Recommendation 896 (1980)[1]

European policy for the design and construction of direct broadcasting satellites

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having regard a. to the report of the European Space Agency for 1978 (Doc. 4392), b. to the decision of seven member states to pursue within the framework of the Agency a programme for the development of a telecommunications and direct broadcasting satellite, and c. to the decision of France and the Federal Republic of Germany to undertake a separate broadcasting satellite programme outside the framework of the Agency ;

2. Aware that satellite broadcasting raises difficult issues- political, legal, social, cultural and commercial- and that it may therefore be desirable to have an experimental pre-operational period of satellite broadcasting on as widely shared a basis as possible to gain experience in managing these difficulties before moving to the introduction of operational systems ;

3. Noting the expected size of the market which will open up in the next fifteen years for large telecommunications satellites, of which direct broadcasting satellites will account for a substantial part ;

4. Considering that, in this time-frame, and given the probable nature of world competition, a concerted approach by European governments to the development of a unified satellite construction and launch capability is the best way of improving the prospects for European industry in this market ;

5. Regretting this failure of European governments to reach agreement to this end on the basis of the concept of a common European satellite "platform", developed within the framework of the European Space Agency, to which nationally designed broadcasting and/or telecommunications "payloads" could be fitted ;

6. Noting that, in consequence, two or three competing centres of industrial capability in Europe will probably be established ;

7. Concerned by the fact that, notwithstanding the anticipated world market for satellite design and construction in the late 1980s and the 1990s, and Europe's potential for winning a share of this market, the future structure of Europe's industrial capability in this field does not appear to have been the subject of any concerted policy decision at ministerial level ;

8. Considering that this situation, which is symptomatic of the continued absence of any concerted approach by governments to the problems of framing a long-term industrial and technology policy for Europe as a whole :

a. will weaken Europe's overall competitiveve position in world markets ;

b. will diminish Europe's prospects of securing for its own industries the design, construction and lauch contracts for the five or so satellite broadcasting systems which are expected to become operational in Europe in the late 1980s and in the 1990s ;

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1. SeeDoc. 4543, report of the Committee on Science and Technology. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 3 July 1980.

c. will result in increased costs to the users of European broadcasting systems to the extent that they are unable to share in a common pool of "reserve" satellites which must be available to avoid interruptions of programmes if the transmitting satellite breaks down ;

d. may impair the production prospects of the Ariane launch vehicle in that, if the development of broadcasting satellites takes place outside the framework for co-ordination provided by the European Space Agency, the satellite developers may no longer have the same incentive to show their solidarity by choosing a European launcher ;

9. Having regard to Article II of the Convention of the European Space Agency, according to which the Agency a. should frame and implement a longterm European space policy, and b. should coordinate the European and national space programmes, in particular as regards the development of application satellites,

10. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

A. invite those of its member governments which co-operate within the framework of the European Space Agency :

10.1. to ensure that adequate and reciprocal information is made available within the appropriate bodies of the European Space Agency on the bilateral or multilateral satellite design and construction programmes in which they are engaged ;

10.2. to arrange for co-operation between the authorities responsible for these programmes, in order to rationalise their future development and ensure the unrestricted availability of hardware within Europe, thereby reducing damage to the competitive prospects of European industry in the world market for telecommunications and broadcasting satellites in the late 1980s and in the 1990s ;

10.3. to give to activities undertaken within the framework of the European Space Agency preference over bilateral or multilateral activities undertaken outside this framework, and to commit themselves to present their projets in priority to the Agency ;

10.4. to ensure, if necessary by holding a meeting of the Council of the European Space Agency at ministerial level to review the present situation, that the types of collective and individual national decisions which have led to the present situation, given the repercussions which such decisions may have on the political and economic status of Europe in the 1990s, are taken in future in a properly concerted fashion at the right political level ;

B. inform the Assembly of the actions taken by the member governments concerned on these proposals.