

Information Society Technologies Estonia 1999

Information Society Legislation in Estonia

The overall developments of Estonian telecommunications policy are oriented towards liberalisation. This means the end of the Concession Agreement signed between the Government of the Republic of Estonia and Estonian Telephone Company Limited (ETC Ltd.). The Concession Agreement signed in 1992 granted exclusive rights to ETC for eight years (until 01.01.2001) to provide basic services (local, national and international switched fixed voice telephony services, telex and telegraphic services, their installation and interconnection to them).

The area of telecommunications is currently regulated by the Communications Law of the Republic of Estonia, passed in 1991 and the Cable Distribution Act. Communications Law of the Republic of Estonia determines the rights and duties of legal and physical persons in establishing and operating telecommunications networks in Estonia and the main principles of responsibility in case of breaking those laws. The Cable Distribution Act regulates the terms of deployment and conditions of operation of cable networks, and the provision of cable television services and telecommunications services by cable operators. Starting from June 1999, the Cable Distribution Act that is completely harmonised with the Council Directive 96/19/EC concerning liberalisation of the provision of telecommunication service per cable-TV network is being enforced.

Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) has approved the Principles of Estonian Information Policy on May 13, 1998. The principles serve as a basis for an action plan for establishing an information society through Information Policy defined as following:

Information policy is an integral part of public policy. It reflects the principles of the actions of the state in the creation of an information society – areas of interest and regulation mechanisms - in an era of rapid technological change. Government information policy takes into account the goals set up in regulating different spheres of social life and introduces opportunities for presenting innovative solutions.

Four main areas in the Information Policy Action Plan are:

- Modernisation of legislation;
- Supporting the development of the private sector;
- Shaping the interaction between the State and citizens;
- Raising awareness of problems concerning the information society.

The principles serve as a basis for an Action Plan for establishing an information society, on the basis of the Information Policy Action Plan all Government agencies make specific proposals to the Government, together with schedules, sources of finances, and responsibilities for implementation of information policy programmes every year.

The following legislation is in preparation:

- Telecommunication Act that will regulate telecommunication within a liberalised environment will be passed in 1999.
- “The Freedom of Information Act” – a legal act that will guarantee citizens’ constitutional right for information – is one of the most important regulations being prepared at the moment. It will probably be passed in 2000.
- The Parliament started the proceedings with the draft “Digital Signature Law”. It is expected to be passed in 2000.

The EU and Estonia signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on July 18, 1994 and it came into force on January 1, 1995. It contains provisions on competition and the economy, including harmonisation of legislation. The FTA was superseded by the Europe Agreement that was signed on June 12, 1995 and entered into force on February 1, 1998. All the provisions and mandates of the FTA have been included as part of the Europe Agreement.

Estonia presented its application for membership of the European Union on November 1995 and on December 13, 1997 the European Council decided to begin EU accession negotiations with Estonia.

On November 13, 1999 Estonia became a full member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

For more information please visit the European Survey of Information Society web-site in Estonia <http://www.esis.ee>.

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