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

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OBJECTIVE: the purpose of the present working document is two-fold: - to summarise the comments received in the course of the period of public consultation which followed the publication of the Green Paper, - to identify the subjects requiring more in-depth discussion with a view to preparing the future Community rules in this sector. CONTENT: This working document forms the first part of a two-phase process which will be concluded towards the end of 1998 with the publication of a Commission communication containing new analyses and policy proposals. As far as the comments on the Green Paper are concerned, the working document addresses point-by-point the responses of groups interested in problems of market access and the grant of licences, the radio frequency spectrum, standards, charges, consumer interests, problems of the general interest and international aspects. The problem of network access is regarded by commentators as the major commercial and regulatory issue (problems of competition, consumer choice and protection, creation of a favourable environment for investment etc.) Access systems also raise many technical questions, in particular the problem of digital links (conditional access, definition of components such as decoders, electronic program guides - EPG - and application programming interfaces - API). A number of technical barriers will have to be removed to allow simple and progressive access to the new services. The commentators also identify the problem of investment in the digital sector. The new framework will have to be sufficiently flexible to encourage production, distribution and provision of audiovisual content which is compatible with the new digital environment. Consumers are also taken into consideration with the problem of high-quality audiovisual content. As far as regulation is concerned, the principles that must govern the future rules have to be based on a balanced approach combining existing regulatory structures (Option 1 of the Green Paper: 'building on existing structures') and a more ambitious approach to networks and infrastructure (Option 3). Thus, networks should be governed by technically neutral rules, whereas the provision of content would continue to be subject to existing arrangements based on the specific characteristics of services (combination of Option 1 for the provision of content and Option 3 - new regulatory model - for networks and infrastructure). Consequently, the Commission suggests that three major points are addressed in greater detail in the follow-up to the Green Paper: 1) network access and the establishment of digital links in a convergent environment; 2) creation of a favourable framework for investment and innovation and encouragement of production, distribution and provision of European content; 3) adoption of a balanced regulatory approach. The responses on these three subjects will form the basis for the future Commission communication containing specific policy proposals. The responses are expected by the Commission by 3 November 1998.