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NEWS RELEASE

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New EC Framework for Info Superhighway Unnecessary, U.S. Panel Says

NEW YORK, Mar. 31 – The U.S.-based Information Infrastructure Standards Panel (IISP) today strongly disagreed with a European Commission proposal for an "International Charter" to harmonize global legal and regulatory frameworks for electronic commerce on the Information Superhighway, calling the charter unnecessary because it adds another layer of potential governmental intervention to the process.

IISP expressed its comments in a paper in response to the European Commission's (EC) solicitation of comments on its proposal (www.ispo.cec.be/eif/com9850.html). While agreeing with the reasons for a global legal and regulatory environment that facilitates electronic commerce, the Panel questioned the need to create yet another "framework" or layer of potential governmental intervention and control.

The paper, which was signed by Oliver Smoot, IISP chair and Executive Vice President of the Information Technology Industry Council (ITI), stated "while IISP focuses on standardization issues, we disagree with the Commission's conclusion of the need for 'a framework'" The paper also states that "multiple frameworks for standardization exist today, and while the amount of communication increases steadily, our view is that communication, not coordinated, top-down decision making is the optimal approach for standardization."

The IISP paper further notes that "within the context of standardization, IISP does not understand how the consultative process described by the Commission would add value to the resolution of standardization issues, as standardization has already a well developed international framework..." Mr. Smoot also made reference in the paper to an EC-hosted GIS Standards Conference in 1997, in which an Electronic Commerce Workshop Report urged that a new framework not be created.

EC Claims New Framework Needed

The EC's proposal, on the other hand, sees a need to create a new framework for this harmonization effort. In a September 1997 speech, EC Commissioner Martin Bangemann stated: "It will not be possible to achieve a satisfactory international framework only on the basis of strengthened industrial cooperation and existing international organizations."

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Commissioner Bangemann also outlined a pivotal EC role and a very broad scope for the proposal. "The European Union, through its widespread experience of multi-lateral frameworks, can make a useful contribution to setting up international mechanisms for achieving mutual recognition of standards, licensing arrangements, and regulations in general," he said. (www.ispo.cec.be/infosoc/promo/speech/geneva.html).

At a recent IISP meeting, however, a U.S. Department of Commerce spokesperson described the Administration's vision of global electronic commerce by stating that "governments must adopt a non-regulatory, market-oriented approach."

IISP is a U.S.-based organization, sponsored by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), whose mission is to identify standards critical to the implementation of the Global Information Infrastructure GII/Global Information Society (GIS). It is a cross-industry effort focused on facilitating standards cooperation among the many sectors converging in the GIS (computer, telecommunications, cable, broadcast, wireless, satellite, etc., and interested users such as government agencies, representatives of the disabled, publishers, etc.).

For More IISP Information

Additional information, including the IISP paper referenced above, may be obtained by logging on to the IISP World Wide Web site (http://www.ansi.org/iisp/); or by contacting Michelle Maas (212) 642-4884, email – mmaas@ansi.org, or R.M. "Chick" Hayden, (603) 964-6349, email – chayden@ansi.org.

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