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

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Adopting the report by Mr Reino Kalervo Paasilinna (PES, FIN) on the Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications sectors, Parliament points out firstly what should be understood by 'convergence': this is the process by which network platforms and technological transmission channels for electronic communication grow together or become interchangeable. Parliament calls on the Commission to clarify the definitions applicable to phenomena associated with convergence and to submit an analysis of the media equipment which households have and of media use, providing European and international comparisons. Parliament considers that the transport of information through the different networks should be regulated under a single framework rather than having specific frameworks for the different networks (except for those needed for the management of radio frequency spectrum and other scarce resources). It also considers that adequate regulation, reflecting a balance in the law on the media, telecommunications and competition would ensure security for investors and legal certainty. Any introduction of new regulations or adaptation of existing regulations should include evaluation of the impact of convergence on employment and work-related developments. Parliament is also concerned about mobile telecommunications, which will play a major role in the future range of uses for telecommunications. It calls for new regulations in this area not to diverge from the horizontal framework to be put in place. Taking the view that convergence should be reflected in European rule-making to encourage interoperability and the development of straightforward and user-friendly interfaces, Parliament calls for the EU to support open standards and platforms and interoperable applications. It calls for strict implementation of Community competition law and calls for providers of conditional access and pay TV services to be obliged to offer all technical and customer services separately. Consumers should not be forced to subscribe to an unreasonably large number of pay TV channels if they only want to watch a limited selection. Network operators should be obliged, under the terms of their licence, to carry the programmes of public service programme providers, which should also apply to digital broadcasting and to user guide systems. With regard to consumer protection, Parliament calls on the Commission to draw up a draft directive to close the remaining loopholes, but calls for a cautious attitude towards regulating new services: regulation should only be introduced where and when it proves necessary for safeguarding the interests of consumers and the general public. The same is true for self regulation by the industry. Since the convergence problem raises once again the issue of concentration in the media sector, Parliament calls on the Commission finally to submit a proposal for a directive on the subject of media ownership and pluralism, taking account of all forms of electronic communication relevant to opinion formation and acknowledging that one of the key issues will be access to viewers and programme rights. Similarly, Parliament considers that in future electronic communications infrastructures should be regulated separately from the content conveyed, and that the same should apply in international agreements. Content regulation should be compatible with the principle of subsidiarity and meet the needs of public policy, taking account of requirements concerning pluralism. Convergence would require establishment of an appropriate regulatory body rather than a general levelling and better coordination rather than fusion. Despite convergence, there would continue to be sector-specific objectives, not all of which can be achieved by the application of European competition law. Pointing out that the Commission's working document on the results of the consultations on the Green Paper demonstrated the demand for quality content, Parliament calls on the Commission to reinforce the MEDIA II programme.