[DE] New Developments in Digital Services

IRIS 2000-3:1/23

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In 1998, the European Commission had prohibited the planned merger of Telekom and Beta Research (see IRIS 1998-6: 14). This decision had largely been based on the fear that Deutsche Telekom would, in the long term, monopolise access to cable services and that d-box technology would more or less become a standard prerequisite for the use of digital TV in German-speaking countries.

Responding to public criticism of the latest attempt to merge with Beta Research, Deutsche Telekom referred to the fact that, in the meantime, the first contract to operate the cable network in Nordrhein-Westfalen had been sold to the American firm Callahan, while other regional cable networks were also about to be sold off. Moreover, in January last year Beta Research had published the programming interface for its digital set top box (d-box) and given permission for Philips Digital Video Systems to make the d-box alongside Nokia (see IRIS 1999-2: 16).

As a first step towards a common access standard, the European DVB Steering Board agreed a set of targets for an open European digital standard (Multimedia Home Platform - MHP) at the end of 1999. The German TV Platform, whose members include Deutsche Telekom, also unanimously accepted MHP.

In view of current developments, the Chairman of the Direktorenkonferenz der Landesmedienanstalten (the Conference of Directors of the Regional Media Authorities - DLM) anticipates that, in time, access problems will be resolved once European standards are established. On 21 February 2000, the DLM published a draft set of rules to act as a legal framework for freedom of access to digital services, based on §53.7 of the fourth revised version of the 4. Rundfunkänderungsstaatsvertrag (the Agreement between Federal States on Broadcasting), which entered into force on 1 April 2000 (see IRIS 1999-5: 11). Under these rules, which do not impose any technical standard, providers of television services who require access services are entitled to demand suitable, non-discriminatory and equal conditions. The document also contains a more detailed explanation of the obligation on providers of CAS (Conditional Access Services) to equip decoders with accessible interfaces in line with the latest technology and common European standards in particular. The same applies to systems that control the selection of television programmes. CAS providers who also determine the API (Application Programming Interface) of the decoder must ensure that the API can also be used unbundled and without its own CAS, so that the decoder can be used to receive CAS offered by other providers. Navigators

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and Electronic Programme Guides (EPG) must not be designed in such a way that some content is more difficult to access. At the same time, more advanced navigators must not hinder the use of other, similar navigators as far as is technologically possible.

Presseerklärung DLM vom 22. Februar 2000.

http://www.alm.de/aktuelles/presse/p220200.htm

DLM press release, 22 February 2000.

Presseerklärung Deutsche TV Plattform vom 22. Januar 2000.

http://www.tv-plattform.de/pages/news/00_04.htm

German TV Platform press release.

Zum Verkauf der Kabelnetze Meldung vom 3. März 2000.

Report on the sale of cable networks, 3 March 2000.

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