Europe's way to the information society: an action plan

1994/2106(COS) - 19/09/1996 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Mr Fernand HERMAN (PPE, B), Parliament reaffirmed a series of principles: information is not just an ordinary commodity and public authority has to guarantee its availability and pluralism; the information society must reduce the risks of a two-tier society and not increase them; it is necessary to set up a European Regulatory Authority and a strong regulatory framework. It also highlighted the role of the European Union (regulation, R & D and industrial policy measures) and the spheres of activity (in particular, public-interest activities such as health care, education and fighting social exclusion). It emphasized the role of the public authorities which have, inter alia, to guide, encourage and coordinate investment initiatives in agreement with the private sector, promote European standards enabling interconnection, encourage the dissemination of multimedia products on a pan-European scale, while taking into account specific linguistic and cultural characteristics, and formulate uniform rules for the control of concentrations. The adopted report addresses four areas: societal consequences and rights of the citizen; industrial policy and telecommunications; legal aspects, and intellectual property. In this connection, Parliament: - called on the Commission to launch a survey, based on the criterion of gender, to evaluate the impact of the information society in Europe on women and men in economic, social and political life, the availability of Internet to women and men, the influence of women on the introduction of the information society, and the influence of the latter on the nature and scope of job opportunities; - asked, however, for a detailed assessment of the danger threatening freedom of association and trade-union representation because of decentralization and the individualization of employment relationships; - called for an appropriate legal framework for information production, distribution and use which takes due account of the right to intellectual property (copyright and neighbouring rights) in accordance with Continental rules; - called for a comparative survey on the effects of teleworking on the health of teleworkers and for safety criteria to be incorporated in a code of good practice; - considered that it is essential to clarify the legal employment status of teleworkers and that it is necessary to adopt legislative provisions; - called for a specific directive granting teleworkers a legal employment status. In relation to industrial policy, Parliament stressed the need to ensure low-cost communications. Though liberalization could contribute to this objective, while increasing the supply of state-of-the-art products, it should not be based solely on the rules of competition but must be accompanied by a policy fostering universal service so as to encourage access to telecommunications services and contents for all citizens. At international level it should not lead to an opening up of the European markets to third-country operators without reciprocity, both as regards contents and as regards networks and services. As a practical measure, the EP called for Community information to be disseminated free of charge on line and in all the official languages.