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Open platforms in digital television and 3G: Commission assesses state of play and charts way forward

The European Commission adopted today, at the initiative of Commissioner Erkki Liikanen responsible for Information Society and Enterprise, a Communication on interoperability of Information Society services. With the more general aim of detecting the barriers to a wide access to new technologies, this Communication addresses the issue of promoting open technological platforms for third-generation mobile communications (3G) and digital television, as requested by the Barcelona Summit and the Seville Council. These technologies could play a key role in future in providing widespread access to the Internet and to interactive services. The Communication identifies follow-up measures for Member States. It also foresees in the long term a “multi-platform environment” emerging which will deliver advanced information society services in a complementary way.

The guiding vision of an “Information Society for All” is to make electronic services an every-day reality for all citizens, and to bring everyone (administrations, businesses, citizens, homes and schools) into the digital age.

Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner responsible for Enterprise and the Information Society remarked: “we know that our digital communications platforms – like 3G and digital TV – will be able in future to deliver virtually any electronic and Information Society service. We also know that because not all platforms are the same, the precise capabilities of each delivery platform will differ, and individual consumers will use their services differently. To maximise the choice for consumers and provide flexibility for the market, open platforms for digital television and 3G mobile will be a key part of the commercial picture.”

In this Communication on interoperability of services, the European Commission addresses “Barriers to widespread access to new IT services and applications of the information society through open platforms in digital television and third generation mobile communications”. The document analyses how providing services over interconnected networks can involve the use of proprietary technology at the interfaces between services and applications and therefore have an impact on consumer choice.

The Commission identifies the voluntary moves on the part of industry to achieve interoperability in 3G. It also presents the measures adopted in Community legislation to foster interoperability in interactive digital TV services. The Communication confirms that this area is evolving rapidly so it is important to follow developments closely and that in future, digital television and 3G could play a key role in providing widespread access to the internet and to interactive services.

Challenges

With this Communication, the European Commission identifies several challenges to the successful deployment of digital terrestrial television, including the management of switchover from analogue to digital transmission, as well as the creation of attractive interactive services and viable business models. Digital satellite and cable television also need to maximise the range of services on offer. It is too soon to predict whether the current levels of TV penetration might be indicative of the potential for success of digital TV platforms for delivering interactive services. Other factors, related to consumer trust, the availability of desirable services and content, and a clear regulatory environment in which companies operate, are needed for a successful information society for all.

The Communication identifies follow-up measures both for Member States and the Commission services in the areas of regulation, research, support for private sector activities and measures to ensure access to the Information Society for the disabled.

The Communication can be found on:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/telecoms/news/index_en.htm