

European telecommunications

Community looks at strategy

Brussels

AFTER years of dithering, the member states of the European Economic Community have agreed to work together to strengthen Europe's telecommunications market. Meeting in Luxembourg on 15 October, industry ministers adopted two recommendations constituting a first step towards a telecommunications strategy.

First, all ten Community governments are to ensure that national telecommunications administrations consult before introducing new services. (The United Kingdom, in the throes of selling off half its nationalized industry, was at the outset rather embarrassed, but has now fallen in line.) Contacts already exist through the European Conference of Post and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT) set up in 1959, but new services put into operation from 1985 would have to conform to standards now being laid down by the developing network of European standards bodies.

Six million ECU (European Currency Units) or \$4.6 million have been granted by the Community to these bodies for a two-year programme for 1984-85 to define and certify European norms in the telecommunications field. Equipment other than terminals, such as digital transmission and switching systems, would have to conform to common standards from 1986.

The second recommendation would throw open to all member states procurement of both conventional terminals (telephone apparatus for mains telephone use, PABX, ordinary teleprinters) as well as telematic terminals.

On switching and transmission equipment, and conventional terminal equipment for which there are no common specifications, the recommendation is that at least 10 per cent of the annual value of orders should be opened up for tender throughout the Community.

French pleas that the market should be opened to the full have been resisted by the European Commission, which is wary of risking a flood of components from both other member states and beyond, as well as scaring member states off a move it has taken them four years to make.

As a technical pioneer, and still the world's biggest exporter of first-generation telecommunications (telex, telephone), with a trade surplus of \$2,000 million a year, the Community recognizes its industry is at a turning point: how to develop a second- and third-generation market in telecommunications which can stand up to Japan and the United States.

The Community at present controls a 19 per cent slice of the world telecommunications equipment market, but growth to the end of the decade is forecast to be slower than in the rest of the world (6-7 per cent as opposed to 8 per cent in the United States and Japan). The Community's telecommunications sector represents 2 per cent of the Community's gross domestic product which, with innovation, could grow to 10 per cent by the year 2000.

The Commission, however, is looking further ahead. Telecommunications are already reckoned to affect 55 per cent of value-added services and 62 million jobs; according to the Commission, investments

in telecommunications could double the turnover of the European economy.

Under the Community's telecommunications programme, informally adopted by ministers last May, aid to finance telecommunications in ill-favoured regions could be drawn from the regional fund, the European investment bank and the new Community lending instrument (which is tailor-made to encourage investments in such conditions).

These schemes are likely to figure on the agenda of the next council of industry ministers on 20-21 November, when there will probably also be a decision on a programme of telecommunications research and development. Twenty-five million ECU a year over a five-year period has been proposed for Research in Advanced Communications in Europe (RACE), to be financed jointly by the Commission, companies and research institutes, much along the lines of the computer research programme Esprit.

Meanwhile, the Commission plans to set up a number of analysis and forecasting groups to look after the development of new services such as integrated digital networks, cellular radio-telephone services, videocommunications and wide-bank trans-national networks. At the October meeting, industry ministers also found an extra 11 million ECU to extend the 1979-83 programme on standardization in data processing for a further two years.

Anna Lubinska

North Sea records

A NEW centre for the storage of North Sea drilling records and cores was opened in Edinburgh last week by the junior energy minister, Mr Alec Buchanan-Smith. The centre will provide public access to core sections for sampling and inspection. Any oil company granted a drilling licence must make records and cores available, but only after an interval of five years.

According to Mr Buchanan-Smith, the first nine months of this year have seen more exploration and appraisal than any previous year. One hundred and forty wells had been drilled in the North Sea by the end of September, compared with last year's record total of 128.

The new centre will be administered on behalf of the Department of Energy by the British Geological Survey (BGS). The tasks of the 55 staff will include the provision of inspection facilities for the 40,000 core samples now housed, of which 50 per cent have been released for access. The associated borehole logs are stored in microfiche form. Samples of cores may be removed for experimental measurements subject to the approval of BGS, which says that the number of requests for access average about three a week. Apparently demand increases as deadlines for new licence applications approach. The annual cost of maintaining the centre is £120,000.

Philip Campbell

US policies offend Europeans

EUROPEAN optimism about the future of the new telecommunications strategy, as of other new industrial research and development programmes, is marred by anxiety about the effects of high-technology export restrictions by the United States.

There is speculation that the US 1976 Arms Export Control Act and the 1979 Export Administration Act will be tightened up by the new Congress when it re-assembles next January.

Existing controls, justified on national security grounds by the US Administration, are suspected of giving US companies an unfair advantage over others.

At the informal dinner following the Industry Council on 15 October, the soon-to-retire EEC Commissioner for Industry and Research, Vicomte Etienne Davignon, told national ministers that the European Commission intends to draw up an inventory of US measures to restrict high-technology transfer and to assess the consequences for economic and industrial development in the Community. The objective of the

study, which will be ready in six weeks, is to make it clear to the United States that security considerations and continued European economic and industrial development are not mutually exclusive.

There is particular concern in Europe at some of the recent measures by the US Administration to restrict the transfer of technology and the dissemination of scientific information, including restrictions on foreigners attending defence- or industry-oriented meetings and conferences, on the dissemination of certain published information, on the transfer of technical data regarding participants at private conferences to certain countries, stricter conditions for foreign scientists applying for entry visas and broadening the base for classified information.

More recently in Belgium, the United States attempted to block the export of agricultural machinery to the Soviet Union by the Pégard Company, on the grounds that it could be converted for military aims.

Anna Lubinska