European Broadcasting Union

Comments of the European Broadcasting Union
on Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan
(draft texts of 21 March 2003)

The EBU is glad to note from the new drafts that the vital role of the electronic media in the development of the information society is now beginning to be recognized. We are also satisfied that many of the newly-inserted paragraphs of relevance to the media refer to concepts and ideas which have been put forward in the contribution of the World Broadcasting Unions to PrepCom-2. On the other hand, we feel that the texts still fail to achieve an overall balance; they place too much emphasis on technical infrastructure and not enough on the content to be transported over the various networks.

Draft Declaration of Principles

In Section I we appreciate the inclusion of the following points, which should be maintained and, if possible, reinforced:

> Point 10 - first and second indent - on *freedom of expression* (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and the role of *independent, pluralistic and free media* as an important means of fostering public information, society development and social cohesion;

> Points 42-43 on the importance of *interoperable standards and platforms* and spectrum management;

> Points 49-51 on *cultural diversity* as a fundamental value, the creation of *local content* as a priority, and the continuing role of broadcasting in disseminating content in the information society.

There are also a number of points in Section II which, in our view, should be fully supported by governments and integrated into Section I. In particular, the following ones are interlinked and could be combined:

Point [2] on *the central role of the media* in any conception of information society (in connection with Point [12 C] on the role of radio and television as basic foundations of the information society) and the importance for citizens of having access to *unbiased information and a wide range of content*;

Point [22 A] on citizens' *access to information* (and the importance, in this respect, of free-to-air broadcasting with universal coverage) and on *free news gathering* by the media regarding events of interest to the public.

In this context we also welcome the clarification suggested in Point [1] of the observers' contribution to the draft Action Plan, which defines the information society as an evolving concept encompassing traditional as well as new media.

Draft Action Plan

In our view, the above-mentioned matters are still insufficiently taken up in Section I of the Action Plan, although we appreciate the inclusion of the following points, which should be maintained and, if possible, further developed:

Points 14 and 30 regarding *open and interoperable standards and platforms*;

Points 43 and 44 regarding support for the *creation of local content* and the facilitation of the *exchange of such content*.

Here again, there are a number of points in Section II which in our view should be fully supported by governments and integrated into Section I, and these include:

Point [34 A] on the encouragement of *public service values* in the information society, including *independent public service broadcasting*;

Point [45] - fifth indent - on plans for *transition to digital television* (or digital broadcasting in general);

Point [45] - seventh indent - on *free news gathering* by the media regarding events of interest to the public.

The "digital divide" and the electronic media

The "digital divide" is increasingly regarded as the greatest challenge for the information society: a divide which exists not only between the North and the South but also between different regions within the developed and the developing world, and between different groups of society, between different generations, etc.

Free-to-air broadcasting - radio and television - has been an outstanding means of reaching and integrating citizens from all parts of society and of providing quality content to meet their democratic, social and cultural needs. Broadcasting, with its digital and interactive enhancements, is also ideally placed to fulfil this role in the information society. It thus has the potential to bring information society services into every home and to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Goals.

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