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INSPIRE - Infrastructure for spatial information in the Community

On the day of the official opening of conciliation between the Council and the European Parliament concerning the draft directive aimed at establishing an infrastructure for spatial information in the Community (INSPIRE), both institutions succeeded in reaching agreement in the Conciliation Committee[1].

The agreement must now be endorsed by a majority of votes cast within the Parliament and by qualified majority within the Council.

The draft directive aims at creating a legal framework for the establishment and operation, in the Community, of an infrastructure for the dissemination of spatial information for the purpose of formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating Community policies, at all levels, and providing public information. Its key objective is to make more and better special data available for policy-making and implementation of Community policies.

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[1] The Conciliation Committee has 50 members: 25 members of the European Parliament and 25 representatives from the Council. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Vidal-Quadras, Vice-President of the European Parliament and Mr Jan-Erik Enestam, Finnish Minister for Environment.

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INSPIRE will not set off an extensive programme of new spatial data collection in the Member States. It is instead designed to optimise the use of data already available by documenting existing spatial data, rendering it more accessible and operable and by dealing with obstacles to the use and sharing of data.

The draft directive specifically focuses on information needed in order to monitor and improve the state of the environment, in particular regarding air, water, soil and the natural landscape, but it is also open for use by other sectors such as agriculture, transport and energy.

The Commission, public authorities, legislators, universities, researchers, the media and citizens' organisations will all benefit from the directive.

The key changes to the common position resulting from the conciliation agreement concern the following issues:

- Charges

Charges in providing information between public authorities should be reduced to the strict minimum to ensure the quality of the service together with a reasonable return on investment.

The services for discovering and viewing spatial data sets should be made available free of charge, except in cases involving larges volumes of data, updated on a regular basis, or where charges or licences are essential for maintaining the spatial data sets and the data services.

- Intellectual property rights

In order to protect public authorities' intellectual property rights, Member States would be obliged to disseminate environmental information only in the circumstances specified in the Århus Convention.