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Conclusions

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Undoubtedly, the combination of telecommunications and computers is the most important issue of the last centuries. We witness a progressive and profound revolution not only of the managerial and productive functioning of our undertakings, but also of our way of life. Time and distance are disappearing and national structures and sovereignty are now affected by an increasingly worldwide telecommunications system which allows an undertaking to transplant without major disturbances the major part of its activities in another country and an American individual to get immediately information about what happens in Japan.

In that perspective, the telecommunication regulations debate is essential. If technological developments have created the potential for an indefinite number of new services (e.g. information services, electronic funds transfer, commodities exchanges), it is essential that the states adopt a telecommunications policy which permits such development and, if possible, a common position in order to avoid international conflicts.

Until the last decades, the telecommunications debate was focused on the military defence of the national sovereignty, the protectionism of the national telecommunications industry and took into account the only existing telecommunications service : the public telephone service.

The situation is now radically different. Technological and overall economic pressures are forcing change and most of the policy makers have now well understood the need to ensure, by new telecommunications regulations, an adequate framework for the development and creation of useful services and by the way, of an industrial sector offering either these new services or the equipment and the infrastructure needed by the specifications of these new services.

In that context, the N.F.S.R. Conference and the publication of the proceedings are not only an attempt to describe in a comprehensive way the technical and

economic background and consequences of the present legislative modifications happening in all the major industrialized countries, but also intend to assist the Belgian policy maker in deciding how to respond to this unprecedented challenge.

The Scientific Committee which has organized this International Conference is convinced that gathering together firstly the actors representing the different social or economic interests around the table, secondly international scientific specialists and finally, representatives of foreign or international policy makers, will contribute greatly to enlightening the present Belgian government on the different issues of this delicate but fascinating debate, vital to our country.

I would like to summarize the main features or conclusions of this debate to which the Ministry of Telecommunications and R.T.T. representatives participated actively :

1. The legislation must take into account the interests (sometimes different, but often similar) of five groups : telecommunications suppliers, public operators, telecommunications service providers, residential users and professional users. By the way, no confusion can be tolerated between the general interest of which the government is mainly responsible and the interests of one of these groups.

2. Adequate legislation must be flexible in order not to restrict technical progress and open enough to authorize as far as possible the use of the different infrastructures and to raise the offering of the telecommunications services to a maximum.

3. The adequacy of the legislation is viewed by undertakings depending on telecommunications services or offering such services as a powerful incentive for choosing the location of their activities. Located at the core of the European community, Belgium has to develop this geographical and institutional comparative advantage.

4. Anyway, the Belgian decision maker will follow the example of the neighbouring countries by creating the conditions for a more competitive market and of course, will respect, and even precede, the decisions of the European and international regulatory institutions.

In the name of the Scientific Committee, it is my duty and my pleasure to address my best acknowledgments to the N.F.S.R. and its General Secretary, M. Paul LEVAUX, having understood the crucial nature of this debate, for having organized the Conference notwithstanding its economic and legal character in the

context of the annual International Chair in Computer Science, and therefore to have so cooperated for solving this debate; to IBM Belgium and its General Director, M. René JACQMIN, for having sponsored this academic initiative, giving to it the financial means for an international and rich discussion with authorized people. I do not forget the enduring and discrete work of Ms Sylvie SCHAFF, Researcher at the Research Center on Computer Law of the University of Namur, for having organized administratively this Conference with more than sixty speakers and ensured in useful time the publication of these proceedings. Finally I would like to underline the quality of the contribution of each speaker and thank the chairman of each session for their participation in the success of this Conference which the participants, and now the readers, I am absolutely certain, will have appreciated.

Members of the Scientific Committee

- Professor Raymond DE BONDT, I.N.C.A.P., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven;
- Professor Bart DE SCHUTTER, Centrum voor Internationale Strafrecht, Vrije Universiteit Brussel;
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