

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

REVISED VERSION

COM(87) 360 final/2

Brussels, 2 September 1987

Communication from the Commission
together with a draft decision
concerning

THE ESTABLISHMENT AT COMMUNITY LEVEL OF A
POLICY AND A PLAN OF PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION SERVICES MARKET

COM(87) 360 final/2

I. INTRODUCTION: EUROPE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION SERVICES

The rapid development of new technologies, the trend towards specialisation in the manufacturing and service industries, the growth of trade and international activity have all contributed to an almost exponential increase in the volume of information which is now necessary for economic and social activity.

It is estimated that the volume of new information disseminated each year now exceeds the totality of knowledge accumulated since antiquity up until the beginning of the present century.

In order to tackle this information explosion it has become indispensable to bring in the new technologies (micro-electronics, informatics and computer communications). These new technologies are, however, upsetting the traditional equilibrium of the information economy.

1. The main changes in the information economy

Information has become both a variegated set of activities and a raw material which is essential at all levels of economic activity. The same information may be transmitted via different, coexistent generations of services. Traditional press and book publishers are liable to find themselves competing with unconventional publishers who communicate through radio, television and new on-line information services.

At the same time, information is present at all levels of activity and in all sectors of the economy, whether it is used to seek out technological intelligence, to supply market information or to manage a production line.

Information is also being considered more and more as a tradable commodity which is subject to the economies of scale by reason of the increased cost of collecting, codifying, verifying, assimilating and stocking relevant data, on top of a considerable initial investment.

Technical, legal, commercial and financial information is a commodity of great value which is sold at high prices by specialised companies.

Business communications are assuming considerable importance and represent an investment which is greater than the budget of the cinema industry. It is currently estimated that information handling in the widest sense covers 55% of jobs and two thirds of the GNP in Europe.

With the progress of technology, the information and communications industries and the policies related to them are exerting an ever greater influence on the economy.

In consequence, information constitutes now more than ever an element of power, in business, in society and between nations.

2. The prospects: new needs which will bring about a rapid growth of information services

The growth of information needs has been accompanied by a change in the type and quality of information required. Formerly only information specialists searched databases. Now professionals in industry and trade need to have direct access to information services which are more and more sophisticated. These new users are looking for information which is tailored to their specific needs, is easily and quickly accessible and allows a high degree of interactivity.

Insofar as suppliers of equipment and services will be in a position to respond to these requirements, the prospects for the European information market appear particularly encouraging:

- The 93 000 libraries in the European Community, with a total budget of the order of 7 to 10 000 million ECU, represent an important potential market for advanced information services. They are increasingly playing an intermediary and advisory role in database searching.
- In-house or "desk-top" publishing of catalogues and technical documents could be responsible for a turnover in the order of 5 000 million ECU by 1990.
- Transactional services (electronic mail, electronic data transfer) are undergoing rapid growth and could reach a turnover in the order of 6 000 million ECU by 1990.
- Finally, the European electronic information services market will see its turnover grow from 1 to more than 10 000 million ECU in 10 years. This would be equivalent to an annual growth rate in the order of 20 to 30% per year.

Moreover, the potential for employment represented by the growth in information activities cannot be ignored. It is estimated that 100,000 people currently work in the sector of electronic information in Europe. If libraries, traditional publishing, telecommunications and manufacturers of electronic equipment are included, then several million people are involved in the industry.

3. The position of Europe

As a result of these changes and prospects, Europe is faced with a challenge. It possesses some notable advantages but its position on the world information market has become relatively weaker since the advent of electronic services.

Europe is producing at the moment only half as many on-line databases as the United States. In 1986 the turnover of most of the European suppliers of specialised electronic information services was only half of that of their American counterparts. The Community market is fragmented by many technical, legal and linguistic barriers. This fragmentation hinders the free movement of information and services and therefore prevents the achievement of the economies of scale which are necessary in order to launch advanced information services.

Investment in the industry by the private sector is handicapped by the lack of relevant statistical data on market trends and also by uncertainty as to public policies. Almost 70% of European databases are still being produced by the public sector or by non-profit-making organisations, whereas in the United States 75% belong to the private sector.

It appears difficult for Member States individually to create the market conditions which would enable European suppliers of information services effectively to vie with the world competition in new services.

The Community as a whole possesses, however, some undeniable potential advantages which should be turned to account:

- a market of 320 million inhabitants which remains to be unified,
- an abundance of raw information material in science, technology and culture,

- a competitive industry and expertise in the field of telecommunications,
- a very real innovative capacity in the sector of information services, as evidenced by the exceptional success of consumer videotex services in Europe.

To these advantages may be added a political will which has caused since 1984 the necessary foundations to be laid for a European policy which will aim at the creation of a European telecommunications area and at improving European competitiveness in the domain of informatics and electronics.

It is not, however, sufficient to attend to the tools and infrastructure which enable information to be collected, stored, handled, identified and transmitted. The conditions also have to be created which will favour the setting up at a European level of a vast internal market and the development of a competitive information services industry.

II. TOWARDS A COMMUNITY POLICY FOR THE INFORMATION SERVICES MARKET

Detailed consultations with representatives of the national administrations of the Member States, the industry and information service users have been undertaken by the Commission during the last few months on the basis of the first ideas worked out in document COM(85)658 final. These consultations have enabled a consensus to be reached on the objectives and lines of action of a Community policy which will favour the development of both information services and the information market.

1. The objectives

The objectives of such a policy, which would take full advantage of the dimension of the Community and at the same time complement national private and public efforts to the best effect, are the following:

1. to establish an internal information services market;
2. to stimulate and reinforce the competitive capability of European suppliers of information services;
3. to promote the use of new advanced information services in the Community;

4. to reinforce the joint efforts to achieve the internal and external cohesion of the Community with respect to information services.

Information services must be allowed to develop freely in a vast internal market which offers the economies of scale necessary to their growth and progress, thereby creating the conditions in which information flows can develop both inside and outside the Community.

In parallel, the strengthening of the competitive capability of European information suppliers is necessary to secure the position of the Community on the world market and to facilitate the arrival of a new generation of services needed by research, trade and industry.

Improving the awareness of users and stimulating demand in a Europe which is slower than its competitors to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by new technology is a supplementary objective which is essential if the viability of modern information services is to be assured and investment stimulated.

However, the construction of an internal information market cannot be achieved if certain regions of the Community are excluded. The Commission must be particularly attentive to any initiative which could contribute to reducing regional disparities in information supply and access, for example in the setting down of the telecommunications infrastructure under the STAR programme. Account must also be taken of this objective when the initiatives designed to achieve the above aims are defined by the Commission in a follow-up to the present document. The emphasis which will be given to developing information services for SMEs will also be of direct concern to the less favoured regions of the Community as a result of their structure and economy. This attention will be reinforced in the choice of pilot projects and by the development of specific actions, notably in the domain of training.

Finally, the internal joint efforts to reinforce the cohesion of the different regions of the Community must be backed up by an enhanced effort by the whole Community to show a common front and speak with a single voice in any discussions in international fora on the subject of economic activity connected with the supply and demand of information services.

The initiatives which the Commission considers necessary to undertake, using the Community dimension to achieve the objectives proposed, are detailed below.

2. A plan of priority initiatives

It is proposed to attain the above objectives through two complementary lines of approach:

- making a continuous effort to improve market conditions and promote the use of modern information services,
- setting up pilot and demonstration projects which are capable of exerting a catalytic effect on the development of the market in key sectors.

These two lines of approach will guide the implementation of a plan of priority initiatives set out as follows:

A) The setting up of a European information market observatory

There exist currently very few reliable quantitative or qualitative data on the information services market, industry and trade, on the impact of information services on the rest of the economy and on the needs of users. The Commission proposes to create a European information market observatory which should:

- identify, collect and evaluate the available data on the different segments of the information market,
- identify gaps, define priorities and methodologies for joint efforts to collect data which would be comparable across Europe,
- make a synthesis, at European level, of the results of socio-economic studies carried out on the information market,

in order to supply information necessary to programme policies and to guide investments. The Commission will define, with the help of a group of specialised experts, the composition, mandate and working methods of such an observatory within 6 months from the transmission of the present Communication to the Council.

B) The elimination of technical, administrative and legal barriers to setting up an information market

There exist numerous technical, administrative and legal barriers which are responsible for the fragmentation of the information market. The actions which need to be undertaken to overcome these barriers have to do with standardisation, the harmonisation of certain regulations and the improvement of the conditions of transmission of and access to information services.

1. Actions to support standardisation

The Commission will develop actions which will support standardisation in the area of database access. In this effort it will build on the progress made in the area of standards for telecommunications and the new information technologies. The initiatives to be taken will be complementary to the actions already carried out by the Commission in close consultation with the Senior Officials' Group on Telecommunications (SOGT) and the Senior Officials' Group on Information Technologies Standardisation (SOGITS).

They will bear on the following matters:

- harmonisation of procedures for connexion to networks and hosts,
- automatic identification by networks of the configuration parameters of terminal equipment,
- harmonisation of documentary search software commands,
- harmonisation of formats for data transfer by diskette and by downloading and harmonisation of downloading commands,
- definition of a logical standard for structuring sound, image and text data, independent of the medium,
- establishment of a protocol for transmitting requests for primary documents between bibliographic database hosts and electronic primary document delivery services,
- harmonisation of certain criteria for the description of databases in order to facilitate the user's choice,
- harmonisation of the names and codes of fields which are common to databases of the same type in a given information area, so as to facilitate searching by occasional users, the automatic transfer of a search strategy from one base to another and downloading,

- adaptation of the principles used for indexing and cataloguing electronic products and services,
- active promotion of existing standards.

These efforts in support of standardisation in the field of database access will also take into account the work undertaken in the context of other Community programmes such as DELTA and AIM.

2. The elimination of legal and administrative obstacles

By virtue of the work of the Legal Observatory on the information market, created in 1985, the extent of the problems has become apparent, as has the urgency of taking Community action to prevent new obstacles from springing up as a result of divergent approaches to the adaptation of existing legislations. The Commission will take account of work already carried out in certain international fora and specialised groups and will make proposals before 1990 in a number of priority areas.

The Commission will initiate a wide-ranging discussion of the questions of intellectual property, including that of software, through the publication of the Green Book on copyright. It will also intensify the examination of the problems of authentication of electronic transactions, electronic fraud and the liability of information services.

With regard to the protection of personal data and the confidentiality of database searches, the Commission will continue to see to it that the Convention of the Council of Europe is implemented uniformly in the Member States and that, if any problems should arise, other measures are taken in time.

C) The improvement of the conditions for transmitting and accessing information services

The improvement of the conditions of access to telecommunications services is a part of telecommunications policy.

While awaiting the coordinated installation of the integrated services digital network (ISDN)⁽¹⁾ the Commission will accord special priority to the improvement of the quality of services and to the interworking of the packet-switching networks. Moreover, in the framework of the debate initiated by the publication on 10 June 1987 of its Green Book on Telecommunications⁽²⁾, the Commission will discuss, at the appropriate time, the question of conditions of access to the networks and possible ways to stimulate the accelerated and harmonious development of value-added services (Open Network Provision), particularly in respect of the principles governing tariffication.

(1) COM(86)205

(2) COM(87)290

The Commission will not only concern itself with the conditions of information distribution via telecommunications. It will also continue its efforts to bring about a concertation between publishers and the post, in order to obtain an improvement in the conditions under which the postal services distribute specialised information products (technical and commercial books and journals, but also information products on new media such as optical compact disks). It will also examine the question of the charges made for information services, and will use its best endeavours in the interests of users to improve the transparency of tariffs.

D) Actions intended to increase the synergy between the public and private sectors

The public sector has a dynamic influence in the supply and use of advanced information services in the Community. If a Community policy to promote the information market is to be effectively carried out, a joint approach must be sought, particularly in the following areas:

- transnational access to non-confidential data held by the public sector, so that it can be processed and marketed by the private sector,
- codes of practice for the supply of advanced information services by the public sector,
- the role of the public sector as a possible customer for the introduction of innovative services.

The Commission has already started, together with the authorities concerned, to define a joint approach in these areas, taking into account national differences. The Community guidelines which will be formulated as a result of this work will serve as a basis for the initiatives which will be submitted to the Council for approval in the course of 1988.

E) The launching of pilot projects

Because users are now requiring facilities of a different quality, a new generation of information services is needed which will be much easier to use, will take greater account of the linguistic diversity of Europe and will correspond more closely to the complex and varied needs of the end user in business and industry.

In the current state of the information market in the Community, there is little hope that such services will spring up unaided in the next future.

The Commission considers, however, that a useful stimulus to such developments could be created by Community support for a number of pilot or demonstration projects, which would be defined in collaboration with users and/or the industry.

The purpose of these pilot and demonstration projects would be:

- to identify genuine obstacles hindering the creation of European services and a common information market, and to try out different remedies;
- to encourage different operators in the market to pool their resources and expertise necessary to set up innovative products;
- to test the market response to those products;
- to identify medium-term priorities as defined by the needs of the market.

The envisaged projects must be large enough to exert a catalytic effect on the development of the information services industry and on the market in general.

They should also match the following criteria, wholly or in part:

- to achieve an optimal combination of competences through collaboration across different specialisations and different countries;
- to encourage cooperation between SMEs and the large organisations active in the market;
- to target well-defined groups of users, in several Member States of the Community and particularly including those in SMEs;
- to incorporate the necessary multilingual facets;
- to relate to those segments of the market which show potential for future growth and pave the way for the introduction of potentially viable information products and services;
- to aim, at least in some projects, at generating a high level of demand in the public sector, in order to help open up an important ready market;
- to make an active contribution to simplifying the formalities of access to services, to improving their user-friendliness and to reducing regional disparities in the supply of and access to information services;

- to make use, wherever possible, of existing technological infrastructure and involve the supply of electronic information products and services available on line and/or via other machine-readable media;
- to include follow-up and evaluation mechanisms which enable the transfer of findings.

Obviously, few products, if any, will meet all of these criteria, so each will have to be assessed primarily on its overall strategic impact on the market as a whole. The use of the most advanced tools and the scope for transfer of experience with a view to the supply of more easily used advanced information services will be the main factor for granting Community support.

The size and conditions of Community support will be determined by the type and requirements of the project, taking into account the imperative requirement not to distort competition.

Projects corresponding to the above criteria and submitted by groups of industry operators will receive an initial assistance calculated by reference to actual needs, and normally limited to 25% of the development costs. Community support will not necessarily take the form of a subsidy. It could be used to marshal other financial instruments such as reduced-interest loans, guarantees or venture capital.

Other projects which are of general interest but which are unlikely to attract private sector investment (e.g. databases containing strategically useful information for public policy decisions or common infrastructures for easier access to databases) could benefit from cofinancing, shared between the Community, users and Member States. In such cases the Community contribution would be limited to 50% of costs except in certain cases (such as exploratory and feasibility studies undertaken at the Commission's initiative).

In parallel with these pilot and demonstration projects, the Commission will keep up its activities already under way, notably in the framework of the five-year programme for the development of the specialised information market, to remedy the lack of scientific and technical database services in priority areas such as information for industry and research, patents, materials and image databanks.

The present Communication does not cover access to the information resulting from those Commission's activities which are financed through other schemes from appropriate budgetary lines.

F) Action in favour of libraries

Public spending for the benefit of libraries in the Community makes up 0.5% of total public expenditure (excluding military expenditure). In addition to its irreplaceable cultural significance, recognised by the Council in its resolution of 27 September 1985, the library sector is assuming an increasingly important role as an intermediary, helping firms gain access to the wide range of databases and other sources of scientific, technical and commercial information available.

In parallel with the pilot projects envisaged above, the Commission will in the course of 1988 prepare the launch of a special action in favour of libraries in the European Community to encourage their interconnexion and the use of the new information technologies.

G) Facilitating user access to existing information services

The user is confronted with both multiplicity and complexity in using existing database services. It is advisable therefore,

- 1) to supply him with clear and objective information about the range of services available in the Community. The Commission intends to extend the coverage of multilingual electronic directories (e.g. the DIANE GUIDE) available on its host service ECHO by adding other information sources (information brokers, specialised consultancies etc.) which could help respond to user needs.
- 2) to set up in the Community a number of help desks to tackle the technical difficulties in accessing international services.

The Commission will reinforce the help services and user assistance provided by ECHO. It will also look at ways to encourage collaboration between information intermediaries, by setting up a network of franchised advisers, so as to secure access to the best information services to reply to users' questions.

- 3) to promote actions to alert users to the abundance and quality of available European information. Experience with Euronet DIANE has shown that Community awareness campaigns helped to multiply by a factor of 30 over 5 years the number of expert users of European on-line services. Such actions are considered by information service suppliers as crucial to the success of their marketing operations. They are considered essential, in the view of users in business, industry and research, as a means of disseminating information about available databases. They assume a particular importance in the light of the objective to extend the market to the millions of potential users represented by the professionals who lack expertise in the use of information services in business.

The Commission will propose to the Member States a coordinated campaign to promote the abundance and quality of European information available on the market.

- 4) to reinforce the existing training structures. The problems of education and training are directly linked to the promotion of electronic information services. The Commission believes that certain forms of Community support for this activity are justified (e.g. schemes to promote the use of the Common Command Language installed by a number of hosts in the Community). The Commission will reinforce its assistance to users by increasing the travelling training workshops organised by ECHO, by developing new automatic training aids on the ECHO host service and by taking advantage of the transnationally orientated pilot activities concerning training in the framework of the SPRINT programme, as well as the remote teaching techniques developed within the DELTA programme.
- 5) to help the user cross the multilinguistic barrier. The diversity of language in the Community is one of the facets of its rich cultural heritage, and third-generation services will have to take full account of this characteristic if they are to tie into the internal market. New technologies, in particular machine-assisted translation, may help in constructing such services. The Commission intends to undertake a complete study of the entire question of multilingualism, with a view to taking further, and if necessary reinforcing the schemes already in operation (Eurotra and Systran) to facilitate the incorporation of multilingualism in information services.

- 6) to strengthen the role of the European Institutions as providers of information. A special effort should be made to facilitate access to Community information through user-friendly systems and tools such as those which have been developed within the INSIS programme.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF PRIORITY ACTIONS

1. General approach

The launching of pilot projects which will exert a catalytic effect on the development of the information market is only one of the mechanisms which are envisaged to attain the objectives of the Commission's action plan. Other schemes corresponding to the priority objectives will be set in motion either directly or through related Community policies (such as the setting up of the internal market, the policy on telecommunications, innovation policy etc.).

2. The introductory phase

Because a complex policy can only succeed if it is carried out with flexibility, the Commission proposes to commence the implementation of its priority actions with an introductory phase of 24 months, for which an amount of 15 million ECU for 1989 and 20 million ECU for 1990 is deemed necessary.

During this phase the Commission will go on with its current work to improve the market conditions for electronic information services. This includes setting up the European information market observatory, promoting standardisation, undertaking the legal work which will result in draft recommendations or directives to be submitted to the Council and completing the guidelines covering the role of the public sector in the information market.

In parallel, the Commission will step up its user support activity and will propose to the Member States a coordinated campaign which will aim to promote the wealth and the quality of information available in Europe.

Finally, the Commission will launch a limited number of pilot or demonstration projects.

The objectives and basic principles underlying the selection of projects have been worked out in consultation with representatives of the information services industry in ISPG⁽¹⁾, representatives of users in ISUG⁽²⁾ and the Senior Officials of SOAG. Calls for Declarations of interest will be published in the Official Journal in order to obtain proposals for projects from users and from the industry. The selection of projects will be carried out by the Commission in consultation with SOAG.

At the conclusion of this two-year phase, the Commission will transmit to the Council and to the European Parliament an evaluation report on the results obtained and on the basis of those results put forward guidelines for the continuation of actions until the end of 1992.

3. Conclusion

The Council is invited to indicate its approval of the general objectives and lines of action proposed by adopting the draft decision at annex.

(1) Information Services Providers Group

(2) Information Services Users Group

Proposal for a

Council Decision concerning the establishment at Community level of a policy and a plan of priority actions for the development of an information services market in the Community

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, and in particular Article 100A thereof,
Having regard to the proposal from the Commission (1),
In cooperation with the European Parliament (2),
Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee (3),

Whereas it is essential to adopt measures for the gradual establishment of the internal market during the period up to 31 december 1992; whereas the internal market comprises an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured;

Whereas the Heads of State and of Government, meeting at the European Council in Brussels on 29 and 30 March 1985, approved the creation of a Community information market as a specific objective;

Whereas the Council on 18 March 1986 gave a favourable reception to the communication from the Commission comprising a work programme for creating a common information market;

(1) OJ No

(2)

(3)

Whereas the Commission, having consulted representatives of users and suppliers of information services as well as the Senior Officials Advisory Group on the information market, has been able to draw up an agreed definition of the principal objectives and lines of action of a Community policy which is designed to tackle on a broad front the complex, diverse and overlapping questions arising out of the evolution of the information market;

Whereas it is recognised that information plays a role of fundamental importance in the development of trade and industry, giving strength and coherence to the European economy as a whole, as well as being an essential component both of the cultural identity of the Community and of the fabric of a modern society;

Whereas, by virtue of the economic importance of information, the creation of a common information services market occupies an essential place in the achievement of the internal market by the end of 1992;

Whereas there exist numerous technical barriers in the way of the development of services, as well as barriers to access and unacceptable distortions of competition which must be eliminated in order to set up a fair and balanced framework for the development of the information market in the widest sense, and thereby also for the whole economy;

Whereas the development of information resources and information-based services requires the application of new technologies and the achievement of economies of scale, thereby presenting a number of problems, but at the same time opens up, directly or indirectly, new prospects which have many important repercussions, not only for the competitive working environment of the internal market but also for the whole Community in the face of its main competitors in the world arena;

Whereas public authorities in the Member States are carrying out to a varied extent different activities in the domain of the information market;

Whereas the growing importance of information in international transactions, and of the related problems concerning services, is receiving increasing attention in international fora and this fact serves to emphasise the necessity for Member States to develop common positions in those fora;

Whereas the needs and legitimate demands of users of information services and particularly of those in small and medium-sized enterprises and in the less-favoured regions of the Community merit special attention;

Whereas the Community already possesses potentially useful instruments for the implementation of the above policy;

Whereas the Community's financial engineering mechanisms may contribute to the implementation of the present action plan, in particular with regard to the pilot and demonstration projects designed to exert a catalytic effect on the development of the information services market;

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

Approval is hereby given to the objectives and broad lines of the plan of action proposed by the Commission with the following aims:

- to set up an internal information services market by the end of 1992;
- to stimulate and reinforce the competitive capability of European suppliers of information services;
- to promote the use of advanced information services in the Community;
- to reinforce joint efforts to achieve the internal and external cohesion of the Community with respect to information services.

Article 2

In order to attain the objectives referred to in Article 1 the following actions shall be undertaken under the responsibility of the Commission:

- the establishment of a European information market observatory;
- the presentation to the Council of proposals which will aim at eliminating technical barriers to the establishment of an information market;
- the improvement of the conditions for transmitting and accessing information services;
- the preparation of initiatives concerning the role of the public sector in the information market;
- the launching of pilot and demonstration projects which will act as catalysts for the development of a European market;

- the preparation of a specific action in favour of libraries.
- the reinforcement of user support activities and the launching, in coordination with the Member States, of a campaign to promote the wealth and quality of European information services available on the market.

Article 3.

The action plan described in Article 2 shall be implemented in two phases, the first of which shall last two years, beginning with the date of adoption of this Decision, and shall constitute an introductory phase designed to intensify cooperation between the different parties concerned and to test the feasibility of a number of pilot and demonstration projects.

Article 4

The amount deemed necessary for the implementation of the introductory phase is 15 million ECU for 1989 and 20 million ECU for 1990.

Part of the amount deemed necessary, that used to finance pilot and demonstration projects, may serve in particular to bring to bear, as appropriate, additional sources of finance emanating from interested partners, thus multiplying its effect on the development of the European information services market.

Article 5

During the second half of 1989, the Commission shall transmit to the Council and to the European Parliament an evaluation report on the results obtained during the introductory phase and shall present, on the basis of those results, guidelines for the continuation of actions until 1992.

Article 6

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at

For the Council

FICHE D'IMPACT SUR L'EMPLOI ET LA COMPETITIVITE

I. Raisons principales pour introduire les mesures?

En raison de l'importance que prend aujourd'hui l'information technique, juridique et commerciale pour toutes les branches de l'économie, la mise en place du marché intérieur des services d'information devient un objectif indissociable de la réalisation du grand marché d'ici 1992.

- Quel est l'objectif politique: social, environnement, marché intérieur, etc ?

Les objectifs poursuivis sont de:

- 1) mettre en place un marché intérieur des services d'information,
- 2) stimuler et renforcer la capacité d'offre compétitive des fournisseurs européens,
- 3) promouvoir l'utilisation de nouveaux services avancés d'information dans la Communauté,
- 4) renforcer la solidarité et la cohésion interne et externe de la Communauté en matière de services d'information.

- Quels sont les problèmes communautaires? Les actions doivent-elle être engagées au niveau communautaire plutôt qu'au niveau national?

L'irruption des nouvelles technologies bouleverse l'équilibre économique traditionnel du secteur des services d'information. Des économies d'échelles doivent être obtenues pour assurer la viabilité des services avancés d'information. Il paraît difficile aux Etats membres de réaliser individuellement les conditions de marché qui permettraient aux prestataires de services d'information européens de faire face efficacement à la concurrence mondiale des nouveaux services. Une intervention communautaire est nécessaire pour surmonter les entraves techniques, réglementaires, juridiques et linguistiques qui fragmentent aujourd'hui le marché européen de l'information.

- Que se passerait-il si les mesures proposées n'étaient pas introduites?

La position de la Communauté sur le marché mondial de l'information se dégraderait. Les entreprises communautaires et les organismes de recherche deviendraient de plus en plus dépendants de sources d'information situées à l'extérieur de la Communauté. Cette dépendance accrue rendrait la Communauté vulnérable face au risque de politiques unilatérales visant à restreindre les transferts d'information scientifiques, technologiques et commerciales.

II. Caractéristiques des entreprises concernées

- La proposition a-t-elle des implications pour les entreprises?

La proposition a des implications pour les entreprises dans toutes les branches de l'économie.

- type d'entreprises: secteur, taille, localisation, nombre

Au niveau de la production sont particulièrement concernés:

- l'ensemble du secteur de l'édition technique et commerciale, (composé de quelques grands groupes et d'une multitude de petits éditeurs spécialisés),
- les producteurs de bases de données, (secteur de l'édition électronique composé essentiellement de petites entreprises),
- les courtiers en information (généralement de très petites entreprises),
- les sociétés de services vidéotex (plus de 10.000 services dans l'ensemble de la Communauté généralement fournis par des petites entreprises),
- les centre serveurs (environ une centaine de gros serveurs et de très nombreux petits serveurs spécialisés),
- les prestataires de services de logiciels, et les producteurs d'équipement télématiques et de services de télécommunications qui concourent à la fourniture des services de bases de données (généralement des grands groupes à l'exception des prestataires de logiciel spécialisé).

Au niveau de la demande, les entreprises de tous les secteurs d'activité sont concernées. Aujourd'hui les branches qui ont le plus recours aux services électroniques d'information sont:

- l'industrie pharmaceutique, chimique et pétrochimique,
- le tourisme et le transport,
- les banques et les instituts financiers,
- les industries ayant une activité à haute technologie,
- les sociétés de conseil et d'étude,
- les assurances,
- les sociétés d'import/export.

En particulier:

a) Y-a-t-il beaucoup de PME:

Ce sont surtout les grandes entreprises qui interrogent les bases de données techniques et économiques, mais dans des secteurs comme le tourisme (agences de voyage) et le transport, les PME utilisatrices des services avancés d'information sont particulièrement nombreuses.

- la proposition a-t-elle des implications particulières pour les PME:

Oui, dans la mesure où elle vise à élargir l'accès des PME aux services d'information avancés (cf point V ci-après).

- la proposition encouragera-t-elle la création de nouvelles PME?

Oui, l'encouragement donné à la création de nouveaux services d'information entraînera la création de nouvelles PME.

b) Sont elles concentrées dans des régions qui sont:

i) éligibles pour une aide régionale dans les Etats membres
ou

ii) éligibles pour une aide du FEDER

Les régions les moins favorisées de la Communauté sont particulièrement concernées en raison de la structure particulière de leur économie composée de petites et moyennes entreprises et par l'importance du secteur du tourisme.

- la proposition a-t-elle des implications sur la concurrence?

Oui, les services d'information avancés contribuent à améliorer la transparence du marché.

- les effets seront-ils plus ressentis dans certaines régions que d'autres?

Non. L'un des objectifs politiques du plan d'action est de renforcer la cohésion interne de la Communauté en matière de services d'information en s'appuyant notamment sur le programme STAR.

III. Quelles sont les obligations que cette mesure impose directement aux entreprises:

La proposition ne prévoit pas d'imposer de nouvelles obligations aux entreprises, mais d'harmoniser certaines obligations qui existent déjà dans les domaines de:

- la propriété intellectuelle, notamment des logiciels,
- l'authentification des transactions électroniques,
- la fraude électronique,
- la protection des données nominatives,
- la responsabilité des services d'information,
- le respect de la confidentialité des interrogations effectuées par les utilisateurs sur les bases de données.

- Qu'auront à faire les entreprises pour se conformer à la proposition?

Respecter la législation en vigueur.

- Est-ce que cela entraînera des coûts supplémentaires

Non. L'harmonisation des obligations existantes ne devrait pas créer des coûts additionnels pour les entreprises concernées, mais au contraire leur apporter des économies d'échelles en ouvrant le marché intérieur.

- La proposition empêchera-t-elle des entreprises de continuer leur activité présente?

Non.

- qu'advient-il si la proposition n'est pas retenue?

De nouvelles entraves juridiques risquent d'apparaître.

- La proposition augmentera-t-elle ou réduira-t-elle les coûts administratifs?

L'harmonisation des obligations n'entraînera pas de charges administratives supplémentaires pour les entreprises.

Les actions envisagées pour assouplir certaines réglementations dans le domaine de la poste et des télécommunications pourraient conduire à une réduction des coûts administratifs liés au lancement de services innovateurs.

IV. Obligations indirectes qui pourraient être imposées par les autorités locales, régionales ou nationales?

- La proposition nécessite-t-elle des actions de la part des autorités locales ou nationales

Oui, les adaptations juridiques qui découleront des efforts d'harmonisation mentionnés au point III et des actions de formation et de promotion.

- De tels actions entraîneront-elles des coûts supplémentaires pour les entreprises?

Non.

- Quels sont les autres organisations impliquées dans la mise en oeuvre de la proposition, et en quoi leur participation est-elle nécessaires?

Les instituts de normalisations auront un rôle à jouer pour harmoniser les normes dans le domaine de l'accès aux bases de données. Les utilisateurs et les fournisseurs d'information seront invités à présenter et à mettre en oeuvre des projets pilotes et de démonstration.

V. Dispositions particulières en faveur des PME:

L'une des lignes d'action de la proposition vise à encourager l'apparition d'une nouvelle génération de services d'information qui s'adresse à l'utilisateur final dans l'entreprise et notamment aux PME. La participation des PME est également explicitement recherchée dans la mise en oeuvre des projets pilotes et de démonstration.

VI. Effets probables sur:

a) la compétitivité des entreprises?

- Quels sont les effets attendus de la proposition sur les forces du marché?

Le développement de l'infrastructure des services d'information avancés facilitera le libre jeu des forces du marché dans la perspective du marché unique en 1992.

- La proposition aura-t-elle effet sur la compétitivité des entreprises de la Communauté par rapport à celle des entreprises des pays tiers?

Dans certains domaines (par exemple commerce, transport aérien ou services financiers) l'accès aux services d'information joue un rôle déterminant. La Communauté accuse un retard par rapport à ses principaux partenaires commerciaux que la proposition vise à réduire. Bien qu'il soit très difficile de quantifier l'impact direct des services d'information sur la compétitivité des entreprises ceux-ci contribuent largement à améliorer leurs performances commerciales.

- Que se passerait-il si la proposition était abandonnée?

L'écart constaté s'aggraverait.

b) Sur l'emploi?

- la proposition contribuera-t-elle à créer ou à réduire des emplois?

Le secteur de l'information est intensif en terme de main d'oeuvre. Les nouvelles formes de diffusion électronique de l'information provoquent l'apparition de nouveaux métiers. Les créations nettes d'emploi sont cependant difficiles à apprécier en raison des effets de substitution. Il est actuellement impossible de quantifier les effets induits sur l'emploi d'une meilleure diffusion de l'information dans toutes les branches de l'économie en raison de l'absence de statistiques appropriées.

Pour combler cette lacune et mieux apprécier l'impact du développement des services d'information sur l'économie, la proposition prévoit la création d'un observatoire européen du marché de l'information.

- Que se passerait-il si la proposition n'était pas retenue?

Face à la concurrence internationale des services avancés, l'emploi dans le secteur européen de l'information, déjà affecté par les restructurations du secteur de l'impression, enregistrerait des pertes aggravées.

VII. Les organisations représentatives concernées ont-elles été consultées?

La Commission a préparé sa proposition en étroite consultation avec:

- un groupe consultatifs de hauts fonctionnaires exerçant des responsabilités sur les diverses politiques liées au développement du marché de l'information dans les Etats-membres,
- un groupe représentatif des principaux fournisseurs européens de services d'information (composé de petites et de grandes entreprises),
- un groupe représentatif des utilisateurs composé des responsables des associations européennes des professions les plus concernées par l'accès à l'information (chambres de commerce, banque, finance, secteur de la santé, agriculture, industrie chimique, sociétés de conseil, etc).

Les trois groupes ont confirmé et affiné l'analyse actuelle du marché de l'information faite par la Commission et exprimé un consensus sur les objectifs et les actions prioritaires présentés dans la proposition.