EU COMMUNICATIONS LAW 2ND EDITION

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

When we wrote the first edition of this book we described the new Directives as rather like one of those wooden puzzles which you give to children. Once you take it apart and try to put it together again, you are either left with one piece too few, or, perhaps more worryingly, one piece too many.

This second edition analyses the way in which the Directives have been implemented in practice, with particular regard to the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. We have several market analyses and appeals from their outcomes to describe.

The book has more than doubled in size since the first edition but that is the nature of a book which seeks to describe the regulatory framework of an industry which moves at the speed of light in terms of new products, services and appeals from National Regulatory Authorities. From now, 2006, into the next few years the European Commission and the regulatory authorities will be reviewing the regime and will need to ensure that the regime accommodates the fast and significant changes occurring in the industry.

The European Commission, the European Regulators Group and various National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) have done well to publish a vast amount of information and guidelines on various aspects of the regulatory framework and how it is working out.

We have sought to guide the reader through the significant maze of legislation and the non-legislative texts which exist in this complex area.

There will of course be areas adjacent to matters covered in the book and readers may wish to advise themselves by reading other texts which deal with such matters.

Overall, the book is a guide to regime and how it applies in practice. It does not (nor can it) purport to be a definitive guide to everything that has gone on in each Member State in the implementation of the EU Directives.

We would like to thank Sweet & Maxwell for the opportunity to produce this second edition of Farr & Oakley and also Palladian Law Publishing who published the first edition.

We would also like to thank our respective spouses. Without their outstanding support the second edition of Farr & Oakley on EU Communications Law simply would not have happened.

All views expressed in the book are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Irish Regulator (ComReg) nor that of Telecom New Zealand Limited.

The law is stated as at August 1, 2006.

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INTRODUCTION

Significant technological and service changes are occurring in 2006, some 130 years after the invention of the telephone and 169 years after the invention of the electric telegraph. The importance of electronic communications is now explicitly linked to growth, jobs and social inclusion. The regulatory regime in Europe is directly linked to the European Commission's i2010 initiative² announced on June 1, 2005 which stresses the role of information communication technologies (ICTs) to such objectives.

The 11th implementation report³ published in February 2006 states that the e-communications sector represents the largest segment of the overall ICT sector increasing slightly to 44 percent of the total value—a sector worth €614 billion in 2005, €273 billion of which derives from e-communications services.

Business models are changing. Broadband, or high speed internet, has become a key focus in Europe and other worldwide jurisdictions and continues to be driven by regulatory focuses around local loop unbundling and xDSL products. Nevertheless broadband and mobile are still not proposed to be part of universal service obligations which form the social aspects of regulation.⁴

Competition is increasing through access to the incumbent networks and a key focus is a movement to incentivising not only investment by the incumbent but by alternative providers. To this end, the concept of the ladder of investment is a current focus in Europe and is discussed in the revised common position on remedies⁵ set out by the European regulators group.

With broadband comes VoiP (voice over internet protocol) and VoB (voice over broadband) threatening traditional voice revenues, although not yet having a significant impact. With these technological changes come challenges to regulatory policies and models.

The anticipated convergence between fixed and mobile is starting to occur. Third generation mobile services are being rolled out with an increased number of subscribers adding to mobile penetration. In addition business

Int-001

Int-002

¹ The ITU was established in 1865 to manage the first international telegraph networks and has a useful history of telecommunications on its website www.itu.int.

² COM (2005) 229.

³ COM (2006) 68 final.

⁴ See Chapter 6 and COM (2006) 163 Final of April 2006, being a European Commission review of universal service.

⁵ ERG document ERG (06) 33, dated May 2006.

INTRODUCTION

models are adapting such that fixed/mobile offers⁶ are being developed along with plans from mobile operators to encourage substitution from fixed to mobile.

Int-003

The EU regime for which this book provides a practical guide sought to anticipate these changes that are occurring in the market. It brought in a regime intended to stand the test of time and bring about flexibility of regulation to a fast changing industry. To this end it moved away from "artificial" market power tests (ex ante thresholds of 25 per cent market share) to align itself with competition law and the test of dominance as the main trigger for regulation in electronic communications markets. The regime created a new goal of striving to a situation of regulation, then increased competition followed ultimately by de-regulation and reliance upon competition law alone. It can be debated whether the regime has in fact led to an increase or decrease in regulation and whether ultimately there will be greater deregulation. There is some movement to de-regulation in retail markets in the review which is to be pursued over the next couple of years. Wholesale interconnection and access to the incumbent's bottleneck facilities remain key to policies going forward.

While price of course remains a major point of contention and a continued subject of regulatory intervention, increased focus has recently occurred on non price terms and discrimination that may arise. To this end, structural and organisational separation has reappeared on the agenda. Organisational design of fixed incumbents has been significantly advanced in the United Kingdom with BT voluntarily giving undertakings to re-organise its business in September 2005 (this occurred outside the Directive regime under competition legislation in the UK). Added to the existing retail and wholesale divisions BT already had, there has now been a further organisational separation of its network business into a separate division. The aims are to promote greater transparency and to require that BT retail and other operators are treated in an equivalent way. There's been a fundamental shift in the way non discrimination is being interpreted (notwithstanding that the legislation has not changed) in the UK and by the European Regulators Group.⁷

Int-004

Next generation networks (NGNs) or IP based networks are being developed in a number of jurisdictions by fixed incumbents as they seek to change their business models to re-position themselves. NGNs are presenting new challenges—will they create new bottlenecks and how does a regulator secure incentives to make substantial investments (commercial outcomes) while ensuring access and interconnection (regulatory outcomes to promote competition) at the same time?

⁶ See for example BT Fusion which consists of a handset operating as a mobile but when in the office operates over a BT broadband connection.

⁷ See Chapter 5 for more detail on non discrimination and Chapter 2 for more detail on BT's undertakings.

There are calls for regulatory certainty to ensure investment and in some Member States there have been calls for regulatory holidays to ensure commercial incentives exist. In others (such as the UK) there are calls for increased transparency for the industry as well to ensure that competition can continue in an NGN world.⁸ The NGN brings with it the issue of IP interconnection seeking a fundamental revisit to the traditional PSTN interconnection models that have been in place.⁹ Of first order importance an assessment needs to occur as to how the transition from PSTN interconnection to IP interconnection will be managed. Other issues arise such as the need for extension of network integrity issues traditionally focused on fixed networks to mobile and IP networks as they gain increased importance.

All of these matters will in turn challenge the economic assessment of market definition and competition assessment. At what point could fixed and mobile services move into the same market—an existing market or a new and emerging market? Given the harmonisation promoted in the Directives, how and when will the European Commission tackle such issues in its pre-defined markets for *ex ante* regulation?¹⁰

Significant consumer issues arise also. While NGNs, increased broadband and converged offers potentially offer greater competition, more choice, personal customisation and lower prices for consumers, new risks arise as well. In particular issues as to quality of service and security will become significant issues and these have already been foreshadowed in the pending review of the Directives. In addition the traditional universal model is to undergo a fundamental review in Europe with initial views indicating a division between infrastructure provision on the one hand and service provision on the other.

Most Member States still have fixed and mobile numbers for fixed and mobile services and ensure that geographic services are allocated to a fixed termination point or certain geographic area. Some Member States however have already commenced consideration of how to deal with numbers where nomadic abilities of services are becoming available through converged mobile services and/or VoiP.¹¹ Trade offs may have to be made between promoting competition and dealing with end user confusion issues. Consideration also needs to be given to whether VoiP services are considered

⁸ See Ofcom's March 2006 Statement entitled: "Next Generation Networks: Developing the Regulatory Framework" and www.ngnuk.org.uk which is a new industry body set up to facilitate such matters.

⁹ Section 9.3 of the Commission staff working document on the review of the regulatory framework SEC (2006) 816 accompanying COM (2006) 334 final of June 2006 notes that the regulatory framework does not propose any particular method of interconnection charging. Accordingly there is an option of moving to a bill and keep model.

¹⁰ See the first edition 2003 Recommendation and the consultation on a draft second edition 2007 Commission Recommendation dated June 28, 2006 SEC (2006) 837.

¹¹ See COCOM 06-14 dated March 23, 2006 and relevant documents regarding VoiP and numbering on Ofcom's website—for example "Regulation of VoiP services"—statement and further consultation dated May 10, 2006.

INTRODUCTION

to be publicly available telephone services (PATS) under the regulatory regime (a subset of services to which different obligations attach). Emergency services are a key area of concern along with divergence throughout the EU.

We are expecting a substantial degree of change in the industry, the markets and the application of the regulatory regime by 2009/2010 when the pending review of the framework is estimated to be completed. The amendment and updating of the regime will then undoubtedly be followed by a further interesting period of implementation in the 25 Member States in Europe.

pa	
Preface	
Table of Casesx	ciii
Table of Treaties	χv
Table of EU legislation	cvi
pa	
IntroductionInt-0	01
Chapter 1: Introduction to the European Framework	
Introduction to the European Framework1–00	01
Entry into force and date of application of the Directives1-00	02
Policy objectives1–00	04
Principles underpinning the Regulatory Framework1-00	05
Structure of the Regulatory Framework1-00	06
Overview of the Framework Directive, the Specific Directives and	
other texts1-00	
Framework Directive1-00	07
Authorisation Directive1–00	08
Access and Interconnection Directive1-00	09
Universal Service Directive1-0	
Directive on Personal Data and the Protection of Privacy1-01	
Directive on competition in markets for electronic	
communications services1_0	12
Decision on Radio Spectrum1-01	
Recommendation on relevant product and service markets1-01	
Guidelines on Market Analysis and the calculation of	
Significant Market Power1-01	17
Commission recommendation on notifications, time limits and	
consultations provided for in Article 7 of the Framework	
Directive1–01	18
Proposal for a Regulation on mobile roaming services in the	
Single Market1-01	19
Directives which were repealed by the 2003 regulatory regime1–02	
Implementation of the Directives in the United Kingdom and	
in the Republic of Ireland	24
Transitional arrangements1-02	

Review of the 2003 Framework	1028
Proposed changes to the 2003 Framework	1-030
Draft Commission Recommendation on relevant product and	
service markets	1~036
Chapter 2: Relationship with Competition Law	
Introduction	
EC Competition Law	2-002
Guidelines on competition rules in the telecommunications sector (1991)	2 000
Notice on the definition of relevant markets (1997)	
Notice on competition rules and access agreements in the	2~009
telecommunications sector (1998)	2 012
Commission Guidelines on market analysis and the calculation of	2-012
Significant Market Power	2 010
Market definition	
Assessing SMP in the relevant markets	
Possible outcomes of a market analysis	
Powers of investigation and co-operation procedures	
- · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	2-034
Procedures for consultation and publication of proposed NRA decisions	2 025
	2–035
European Commission discussion paper on the application of Article 82 to exclusionary abuses	2 027
Competition Law in the United Kingdom	2-038
Operational separation and BT's equivalence undertakings in	2 041
the United Kingdom	
BT's September 2005 undertakings	
Competition Law in the Republic of Ireland	2048
Chapter 3: The Framework	
Introduction to, and the scope of, the framework	
National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs)	
The duties and tasks under the new framework	
Policy objectives and regulatory principles for NRAs	
The ability to require information	
Making information publicly available	
Management of resources	
Rights of way, co-location and facility sharing	
Accounting separation	
NRA intervention in wholesale relationships	
The market analysis procedure under the Framework Directive	
Market definition	
Market analysis, SMP and the concept of effective competition	
What happens at the conclusion of a market analysis?	
Trans-national markets	3–060

Implementation requirements	3–061
Implementation of the market review process in the UK	3–066
The consultation and co-operation procedure under the Framewo	ork
Directive	3–085
Within a Member State	3–085
Consultation in accordance with Articles 6 and 7 of the	
Framework Directive	3–086
Procedure for notifications	
Notifications made to the European Commission	3-093
Commission's views on notification regime	3–094
Veto decisions	
Appeals against NRA decisions	3–102
Implementation of the appeal mechanism in the United	
Kingdom	3–105
Implementation of the appeal mechanism in the Republic of	
Ireland	3–128
European cases	3–157
Standardisation	3–158
Compulsory standards and specifications	
Interoperability of digital interactive television services	
Harmonisation procedures	
Communications Committee (Cocom)	
Review procedures	
Annex—UK market reviews	3–168
Chapter 4: The Authorisation Directive	
Introduction	
Objectives and Scope of the Authorisation Directive	
What the Directive does cover and what it does not cover	
The General Authorisation itself	
Rights which the General Authorisation confers	
Rights of use for radio frequencies and numbers	4–008
Limiting the number of rights of use to be granted for radio	
frequencies	
Harmonised assignment of radio frequencies	
Conditions attached to the GA, and to the rights of use for radio	
frequencies and for numbers and specific obligations	4-013
Annex to the Authorisation Directive	4–014
Implementation of the General Authorisation in the United	
Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland	
United Kingdom	
Republic of Ireland	
Enforcement of conditions-The provisions of the Directives	
Normal infringements	
Serious and repeated infringements	4-040

Immediate and serious threats caused by breaches	4041
Enforcement of Conditions-United Kingdom	4-042
Notification of contravention	4-043
Enforcement notification of contravention	4-045
Penalties for contravention of conditions	4-046
Power to deal with urgent cases	4_048
Suspending service provision for contravention of conditions	
Enforcement of directions under sections 98, 100 and	
101—Offences and civil liability	4-052
Miscellaneous enforcement matters	4-053
Enforcement of Conditions-Republic of Ireland	4-056
Civil enforcement	
Enforcement during the period for bringing appeals	
Criminal enforcement	
Administrative charges	4-068
Amendment of rights and obligations	
Chapter 5: Access and Interconnection	
An introduction to access and interconnection	5-001
The responsibilities of national regulatory authorities	5-004
General rights and obligations	
Implementation in the United Kingdom	5-009
Implementation in the Republic of Ireland	
Specific obligations	5-011
Specific obligations which may be imposed on non-SMP	
operators	5-012
Specific obligations which may be imposed on SMP operators	5-016
Specific obligations which must be imposed in relation to	
conditional access systems	5-063
Transitional requirements, the Commission and procedures	5-069
Transitional requirements that were required to implement the	
regime	5-069
Notifications to the Commission and reviews by the	
Commission	5-071
Procedures	5-072
Chapter 6: Universal Service, Regulatory Controls and End User Ri	~
An introduction to the Universal Service Directive	
The provision of Universal Service	
Designation of undertakings	
The services that make up "Universal Service"	
Other obligations flowing from Universal Service	
Costing and funding the provision of Universal Service	
Keeping the scope of Universal Service under review	
Implementation in the United Kingdom	6-022

Implementation in the Republic of Ireland	6-024
Regulatory controls	6–026
Retail markets	6-027
Minimum set of leased lines	6-029
Carrier selection and pre-selection	6-032
End-user interests and rights	
Contract rights for subscribers	
Requirements for transparency and the publication of	
information	6-038
Quality of service	
Integrity and availability of the network and services	6-041
Interoperability of consumer digital television equipment	
Ability to access operator assistance and directory enquiry	
services	6-043
Importance of the single European emergency call number	6–044
Use of the European telephone access codes	
Ability to access non-geographic numbers	
Additional facilities	
Availability of number portability	
"Must carry" obligations for radio and television broadcasts	
Implementation in the United Kingdom	
Implementation in the Republic of Ireland	
Transitional requirements, the Commission and procedures	
Transitional requirements	
Out of court dispute resolution	
Consultation	
Notifications to the European Commission	
Review	
Amendments	6-060
Chapter 7: Privacy and Data Protection	
Background-aims and scope of the General Data Protecton	
Directive	
Essential features of the General Data Protection Directive	7-002
Definitions	7–004
General rules on the lawfulness of the processing personal	7 005
data Directive 2002/58 on Privacy and Data Protection	
•	
Definitions The services concerned	
The requirement for security of communications	/-015
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	7.016
billing Itemised bills	
Calling line identification and connected line identification	/-019

Directories of subscribers	7-022
Unsolicited communications	7-023
Retention of Data—Directive 2006/24	7–025
Implementation in the United Kingdom and the Republic of	
Ireland	7–029
	page
Glossary	
Useful websites	356
Index	361
IIIUCA	

TABLE OF CASES

Ahmed Saeed Flugreisen v Zentrale zur Bekampfung unlauteren Wettbewerbs eV (66/86); Silver Line Reiseburo GmbH v Zentrale zur Bekampfung Unlauteren	
Wettbewerbs eV (66/86) [1989] E.C.R. 803; [1990] 4 C.M.L.R. 102, ECJ	2013
Airtours Pic v Commission of the European Communities (T342/99) [2002] All F. D. (EC)	
783; [2002] E.C.R. II-2585, CFI (5th Chamber)	2 033
Drush relecommunications v Office of Communications [2005] CAT 21-[2004] CAT 23	2 120
British Telecommunications Plc v Director General of Telecommunications, unreported,	. 3-120
August 4, 2000	2 102
British Telecommunications Plc v Office of Communications (formerly Director General	6–032
of Telecommunications (2004) CAT 9: (2004) Command D. 574. CAT.	
of Telecommunications) [2004] CAT 8; [2004] Comp. A.R. 574, CAT	
Pritish Tologomerusisation Discossing Co.	5-001
British Telecommunications Plc v Office of Communications (The Number (UK) Ltd)	
1063/3/3/06	3–125
Carrigdale Hotel v Controller of Patents [2004] I.L.R.N. 401	.3–131
Commission v Belgium (C-240/04)	1-024
Commission v Belgium (C-376/04)	1-024
Commission v France (C-31/05)	1_024
Commission v Greece (C-250/04)	1_024
Commission v Greece (C-252/04)	1_024
Commission v Greece (C-253/04)	1_024
Commission v Greece (C-254/04)	1_024
Commission v Greece (C-475/04)	1_024
Commission v Luxembourg (C-236/04)	1_024
Commission v Luxembourg (C-375/04)	1_024
Eircom Ltd v Commission for Communications Regulation (ECAP/2005/02)	1_027 1_087
	3–141
Eircom Ltd v Commission for Communications Regulation ECAP 6/2005/09	3-1 1 1
Eircom v Commission for Communications Regulation, unreported, July 29, 2005	3-155
3–129, 3	
3–153, 4	
Elec Telegram Tall (To All 11 to Co.)	4060
Floe Telecom Ltd (In Administration) v Office of Communications (Permission to	
Amend Notice of Appeal) [2004] CAT 7; [2004] Comp. A.R. 559, CAT	3–110,
3–120,	3-122
Floe Telecom Ltd v Office of Communications (Extension of Time) [2005] CAT 17; 2005] Comp. A.R. 1058, CAT	
Comp. A.R. 1058, CAT Floe Telecom Ltd v Office of Communications (Permission to Appeal) [2005] CAT 14;	3-122
20051 Comp. A.P. 1004 CAT	
2005] Comp. A.R. 1004, CAT	5-122
Germany v Commission (T-328/03)	2–005
Hannon v Commissioners of Public Works, April 4, 2001	3-141

TABLE OF CASES

Hutchinson 3G Ireland Ltd v Commission for Communications Regulation
(ECAP/2004/01)
3–131, 3–132,
3–134, 3–138,
3–139, 3–140,
3–142, 3–144,
3–146, 3–148
Hutchinson 3G (UK) Ltd v Ofcom [2005] CAT 39
Hutchingon 2C UV Ltd v Ofconi [2003] CA1 37
Hutchinson 3G UK Ltd v Office of Communications 1066/3/3/06
4-028, 6-049
IBM Corp v Commission of the European Communities (60/81); sub nom. International Business Machines Corp v Commission of the European Communities (60/81) [1981]
E.C.R. 2639; [1981] 3 C.M.L.R. 635, ECJ
IMS Health Inc v Commission of the European Communities (T184/01 R) (No.1) [2001]
E.C.R. II-2349; [2002] 4 C.M.L.R. 1; [2002] E.C.D.R. 16, CFI
La Technique Miniere v Maschinenbau Ulm GmbH (C56/65) [1966] E.C.R. 337; [1966] C.M.L.R. 357, ECJ
M. E. Classer v. Compatition Authority (1901) L. L. D. M. 401
M & J Gleeson v Competition Authority [1999] 1 I.L.R.M. 401
Media Marketing & Promotions v Ofcom [2006] CAT 12
Megaleasing UK Ltd v Barrett [1992] 1 I.R. 219
Mobistar SA v Institut belge des services postaux et des telecommunications (IBPT)
(C-438/04)
Number (UK) Ltd v Office of Communications 1057/3/3/05
Orange Communications Ltd v Director of Telecommunications [2000] 4 I.R. 136 3-131
R. (on the application of T-Mobile (UK) Ltd) v Competition Commission; R. (on the
application of T-Mobile (UK) Ltd) v Director General of Telecommunications; R. (on
the application of Vodafone Ltd) v Competition Commission [2003] EWHC 1566;
[2003] Eu. L.R. 769; [2003] Info. T.L.R. 319; [2003] A.C.D. 72, QBD (Admin) 3–113
Ryanair Plc v Aer Rianta CPT [2003] 4 I.R. 264
Smart Mobile Ltd v Commission for Communications Regulation 2006/702 P3–131,
3–156
Societe Technique Miniere v Maschinenbau Ulm. See La Technique Miniere v
Maschinenbau Ulm GmbH
Telekom Austria AG (C-256/05)
Tetra Pak International SA v Commission of the European Communities (C333/94 P);
sub nom. Tetra Pak International SA v Commission of the European Communities
(T83/91) [1997] All E.R. (EC) 4; [1996] E.C.R. I-5951, ECJ (5th Chamber)2-016,
2–031
United Brands Co v Commission of the European Communities (Banana Market)
(27/76) [1978] E.C.R. 207; [1978] 1 C.M.L.R. 429, ECJ
2-006, 2-027,
2-030
VIP Communications Ltd (In Administration) v Office of Communications
1027/2/3/04
Verizon Communications inc. petitioner v law offices of Curtis v Trinko, LLP 540 US 398

(2004)
Vodatone and O2 v ComReg (ECAP/ 2005/03)
Vodafone Ireland Ltd, O2 Communications (Ireland) Ltd and Meteor Mobile
Communications Ltd v Commission for Communications Regulation ECAP
6/2005/03, 04 and 05
3–140, 3–142,
3–154
Wanadoo UK Plc (Formerly Freeserve.com Plc) v Office of Communications [2005]
CAT 24

TABLE OF TREATIES

1992	Treaty on European Union (Maastricht) [1992] O.J. C 191
1772	Title V
	Title VI
2002	Treaty establishing the European Community [2002] O.J. C3251-006, 2-002,
	3–094
	Art.3(1)(g)2-002, 2-016
	Art.10
	Art.46(1)
	Art.812-002, 2-003, 2-005,
	2–009, 2–013, 2–018,
	2–021, 2–028, 2–038,
	2–049, 3–087
	Art.81(3)2-005
	Arts 81–89
	Art.82
	2-007, 2-009, 2-010,
	2-013, 2-017, 2-021, 2-028, 2-029, 2-030.
	2-028, 2-029, 2-030, 2-035, 2-038, 2-049,
	3-056, 3-057, 3-087
	Art.82(b)
	Art.83
	Arts 83–89
	Art.84
	Art.85
	Art.86
	3–029
	Art.86(3)1–012
	Art.87(3)(c)
	Art.226
	Art.234
	Art.253
	Art.295