European Ministerial Conference: European Ministers Adopt Declaration on Global Information Networks

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The German Government and the European Commission together organised a European Ministerial Conference on "Global Information Networks: Realising the Potential" in Bonn from 6 to 8 July 1997. It ended with the adoption of a declaration, signed by participating ministers from EU, EFTA and Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Cyprus.

In this declaration, the ministers attempt to define the role of both the public and private sectors, the aim being to strike an optimum balance between the opportunities and the dangers inherent in the rapid development of the information technologies.

The text assigns a key role to the private sector, which has the task of promoting the expansion of global information networks and electronic commerce in Europe. The `spirit of enterprise' is vital to further development of global information networks, and generous investment aid must be used to foster it. To protect consumer interests and ethical principles, the industry must develop effective self-regulation systems (e.g. open, platform-independent content rating systems (filter techniques) or rating services). Among other things, it must also do the technical groundwork needed to boost confidence in digital signatures.

Concerning the protection of young people and consumers, the ministers agree that regulatory action by governments is an essential first step in this area. To increase confidence in global information networks, they stress the need for proper regulations on applicable laws and jurisdiction, and particularly for rapid harmonisation of the laws on copyright and related rights. Here, they promise to work for rapid ratification of the WIPO agreements of December 1996 (see IRIS 1997-1: 5) and stress the need for full and timely implementation of the TRIPS agreement. Other measures which they emphasise include:

- Precise definition of the responsibilities of information providers and users, it being agreed that intermediaries, such as network operators and access providers, should not in principle be obliged to exercise prior control;

- Action to prevent the division of society into information "haves" and "have-nots", i.e. to provide access to global information networks, regardless of age, geographical situation, social status, etc.;

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- Support for information technology training programmes all the way from primary school to working life;

- Legal and technical measures to protect personal data.

The ministers also stress that boosting electronic commerce can help to promote economic growth. In his speech at the conference, Mario Monti, the EU Commission member responsible for the Internal Market, had already spoken of the Commission's latest efforts in the field of electronic commerce. He said that his Directorate General was at present making a detailed study of various questions going beyond the regulatory measures which the Commission had worked out in its communication, "A European Initiative in Electronic Commerce" (see IRIS 1997-5: 3). These questions included regulated professions, commercial communications, contract law, accountancy, fraudulent use of electronic payments, data security, data protection, industrial property, direct and indirect taxation and public procurement.

Shortly before the Conference, on 1 July 1997, the United States presented an initiative on Electronic Commerce, with aims very similar to those of the ministers in Bonn.

Commission member Mario Monti's speech on "Electronic Commerce in Europe - Creating a Favourable Environment for Electronic Commerce"

http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:gRxYqtpYqX8J:europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference%3DSPEECH/97/157%26format%3DPDF%26aged%3D1%26language%3DEN%26guiLanguage%3Den+Electronic+Commerce+in+Europe+-+Creating+a+Favourable+Environment+for+Electronic+Commerce&hl=fr&gl=fr&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESgq9DTJNUF5gx4BL8aIl3j45FXOG53Jg5NOA_9DYeubgjnJn5m-lqoggjin0hHerD-BNty_29MlH9l7i5Yy1sbg0AEapo00iZHuBj6diNYB4fWwb9Sd_Kx21xn8KfmWetfxdWWj&sig=AHIEtbShXIA5Adtx_jAn8VyZ3Xwv84pEHg&pli=1

U.S. Government, "Framework for Global Electronic Commerce", 1 July 1997

http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/New/Commerce/read.html

European Ministerial Conference, Bonn 6-8 July 1997: Ministerial Declaration

http://web.mclink.it/MC8216/netmark/attach/bonn_en.htm#Heading01

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