undertaken through a public/private partnership. The Union must now decide on its strategy rapidly as any delay could impair the prospect of Europe achieving a competitive position in this market.