

IX International Conference

Law via the Internet

Free Access, Quality of Information, Effectiveness of Rights

Florence, 30-31 October 2008

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Access to Legislation Online in the EU: From Fee-based to Free Information

In this paper, I would explain how and why the conditions of online access to legislation changed completely in nearly all Member States of the EU between 1997 and 2003: from subscription-based legal databases to free-of-charge websites. I would talk about the conflicting policies in the late 1990s: the dogma of fee-based added-value services vs. the principle of Public Sector Information that should be free of charge.

I would show how from 2001 on a paradigm shift took place, as far as the websites of the legal gazettes are concerned: they were no longer seen as merely a free source of public information, but as a way to rationalise the promulgation (official publication) of legislation.

I would also look at the reverse side: private legal publishers obtaining (easier) access to the source materials but loosing subscribers and buyers of their paper products.