



NEWS RELEASE

DIGITAL TV: ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIVE SERVICES – Expert group established to accelerate production of necessary standards

Sophia Antipolis, France – 19 September 2003

Progress towards the use of digital television for interactive services received a boost yesterday with the establishment of a special expert group to accelerate standardization activities in this area.

The new group, Specialist Task Force STF 255, has been created by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC) to meet the urgent demands of a European Union (EU)/European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Mandate (M/331) in support of digital TV and interactive services.

The European Commission's eEurope 2005 Action Plan for the further development of the Information Society includes among its priorities extending the role of digital television based on a multi-platform approach. The objective is to provide widespread access to advanced communications and information services for all European citizens, with increased broadband access. If widely implemented, digital interactive television may complement PC/Internet based access to Information Society services in the EU. However, at present, the lack of commonly agreed standards in support of the interoperability of interactive television services is considered to be a potential barrier to their further deployment in Europe. The objective of Mandate M/331 is to stimulate further complementary standardization work in this field.

The new STF will support the work of Joint Technical Committee (JTC) Broadcast (which brings together CENELEC, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and ETSI, working in

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co-operation). The STF's urgent task is to identify gaps in standardization, ascertain areas of overlap and draw up a plan which will contain clear objectives, assign tasks and set timetables for the delivery of the required standards. This will be followed by the actual production of the standards by JTC Broadcast.

At the initial preparatory meeting held yesterday, the membership of the group was selected from technical experts from all over Europe. The new team consists of:

- Bart Brusse – CENELEC (STF leader)
- Dr. Julian Seseña – Asociación Nacional de Industrias Electrónicas in Spain (ANIEL)
- John Tinsman – Open TV/NTL.

Work will begin immediately. Two open stakeholders' meetings will be held in CENELEC's offices in Brussels on 7 November and 16 December 2003 to help identify what is needed.

(To attend either of these events, please register at: www.cenelec.org/Cenelec/CENELEC+in+action/Horizontal+areas/ICT/Digital+TV+-+open+meetings.htm.) The STF's work will be completed in January 2004 when the team delivers its plan.

Under its Framework Directive 2002/21/EC, the EU has laid down a tight timescale for the Commission to review the interoperability of digital TV interactive services. Following a consultation document to be published in December 2003, the Commission is due to deliver a formal assessment of the state of play regarding interoperability no later than July 2004. If interoperability and freedom of choice for users have not been adequately achieved, the Commission has said that it could make a previously published standard compulsory. As part of its consultation and due diligence process, the Commission has issued Mandate M/331 so that standardization bodies can make inputs on interoperability.

STFs operate across the full range of ETSI work, under the guidance of ETSI's technical committees and relevant CENELEC technical bodies. STFs bring together experts from all over Europe to work in ETSI on particular projects, speeding up the production of urgent deliverables; the time saved using an STF is estimated to be about 40%.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About ETSI

Based in Sophia Antipolis (France), the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) is officially responsible for standardization in telecommunications, broadcasting and certain aspects of information technology within Europe. As such, it also plays a major role in global standardization. ETSI unites almost 800 members from nearly 60 countries inside and outside Europe, including manufacturers, network operators, administrations, service providers, research bodies and users – in fact, all the key players in the telecommunications arena.

For more information: www.etsi.org

About CENELEC

The European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC) is the recognized European Standards Organization in the electrotechnical field and has recently reinforced its ICT standardization unit. Its members have been working together in the interests of European harmonization since the 1950s, creating both voluntary and Harmonized Standards which have helped to shape the European Internal Market. CENELEC works with 35,000 technical experts from 23 European countries. Its work directly increases market potential, encourages technological development and guarantees the safety and health of consumers.

CENELEC website: www.cenelec.org/

About the European Commission's eEurope Initiative

eEurope 2002 – An Information Society For All – was launched in 2000 to ensure that the whole of Europe reaps the benefits of the Information Society; it is a key element in the strategy for modernizing the European economy and aims to bring everyone in Europe – every citizen, every school and every company – on-line as quickly as possible. Building on the success of eEurope 2002, in June 2002, an Action Plan for eEurope 2005 was launched. Its objective is to provide a favourable environment for private investment and for the creation of new services and new jobs, to boost productivity, to modernize public services and to give everyone the opportunity to participate in the global information society. This will be achieved through the widespread availability and use of broadband networks, the development of Internet Protocol IPv6 and the security of networks and information.

For more information: www.eeurope-standards.org

About the European Union's Communications Directives

For information about the New Regulatory Framework for electronic communications infrastructure and associated services, visit:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/telecoms/regulatory/new_rf/index_en.htm

For further information about this news release, please contact:

Kevin Flynn
ETSI Press Office
Tel: +33 (0)4 9294 4258
E-mail: press@etsi.fr

Beverley Wing,
Kingston Public Relations, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1482 876229
Fax: +44 (0)1482 844612
E-mail: BeverleyWing@aol.com

Paco Cabeza-Lopez
CENELEC Communications Officer
Tel: +32 (0)2 519 6867
E-mail: info@cenelec.org