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Copyright Directive:

Discussion continues in Council working group

At its meeting on 7 December, the Council of Internal Market Ministers only took note of a progress report on the proposed Copyright Directive. A political agreement is expected to be reached in March under the Portuguese Presidency.

There are still major differences especially regarding the exemptions (Article 5). Discussions are continuing on which exemptions Member States will be allowed to maintain or introduce. The main issues concern the structure, the degree of freedom left to Member States to retain exceptions not yet covered in the draft Directive and the question of „fair compensation“.

Discussion of the proposal in the Council Working Group on Copyright had already begun under the UK and Austrian Presidencies; it resumed earlier this year after the European Parliament had voted its amendments in first reading. An amended proposal was presented by the Commission in May, and the Council took note of the state of play at its meeting on 21 June last. Further work at working group level is still needed, and it is expected that a common position will be reached under the Portuguese Presidency, in the first half of 2000.

***Electronic Signature Directive:
Council adopted Directive***

The Council of Telecommunication Ministers adopted on 30 November the Electronic Signature Directive. The Council unanimously approved all the European Parliament's second reading amendments on the Directive, allowing the final adoption of this Directive in the form of the common position as amended by the Parliament. The Directive recognises that electronic signatures have the same legal value as hand-written signatures, under certain conditions. More information can be found at:

<<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg15/en/media/sign/index.htm>>

Transparency:***Commission plans proposal for right of access to documents***

At the Helsinki Summit on 10-11 December, the European Council confirmed that transparency of the European institutions would be an important element in bringing the European Union closer to its citizens. Progress has been achieved during the Finnish Presidency, especially in the area of access to documents and rapid communication using modern information technologies. The European Council welcomes the Commission's intention to table in January 2000 the proposal on general principles governing the right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents. The Commission has been working on its transparency proposals since the Amsterdam Treaty committed the Union to take its decisions as openly as possible.

Research:***Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development***

At its meeting on 2 December, the Council of Research Ministers had an exchange of views on the future of European research and the preparation of the next Framework programme for the time after 2002. Following this discussion, the Council concluded that it would be useful to establish an indicative timetable for the preparation of and the decisions relating to the Framework Programme. The aim should be to complete the entire process within a period of two years; all legislative decisions relating to the Framework Programme should be in place in good time and preferably six months before the new programme starts. The Council therefore welcomed the Commission's intention to present to Parliament and Council a tentative workplan for the 6th Framework programme in early 2000.

Structural Funds:**More public information on projects requested**

The European Commission adopted on 24 November a regulation on information and publicity measures to be taken by the Member States over the period 2000-2006. The purpose of laying down common rules on information and publicity is to provide clearer information to Structural Funds recipients and to raise public awareness of the role played by the European Union in regional development.

The regulation puts forward a common methodology and approach for persons responsible for carrying out information and publicity measures which takes account of the specific situation of each Member State. The introduction of a „communications plan“ is one of the key components of this regulation. The information and publicity measures put in place by the Member States will be presented in a structured form for each Community Support Framework or Single Programming Document, clearly setting out the aims and target groups, the content and strategy of the measures and an indicative budget.

The Member States are also required to appoint a person responsible for monitoring and co-ordinating communication measures at national level and at the level of each managing authority, thus enabling the Commission to play a more effective role in activating the partnership. The Commission hopes this decision will be adopted definitively at the end of the year.

Culture:**Agreement on Culture 2000 programme**

On 9 December, the European Parliament and the Council reached agreement on the Culture 2000 programme during their conciliation meetings. The legal act will shortly be adopted by both institutions. Agreement was reached over a total budget of 167 million Euro for 5 years (2000-2004) which means that the funding was not increased. The budget breakdown between the different types of action is as follows: up to 45 % for specific innovative or experimental actions; at least 35% for integrated actions; 10% for special cultural events; 10% for remaining expenditure.

The Parliament had initially asked for 250 million Euro, but ran up against opposition from some Member States which refused to go beyond 167 million Euro. Given that unanimity is required in Council and with a European Commission declaration that it will present by June 2002 a report on the progress of the programme, together with an assessment of available financial resour-

ces and a possible draft revision, the European Parliament finally agreed to the amount set by the Council.

The Cultural 2000 programme is open for participation by European Economic Area, Cyprus and associated countries in CEE.

Culture:

Projects selected under Connect initiative

The European Commission has selected 31 projects from the 243 applications received in the framework of the first call for applications in May under the new Connect initiative. This action supports projects combining culture, education and training particularly in connection with research and new technologies. These projects will receive an amount of 7.038 million Euro.

In addition to the 31 projects selected in the framework of „Connect“, the European Commission has selected another 60 projects from 267 submitted following a second call for applications in June under the Connect initiative. These projects will receive an amount of 8.899 million Euro.

The Connect action is a new initiative launched by the European Parliament in 1999, with a budget of 15 million Euro. This sum is divided up between the Directorate General for Culture at the Commission and that for Education, which have each proceeded to the selection of projects. Despite the success of the initiative, the European Parliament has not renewed it for the year 2000. It has this time given priority to the programmes which have a legal base such as Socrates, Leonardo and Youth. It is hoped that in 2001 there will be a new budget available.

For further information on selected projects, contact either *Mr Antonios Kosmopoulos, DG EAC, Fax : +32-2-296.69.74* or *Ms Louisa Anastopoulos DG EAC Fax: +32-2-296.62.97*

Education:

SOCRATES II Programme adopted

The second phase of the Socrates programme („Socrates II“) - the European action programme for co-operation in the field of education - will cover the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2006.

On 26 November, the Finnish Presidency presented to the Council of Education Ministers the positive result of the conciliation procedure with the European Parliament on the SOCRATES II programme which, after long and sometimes difficult negotiations, has been brought to a successful end on 10 November 1999. Delegations and the Commission welcomed that the pro-

gramme could now enter into force as foreseen on 1 January 2000. The financial envelope of the programme had been the last issue of divergence in the conciliation committee. Agreement was finally reached on an amount of 1850 million Euro for a 7-year period (2000-2006).

In future, there will be 30 countries participating in the programme. Among those will be - apart from the 15 EU Member States - the EFTA States, the associated countries in Eastern and Central Europe, Cyprus, Malta and new partners like Turkey, which is expected to participate as from 2001.

Copies of all documents are available from: *The Socrates National Agencies or from the Socrates & Youth Technical Assistance Office, Rue Montoyer / Montoyerstraat 70, B-1000 Brussels, Tel.: (32-2) 233.01.11, Fax: (32-2) 2330150, E-Mail: info@socrates-youth.be*

Copyright:

Second meeting of EBLIDA Copyright Expert group

On 9 December, the EBLIDA Copyright Expert group met for the second time in this year. The seventeen members of the Expert group were nominated by their associations at the beginning of this year, and are representing almost all EU Member States. After a presentation by the director of EBLIDA on the progress of the draft Copyright Directive in the Council working group and resulting lobby strategies, each representative reported on activities in the various countries. This was followed by a debate on a set of licensing models for different kind of libraries which have been developed on the initiative of some leading subscription agents. EBLIDA's legal adviser Emanuella Giavarra then reported on the new WIPO Digital Agenda and some aspects of the draft E-Commerce Directive. After identifying some important topics for future discussions, it was decided to hold the next meeting on 6 May 2000 in Madrid in connection with the EBLIDA Council meeting.

E-Commerce:

Council debates global aspects

At its meeting on 30 November, the Council of Telecommunication Ministers also held an open debate on „The Information Society of the future: responding to the challenges of global electronic commerce.“ This has to be seen in context with the industry-led Global Business Dialogue (GBD). Last September in Paris, the GBD held its annual conference where it presented its first recommendations to governments and international organisations as regards future policy framework in the identified fields. Those were authentication and security, consumer confidence, content/commercial communications, infor-

mation infrastructure (including interoperability and internet governance), intellectual property rights, jurisdiction, liability, protection of personal data, and tax and tariffs. Although in favour of self-regulation, the Council agreed that self-regulation cannot be a substitute for regulation which is still needed, in particular in specific areas, for enhancing trust and security, as well as for the protection of consumers' interests. For further information on Council: <http://ue.eu.int> (in Newsroom) and on GBD: <http://www.gbd.org/>

E-Commerce:

WIPO E-Commerce conference presentations available

Presentations and papers of the WIPO Conference on Electronic Commerce and Intellectual Property that took place on 14-16 September in Geneva, are now available at the WIPO website at:

<http://ecommerce.wipo.int/meetings/1999/papers/index.html>

E-Commerce:

OECD guidelines for consumer protection in E-commerce

EU Commissioner *David Byrne*, responsible for Consumer Protection, welcomed the adoption by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) of a Recommendation on Guidelines for Consumer Protection in Electronic Commerce on 9 December. Their fundamental principle is that consumers who engage in electronic commerce should enjoy the same level of protection that they would have in off-line transactions. The guidelines reflect closely EU consumer protection regulations and principles.

The OECD guidelines highlight areas of particular concern for consumers in the on-line environment such as fair business, advertising and marketing practices; clear information about an on-line business's identity, the goods or services it offers and the terms and conditions of any transaction; a transparent process for the confirmation of transactions; secure payment mechanisms; fair, timely and affordable dispute resolution and redress; privacy protection; and consumer and business education. On each of these issues, practical guidance is given on what measures or steps should be taken in order to foster consumer confidence or safeguard consumer rights.

The result of 18 months of discussions among representatives of OECD governments and business and consumer organisations, the Guidelines will play a major role in assisting governments, business and consumer representatives to develop and implement on-line consumer protection mechanisms, without erecting barriers to trade.

The text can be downloaded at:

<http://www.oecd.org/news_and_events/release/guidelinesconsumer.pdf>

Printed copies are available from the OECD Media Relations Division,
Fax: 33 1 45 24 80 03.

Quelle: EBLIDA, Hot news Dezember 1999

