

European Commission: Communication on Reviewing the Interoperability of Digital Interactive Television Services

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In its bid to foster EU-wide development of digital interactive television services, the European Commission has actively promoted the digital dossier since 2004. In July 2004 a Communication was published setting out the Commission's position on the interoperability of digital interactive television services pursuant to Art. 18(3) of the 2002/21/EC Framework Directive. The Communication then concluded there was no need to mandate standards for interactive television and scheduled a review in 2005. The Commission's efforts have now culminated in a new Communication published in February of 2006.

To contribute to interoperable solutions and to ensure the adequate development of interactive TV, the Commission has since 2004 consulted stakeholders ranging from ministries to broadcasters but has also worked with network operators, manufacturers and industry associations. The ambitions resting on digital TV derive from the fact viewers can interact with the broadcaster via a “return channel” thereby making it possible to play games and send messages to the TV broadcaster. Interactivity operates on the basis of an Applications Programme Interface (API) which is a software stack in the receiver. Open interoperable APIs are paramount to preventing technical incompatibilities which in turn will benefit the development of a market of scale as well as safeguarding EU consumers' interests.

A List of standards has been published in the Official Journal by the Commission and includes such recent additions as MHEG-5 and WTVML. The Multimedia Home Platform (MPH) has been the standard of choice in Italy where the voluntary agreement of Italian broadcasters to use MHP reflects the success that can be reached through flexibility and consensus among market players. The Commission is intent on encouraging such developments in other EU Member States and aims to continue promoting open, interoperable standards for digital television in Europe and beyond (it has established and funded a series of actions targeting international standards).

The Communication concludes the Commission's priorities must be:

- to work with Member States to ensure the successful switch-over to digital TV (see IRIS 2005-7: 6)
- to promote open standards and interoperability;
- to support cooperation between Member States and stakeholders;
- to monitor use of proprietary technologies; and
- to promote international cooperation on the matter.

Yet again, it considers that: “the market is best served at the present time by continuing to rely on industry-led voluntary standardisation initiatives.”

"Digital interactive TV: Voluntary standards best way to achieve roll-out of new digital services in Europe, says European Commission", press release of 7 February 2006, IP/06/127

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/127&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Communication from the Commission 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 of 2 February 2006

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0037:FIN:EN:HTML>

