

Interoperability of digital interactive television services

European Parliament resolution of 13 November 2007 on the interoperability of digital interactive television services (2007/2152(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 11, on freedom of expression and information, of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Directive 2002/21/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive)¹,
- having regard to Directive 2002/19/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on access to, and interconnection of, electronic communications networks and associated facilities (Access Directive)²,
- having regard to the Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on reviewing the interoperability of digital interactive television services pursuant to Communication COM(2004)0541 of 30 July 2004 (COM(2006)0037),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on interoperability of digital interactive television services (COM(2004)0541),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on accelerating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting (COM(2005)0204),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting (from digital 'switchover' to analogue 'switch-off') (COM(2003)0541),
- having regard to its resolution of 27 April 2006 on the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting: an opportunity for European audiovisual policy and cultural diversity?³,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2005 on accelerating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting⁴,
- having regard to the conclusions of the meeting of the Transport, Telecommunications

¹ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 33.

² OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 7.

³ OJ C 296 E, 6.12.2006, p. 120.

⁴ JO C 280 E, 18.11.2006, p.115.

and Energy Council, held in Brussels from 6 to 8 June 2007, on the i2010 initiative - Annual Information Society Report 2007,

- having regard to the conclusions of the meeting of the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council held in Brussels on 9 and 10 December 2004,
 - having regard to Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the remit of public service media in the information society,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (A6-0390/2007),
- A. whereas the switchover from analogue to digital is a great step forward and can contribute towards disseminating culture and improving social cohesion,
- B. whereas digital television can make use of new media technology to provide information services and can therefore enhance social cohesion and help bring everyone within the information society,
- C. whereas, in keeping with the Commission's view, the successful switchover to digital television is a prerequisite for developing interactive digital services,
- D. whereas the digital television services sector has great economic potential and is important as a source of employment,
- E. whereas, however, any legislative initiative concerning the digital sector cannot be reduced to a matter of infrastructure and technical data, and whereas these issues should be dealt with in accordance with policy objectives, in a continual quest for added value for users,
- F. whereas safeguards should be established at the European and national levels to prevent competition and market forces alone from governing the important choices to be made,
- G. whereas Parliament's earlier position needs to be restated, that imposing a single European standard is not the right solution, given the disparity of situations, to achieve the intended objectives, and that for the time being good sense dictates that industry-led, voluntary standardisation measures should be used, as demonstrated by a few positive national examples,
- H. whereas the digital television sector in the European Union already benefits from a wide range of robust European standards,
- I. whereas it is important for European citizens to take full advantage of the potential benefits of digital television,
- J. whereas the expansion of interactive services has so far been minimal compared with the optimistic forecasts made by the experts,
- K. whereas the wide range of technical opportunities created by digital broadcasting, such as

interactivity, should not be a fresh source of inequality, adding a ‘digital divide’ to the social and cultural divide,

- L. whereas it is a cause for concern that this risk may grow for the underprivileged categories, owing to the additional costs of the necessary material,
- M. whereas the move from analogue to digital television is making it possible to release spectrum capacity and develop new technologies and innovative solutions which boost European competitiveness in this sector,
- N. whereas the new technologies should be mastered at as young an age as possible and education systems should adapt as swiftly and effectively as possible to the cultural and social changes brought about by the new information and communication technologies, convergence and digitisation,
- O. whereas particular attention must also be paid to disabled people’s access to and mastery of the new information and communication technologies;
- P. whereas digital interactive television services include multilingual subtitles, enabling digital television to enhance intercultural dialogue and lifelong learning,
- Q. whereas access to a greater number of services should always go hand in hand with freedom of information and expression,
- R. whereas, during the entire transition process, care should be taken not to weaken public audiovisual services but, on the contrary, to support them in their public service mission, while preserving the vitality of private audiovisual services,

Benefiting from the positive effects of technology

- 1. Affirms that the new audiovisual technologies should allow the broadcasting of pluralist information and quality programmes, accessible to an ever increasing number of citizens;
- 2. Points out that respect for pluralism of information and diversity of content is not automatically guaranteed by technological progress but must be implemented by national and European public authorities through an active, steadfast and vigilant policy;
- 3. Considers, given the role of television in a globalised society, that the technical and legislative choices relating to interoperability should be not merely of an economic nature, but also of a social and cultural nature, and stresses that attention should be paid above all to users’ interests;
- 4. Stresses that the establishment of digital platforms is essential to maintaining a common public media zone following the abandonment of analogue technology, and calls on the Member States to promote the provision of wireless digital interactive television services with guaranteed reception from all proprietary platforms;
- 5. Considers it essential, therefore, for the Commission to submit a report on the results of the exchanges of good practices, forums and working groups among stakeholders, including consumers’, users’ and viewers’ associations;
- 6. Stresses that the use of interoperable technical solutions which are technology-neutral

provides a way of promoting investment and innovation in this sector, thereby stimulating competition and safeguarding consumer choice;

Succeeding in the digital transition and promoting open standards

7. Maintains that the success, in as short a time as possible, of the transition from analogue to digital is a prerequisite and a priority; is concerned about possible delays in meeting the 2012 deadline;
8. Takes the view that the coordinated development of digital television at Community level is essential if users are to benefit from the advantages of the internal market and in order to reduce the price of television receiving equipment and achieve greater penetration by digital interactive television services; accordingly, urges the Commission to support the Member States in drawing up a common plan of action at Community level;
9. Calls on the Member States to speed up the transfer to digital television, taking account of market demand and topographical and regional demographic factors, and calls on those Member States which have not yet drawn up a national plan for the full switchover to digital television to do so by the end of 2008;
10. Insists that measures taken by the Member States which lead to the expansion of digital interactive television services must comply with the rules on State aid;
11. Stresses the importance of the principle of interoperability to strengthen user confidence in the new services and to develop the market in a positive way on the basis of open, interoperable standards;
12. Stresses the importance of ensuring technological neutrality and developing successful business models;
13. Welcomes the work done by the Commission and its vital and necessary role in coordinating all interested parties;
14. Fully supports the Commission's approach in terms of its intention to cooperate fully with the Member States with a view to switching over to digital television successfully and facilitating interactive digital services;
15. Reiterates that imposing a single standard by legal means is not the right solution but only a final sanction, but does not approve of market intervention alone as a means of resolving the problem of interactivity;
16. Shares, therefore, the Commission's view that it would be advisable to continue promoting open standards such as MHP or MHEG-5, which are recognised by European standards bodies in relation to the switchover to digital and the interoperability of services, and maintains that these open standards are the most appropriate ones for ensuring the technological neutrality of networks and the free movement of information, respecting the special needs of countries where frequency capacities are limited;
17. Stresses that, in view of the example of the 'submarine patents' which emerged five years after the MHP standard had begun to be implemented, it is reasonable for licence fees to be fair and publicised at the start of the development of any open standard in order for it

to be successful;

18. Stresses the importance of voluntary agreements between digital television service providers on the establishment of a number of common technical specifications for the implementation of standards adopted by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute;
19. Urges the Commission to continue actively to promote the introduction of open European digital television standards in all regions of the world and to encourage international cooperation in this area, thereby ensuring the widest possible access to digital content;
20. Regrets that interactive television in the EU has ultimately proved to be less commercially successful than expected; calls on the Commission to study the reasons for this phenomenon and to submit regular reports on the efforts made by the Commission and the Member States to develop the digital television market and its numerous offshoots;
21. Considers it essential to provide consumers with more information on the opportunities offered by digital platforms and the necessary equipment, so that they are able to make informed technical and cultural choices;
22. Stresses that any public intervention should not be discriminatory or favour one or another market operator;
23. Calls on the Commission to help the Member States and local authorities, by disseminating best practices, to exploit the potential of the new technologies in order to communicate with their citizens more effectively;

The need to consider the impact and mastery of the new technologies

24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to inform the public about future developments in digital interactive television services, and recommends that digital television service providers take active steps to inform users about existing interactive services;
25. Regards it as essential to ensure the security of users and the protection of their personal data and privacy, and stresses the importance of consumer confidence in digital interactive television services;
26. Stresses the importance of discussing at European level the social and cultural implications of the digital society and the adaptation of national education systems to the cultural and social changes brought about by the new technologies;
27. Reiterates the importance of educating people of all ages about the digital world and the media;
28. Calls on the Member States to establish mechanisms which guarantee a non-discriminatory structure for electronic programme guides that can guide users through the digital services offered;
29. Points out that the European audiovisual model is based on a creative dichotomy between public and private audiovisual services, and stresses that under no circumstances should the new technologies disturb that balance by weakening the competitiveness of the public

sector; recalls that the public sector should continue to have guaranteed access to digital platforms;

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30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the Council of Europe.