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<p>UNICE WARNS: COSTS OF DATA INTERCEPTION TOO HIGH</p>
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UNICE strongly warns against the heavy cost burden for European companies that will result from proposals by the Council of Ministers on a common standard for telecommunications interception.

In 1996 the Council set up requirements which member states should meet in order to intercept telecommunications lawfully. These provide a non-binding common technical standard for interception measures, respecting the legal differences on interception rules within member states. New Council plans, to be presented to the European Parliament, seem to aim at revising these requirements, shifting to binding cross-border regulation and extending to the latest communications methods, e.g. internet (enfopol 98 10951/2/98 rev 2).

UNICE points out that such a new standard, stipulating that technical interception must be capable of operating across national borders, could lead to considerable extra costs. The obligation to pass on all kinds of data, including internet data, as soon as possible, will impose high technical and staffing costs on companies in Europe. In order to keep the financial burden bearable for enterprises, and in order to keep information flows safe, manufacturers and operators should be involved in discussions on new interception technologies.

The sensitive question of data protection involved should be taken into full account as well, and studied more thoroughly. Furthermore, tapping does not really help to fight organised crime. Adding some form of encryption is common in those circles. Tapping is losing much of its former significance. Therefore, if the Council's plans go in this direction, UNICE finds that the price European business will have to pay unacceptably high.