[FR] Information Superhighways Bill

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The Information Superhighways Bill passed the National Assembly on a first reading on 30 January 1996. It merely provides a legal basis for experimental projects, limited to certain areas and running for specified periods, and carried out "principally for the purpose of establishing whether there is a genuine demand for new services and technologies, and whether that demand can be met".

More radical changes will be discussed when the new telecommunications regulations come up for debate in the spring.

Existing French law is proving inadequate, and the distinction which it makes between telecommunications and audiovisual communications poses a special problem, since a single set of regulations is needed for all the data carried on a single superhighway.

Pending new legislation, derogations are already envisaged for experimental projects, which are of general interest, innovative and restricted to certain areas. After consultation of the ministers responsible for information technologies, telecommunications and communication, these will be authorised for a maximum period of three or five years, non-renewable.

Concerns other than France Télécom will also be allowed to establish and operate facilities, limited to certain areas and serving a maximum of twenty thousand users, and provide a full range of telecommunications services, including telephone services between fixed points. Operators will be responsible for the nature of the information carried.

As far as digital television is concerned, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA) will authorise "the use of frequencies for terrestrial or cable-based radio and television services, using digital or multiplex microwave technologies" in specified areas.

Finally, the CSA may approve derogations from the existing regulations, and particularly those which impose a quota for French works, for audiovisual communication services "making it possible to transmit sound and television programmes on request and possibly in return for payment".

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Projet de loi adopté en première lecture par l'Assemblée Nationale (Doc. SENAT ns 193 du 31 janvier 1996).

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