Trans-European networks in the telecommunications domain (declaration of European interest)

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The development of trans-European telecommunications, electricity, natural gas and transport networks was of vital importance for the Community, in particular in order to eliminate existing bottlenecks and gaps in infrastructure. The Commission intended to grant infrastructure projects in these three sectors with 'a declaration of European interest' in order to improve the general conditions for the implementation of these networks. The purpose of the 'declaration of European interest' would be to let the public know that the implementation of the project in question was of interest from the point of view of integration. It would be granted only to projects covered by one of the trans-European networks whose configuration was to be decided by the Community under the Treaty on European Union, when it had entered into force. The three rapporteurs, Joaquin Sisó Cruellas (PPE, E) (telecommunications) Carlos Robles Piquer (PPE, E) (electricity, natural gas) and Manuel Porto (LDR, P) (transport), requested that projects eligible for the declaration of European interest be put forward by any Member State concerned or by regional or local authorities. They hoped that in cases where the declaration was granted, the Commission would consider, in accordance with the provisions governing the appropriate instrument, whether the project concerned was eligible for support from one of the Community's financial instruments. They also called for the Member States to be invited to consider what financial or fiscal advantages could be given to projects to which this declaration had been granted. The rapporteurs stressed that the project must have direct economic and social benefits in the Community and help to strengthen economic and social cohesion. Where the project required an environmental impact study, it must show that the impact of the project on the environment was acceptable. For projects of a transfrontier nature, the environmental impact study must be carried out on a transfrontier basis. Commissioner Van Miert responded to Members who had called for the European Parliament to be involved in the infrastructure committee by saying that it was not advisable. The Commission had to consult the national administrations and the sectors involved in order to draw up a proposal for a directive or a regulation. It was only at the following stage that the European Parliament joined in and took a decision. With regard to the regions and the Committee of the Regions, even though the Committee had only consultative status, it would be able to make its influence felt. As regards the effect of the declaration of European interest, the Commissioner pointed out that the Commission had the power to give the label, but it was for the Member States to decide whether or not to grant financial support to these projects. With regard to procedures and time limits, the Commissioner agreed that the Commission would comply with the time limits, but asked for these to start six months after the full dossier had been submitted to the Commission. Parliament adopted the report by Mr Sisó Cruellas, Mr Robles Piquer and Mr Porto.