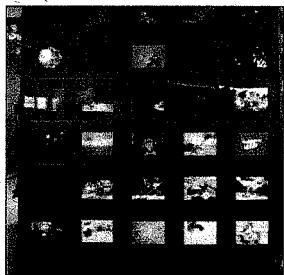


BASF potato complaint

German chemicals firm BASF on Thursday (24 July) filed a complaint at the European Court of First Instance against the Commission, alleging that it should have received automatic clearance for its genetically modified potato, Amflora, after member states failed to come to a decision last year. The firm first applied for approval of the crop 12 years ago.



European television

Around two-thirds of programmes shown on European television in 2006 were made in Europe, according to a Commission report published on Friday. The figure, 65%, marks an increase of 2.5 percentage points on 2005. The share of independent productions broadcast on European channels rose from 36.4% in 2005 to 37.6% in 2006.

and capital requirements – all of which are included in a ‘roadmap’ adopted at the end of last year. Wide divergences among member states have slowed down the reform process: Italy last year pushed for a permanent agency tasked with regulatory oversight and a common rule-book, for instance, while the UK, predictably, advocated a

EU regulators urgently need to broaden their knowledge of cross-border risk exposures and the impact of write-downs on capital positions, yet they continue to operate in silos. The Committee of European Securities Regulators (CESR), made up of market watchdogs from the EU’s 27 member states, appears ready to act, but awaits

The question is what do we do with banks like Deutsche Bank? How are such conglomerates supervised? Can we share supervising? Do we need more co-operation?”

Despite the evident volatility – even fragility – of global financial markets, no real answers are yet available. “It is quite clear no consensus has emerged for making signifi-

although markets were “erratic” and regulatory measures were “not sufficient”, the presidency was responding with a “long-term view”. “We will progress in stages towards better co-ordination between regulators,” she said.

The Commission, for its part, has no plans to increase its vigilance over the holiday period. “The system as it ex-

posed to be a key role in preventing liquidity markets from seizing up, but there is always a risk that markets could become addicted to the measures. They remain, however, Europe’s main line of defence. As financial markets plunge further into crisis, it can only be hoped that this summer will not be too long, or too hot.

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INFORMATION SOCIETY Communications

Spectrum move threatens space projects

Firms fear scarcity of space on the airwaves

Lorraine Mallinder
lormainemallinder@economist.com

European satellite firms say that proposals for the liberalisation of the airwaves may prevent them from realising the space projects that France has made a priority for its presidency of the EU.

Projects alleged to be under threat include the European Space Agency’s plans for a ‘space situational awareness system’, a technology capable of tracking and identifying objects in earth’s orbit. Radar satellite constellation Musis – a project led by France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Spain and Greece – could also be at risk.

The European Commission proposals on liberalisation, currently in first reading in the European Parliament, would lift restrictions on the use of the airwaves, also known as spectrum. Under plans for

a ‘technology neutral’ trading scheme, terrestrial, cable and satellite firms would all be allowed to bid for the finite resource.

Competition

But competition for the airwaves is intensifying as a result of accelerating developments in communications technologies.

The European Satellite Operators Association (ESOA), which counts firms such as Inmarsat and EADS Astrium among its members, claims that satellite technologies need privileged access to the less-populated higher frequencies.

Confrontation is deepening between satellite firms and mobile operators seeking higher bandwidth for their terrestrial connections. ESOA are calling on lawmakers to scale down the liberalisation proposals and follow ground rules set by the International Telecommunication Union, a United Nations agency which sets global demarca-

tions for spectrum allocation and use.

Commitment

A Commission official said that ESOA’s concerns were “surprising and unjustified”. The Commission’s recent decision on pan-EU licensing of mobile satellite services (MSS), he said, demonstrated strong commitment to the satellite sector. The decision was endorsed by MEPs and member states last month.

ESOA claims the mobile satellite decision would apply only to a segment of its members’ downstream customers. It is especially worried about access to C-band frequencies (3.4-4.2 GHz) being targeted by terrestrial mobile and WiMAX services.

EU space ministers discussed the satellite projects at their meeting in French Guiana last week. The European Parliament will vote on the liberalisation proposals, which are included in a revision of EU telecoms laws, in September.

TRADE EU-Canada

Study does not presage free trade accord, says Commission

Lorraine Mallinder
lormainemallinder@economist.com

The European Commission will release the results of a study on EU-Canada trade relations over the summer, paving the way for closer ties between the two economies – but not necessarily a full-blown free trade agreement.

A Commission source said that it was “not a feasibility study that would normally be applied to free trade negotiations”. “It should not be overplayed or oversold by anyone at this point,” he said.

Canada, which has long been pushing for a trade deal with the EU, may have to settle for an enhanced partnership agreement. Christos Sirros, the head of the Quebec delegation in Brussels, said that any deal would have to create opportunities for “trade-offs”, covering issues in a “global” rather than a “sequential” manner.

Canadian provinces Quebec and Ontario, which have strong ties with France and the

UK, have been lobbying especially hard for a trade agreement. Sirros said that an eventual deal should cover market access, non-tariff barriers, regulatory co-operation, public procurement and labour mobility.

A French diplomat said that his country, which currently holds the presidency of the Council of Ministers, would be pushing for an ambitious declaration at the EU-Canada summit on 17 October. She conceded, however, that a proposed EU ban on seal products could disrupt negotiations. The proposal, unveiled last week (23 July), would target countries like Canada, which are considered to be insufficiently regulated. Sirros said that hunting methods employed in Canada had changed considerably in the past three decades and could no longer be considered “cruel and inhumane”.

Climate change discussions, contentious in the past, are expected to be less troublesome this time round.