[FR] French Government Keen to Promote the Development of Internet in France

IRIS 1999-2:1/3

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On 19 January, one year after adopting the government's action programme for the information society (programme d'action gouvernemental pour la société de l'information - PAGSI), the Prime Minister announced at a meeting of an interministerial committee a number of new measures to promote the development of Internet in France.

Asserting its desire to construct a legislative framework to protect exchanges and privacy, the Government has decided to fundamentally change direction by completely deregulating encryption in France. The provisions of the law of 26 July regulating telecommunications 1996 allowed the least powerful type of encrypting using 40 bit keys, and beyond this limit set up a strict system of depositing secret keys with "trustworthy third parties". This system is no longer suitable and there is a risk of France becoming isolated from its main partners. Pending announced legislative amendments and in order to lift the barriers to the development of electronic trading immediately, the Government has decided to raise the threshold for permitted encrypting from 40 to 128 bits, a level considered by experts as offering very high security for some time to come. In addition, in order to adapt the law on establishment of proof to new technologies and to electronic signature, an amendment to the Civil Code has been announced.

The second range of measures concerns the development of culture, content and French presence on the Internet. For this purpose, and in order to clarify matters of copyright and multimedia, the Government has announced the creation of a Higher Council for Literary and Artistic Ownership and two working groups on the situation of salaried authors in the public and private sectors.

Looking to the emergence of an "electronic administration", the Government also announced the generalisation of the use of the new technologies in the Administration. A decree will shortly make the forms available on Internet valid in respect of the Administration, and it will become compulsory to put new forms on line. Lastly, the priority attention being given to the emergence of an information society available to all and to the improvement of public access to the new information technologies in public services (development of the use of Internet in schools, municipal libraries, post offices, official employment offices, etc) was confirmed. The Government believes that the local authorities should be free to install modern structures and make them available to telecom operators.

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Nevertheless, in doing so the local authorities must respect the rules of competition law and not prejudice the public telecom service. The Government's referral of the telecom regulatory authority (ART) to the courts should moreover result in more favourable rate proposals for Internet access using the telephone network.

Comité interministériel pour la société de l'information du 19 janvier 1999.

http://www.internet.gouv.fr/francais/textesref/cisi190199/accueil.htm

Interministerial committee for the information society, 19 January 1999.

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