

[CH] Teleclub Banned from Using Own Set-Top Box in Switzerland

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The set-top box developed for the decoding of the Teleclub channel, the so-called "d-box", is likely to discriminate against the digital distribution of other pay-TV stations and to restrict the public's free choice of programmes. Only an open set-top box and use of the internationally recognised coding system Multicrypt enables the public to receive a variety of different coded channels using the same set-top box, thanks to its open interface. These were the conclusions of the Swiss Department for the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communication (UVEK) in a decision of 8 November 1999.

In future, the broadcaster Teleclub AG plans to distribute its pay-TV channel in Switzerland in digital form, which means special equipment will be needed to receive it. A set-top box, which converts the digital signal into an analogue signal which the television set can understand, is required. This box can also be used to decipher coded pay-TV channels and uses a special navigation system to search for such channels. All this technology threatens the diversity of opinion in broadcasting: at the end of the day, whoever controls the set-top box can decide which channels are made available to the public under what conditions. The technical characteristics of a set-top box must also therefore take into account the need for media diversity and openness.

The d-box, developed in Germany, was to be used to decode the Teleclub channel. However, in the UVEK's opinion, this set-top box did not meet the above-mentioned criteria since it only understood a single encryption system. Viewers equipped with a d-box would therefore have to buy a second set-top box to receive channels that used other coding systems unless other pay-TV broadcasters were legally able to obtain the d-box code. The UVEK therefore called for an open set-top box using the internationally recognised coding system Multicrypt, which enables the public to receive a variety of different coded channels, thanks to its open interface.

