

LIBERALISATION OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS MARKET

By 1st January 2003 at the latest, the telecommunications sector in Malta will be fully liberalised. Liberalisation means that all local companies operating in this sector would be in a position to compete against each in order to attract new clients. New companies can also enter the market. Experience in countries all over the world has shown that liberalisation of telecommunications has led to significant price reductions and better service for consumers. It has also shown that the demand for telecommunications services, particularly in the mobile sector, has grown substantially.

TIMETABLE FOR LIBERALISATION

According to plans published recently by the Maltese government, the local telecommunications market will be liberalised as follows: all telecommunications services (2000), except for mobile telephony (second licence in 2000, third licence from 01.01.2003), cable television (01.06.2001), international gateway services, including data services (01.01.2003) and fixed-line telephony (01.01.2003).

JOB CREATION AND JOB LOSSES

Experience in other countries has shown that the liberalisation of telecommunications stimulates job creation. It is expected that Malta would follow this trend. For instance, Maltacom itself has created new avenues for employment by extending its operations to new services, such as mobile telephony. However, there is concern that unskilled jobs at Maltacom may be at risk and would need to be cushioned by specific training, re-training and other social measures. The government has announced that specific action to counter this effect will be taken.

THE COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

A new Communications Authority will be set up to strengthen regulation in the telecommunications sector and to ensure that the rules are respected by all operators in the interests of consumers.

OPEN NETWORKS

Under EU law, telecommunications networks must be open. This means that any enterprise, including small businesses, may use the infrastructure available and penetrate the telecommunications market by offering their own services without having to invest in infrastructure. This leads to increased competition.

NUMBERING

The availability of "numbers" is a basic requirement for promoting competition. Every customer will be able to retain his or her own number when changing from one operator to another. In Malta, the government has announced that a revised numbering plan is currently being drawn up.

SATELLITE TELECOMMUNICATIONS, MOBILE TELEPHONY

Maltese operators will participate in a European-wide network of co-operation and exchange of information and experience in the area of telecommunications.

EMERGENCY NUMBER 112

Malta will be introducing the common European emergency number "112". This number is used throughout the EU.

DATA PROTECTION

Malta is in the process of enacting a new law to provide for data (information) protection. This law will reflect EU standards as well as the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with Regards to Automatic Processing of Personal Data.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE

The EU is putting particular emphasis on the development of an information society which is fully able to exploit the opportunities of information technology. A case in point is the EU action plan on "e-Europe". Here too, Malta is in the process of enacting a new law to give a sound legal basis to electronic commerce. Through electronic commerce, the whole world will be open to the Maltese business community.