

# European Community

## News Release

### BACKGROUND NOTE

#### TELEVISION AND BROADCASTING

##### Creating a common market for broadcasting

Eurobread, Eurobeer and now Eurotelevision. Nothing, it seems, is safe from the meddling of the Eurocrats in Brussels. But the European Commission has a duty to help create a common market not only for television sets but also the programmes they receive, as it made clear a year ago with its Green Paper "Television Without Frontiers".

It was not surprising, therefore, that the Community's policy on television broadcasting should have been outlined to the press recently by the Commission's chief internal market strategist, Lord Cockfield.

The policy aims at creating a single market for television broadcasting throughout the 12-nation European Community. But this requires the breakdown of existing barriers, represented by the various national systems for regulating broadcasting. Hence the Commission's draft directive, which lays down a Community-wide regulatory system.

The Commissioner pointed out that in drawing up its directive he and his colleagues had taken into account the reasons invoked by governments to keep out broadcasts from other Member States. As they relate essentially to programming and advertising, the draft directive sets a quota for programmes produced in the Community and a maximum transmission time for advertising.

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The directive would require Member States to ensure that at least 30 per cent of the programmes are produced in the Community. This percentage would eventually be increased to 60 per cent. Lord Cockfield noted that currently 80 per cent or more of programmes on offer are produced in the Community. But the Commission clearly wants to discourage newcomers from using popular programmes obtained very cheaply from third countries to collar advertising revenue.

The directive limits advertising to 15 per cent of total transmission time, as compared to around 12 per cent at present in the case of some important broadcasters. Lord Cockfield stressed that Member States would be free to set a lower ceiling for their national broadcasts but could not refuse Community programmes with a 15 per cent advertising content.

The Commission wants equipment manufacturers, producers and performers, to take advantage of the emerging, Community wide market. The Industries Commissioner, Karl-Heinz Narjes, told of the Commission's efforts to establish a permanent dialogue with industry, especially as regards the development of high definition television. His colleague, Carlo Ripa di Meana, who is responsible for communication policy, told of the Commission's cooperation with Europa-TV, a European channel broadcasting multilingual programmes.

#### High-definition television: Made in Europe - or Japan ?

Television sets coming on the market in three years' time will be near perfect as regards the quality of the picture and sound. They will mark the beginning of high-definition television (HDTV). The Japanese are already working on a broadcasting standard for this television of tomorrow. But the European Community does not intend to be caught napping. On March 17 representatives of the European Commission, the industry, the national broadcasting authorities and the heads of the European television channels agreed to propose an international standard of European origin.

HDTV will revolutionize television as lasers and compact discs have revolutionized sound reproduction. The technology in fact is the same in that both are applications of electronics. These high technologies in fact are coming together: the technology needed to produce television pictures of the same high quality as cinema films is similar to that which is at the basis of the future European telecommunications network.

It is in the interest of manufacturers as well as consumers that there should be only one international standard for the

production, transmission and reception of HDTV broadcasts. The standard which the Japanese have proposed to the International Radio Consultative Committee is incompatible with existing television systems and receivers.

The Europeans have decided to join the fray on the initiative of the European Commission. In February Thomson (France), Philips (The Netherlands), Bosch (Germany) and Thomson/EMI (Britain) began work on a joint approach with the backing of their national broadcasting authorities. This led to the March 17 agreement. They will put forward their solution at the next IRCC meeting in May.

The EC can be expected to make an important contribution to research into HDTV, thanks to RACE, the Community research programme on advanced telecommunications. Moreover, this summer European manufacturers should launch a project devoted to the television of tomorrow in the framework of EUREKA, another Community-wide R&D programme. So far the Japanese project has won the backing of Asian and Latin American countries and of the American CBS network. But it is opposed by all Europeans, including East Europeans, and the Australians.

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NR (86) 5  
21 April