Canada proposes world videotex marriage to create global super system

Communications Minister Francis Fox has called on supporters of the world's major competing videotex systems to combine their efforts to create a new global super-standard for videotex. Speaking recently to delegates at VIDCOM '82, the International Videocommunications Congress, in Cannes, France, Mr. Fox said it was "time for *détente* in the international videotex standards arena".

The minister said that the videotex industry had grown to the point where there were more than 125 000 users of different forms of videotex (two-way television and computer information systems) in 18 countries. Also, nearly one million people were using the one-way broadcast version of the technology, known as teletext.
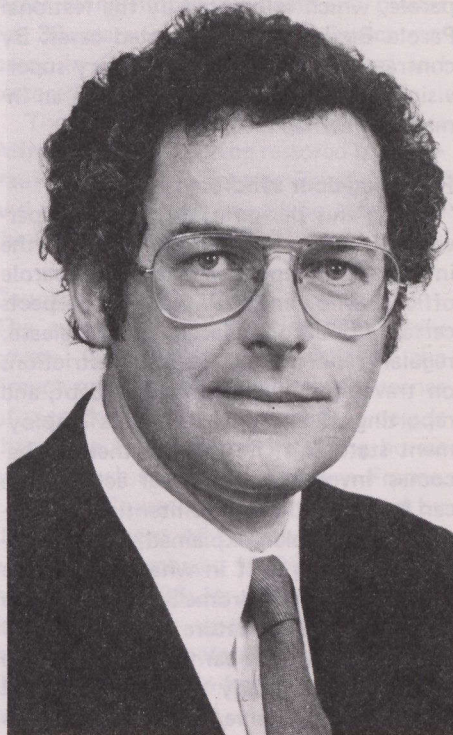
Telidon's success

Mr. Fox noted that Canada's Telidon technology had been sold in Canada, the United States, Britain, Venezuela, Switzerland, West Germany, Japan and Australia and that despite global economic conditions, the international videotex industry was poised for rapid growth and would probably be a multibillion dollar market by the end of the decade. However, he said there were still certain obstacles to the development of the industry, one of which was the uncertainty among potential investors caused by the international debate over technical standards.

"I believe the time has come for us to put the old disagreements behind us, to combine our strengths and to work together to create universal videotex superstandards that would meet all our needs. I am proposing a form of international tele-matrimony, an open-systems marriage of videotex networks built to different standards that would allow the contents of videotex data bases in each nation to be shared by users in other nations," Mr. Fox said.

"We in Canada recognize that this will require a lengthy and arduous courtship," he went on. "At present, as you are aware, the world seems divided into the European and North American camps. But these camps are themselves the result of successful compromise among nations with differing priorities and interests."

European co-operation

Mr. Fox noted that the European Conference of Post and Telecommunications

Communications Minister Francis Fox

Administrations (CEPT) had devised a standard that is a "super-set" of the British Prestel and French Antiope standards to bring technical compatibility to the videotex systems of Europe. "Similarly, the North American Videotex/Teletext Presentation Level Protocol Syntax (NA-PLPS) has been arrived at after lengthy technical debate and negotiation among videotex experts in Canada and the United States."

The NA-PLPS standard, based largely on the advanced Canadian Telidon graphics technique, was announced jointly by representatives of the Canadian Standards Association and the American National Standards Institute in June at the Videotex '82 conference in New York. Many of the largest communications and computer companies in North America have announced plans to use this standard in videotex and teletext systems to be launched in the coming year. The Canadian videotex industry has sold both equipment and services to a number of US companies and institutions for these new videotex systems.

"Just as the CEPT standard was arrived at based upon the principle of the co-existence and preservation of all the individual features of the original Prestel and Antiope systems, so can a just and acceptable world super-standard be achieved through the marriage of the CEPT and North American standards based upon the same principle of preserving the integrity of both standards and the rights of all parties," Mr. Fox said. He announced that Canada's delegation to the next meeting of the International Consultative Committee on Telegraphs and Telephones (CCITT) in Geneva in November would make proposals in this regard. The US delegation was expected to make similar proposals, Mr. Fox said.

"The international videotex industry has come of age in the past few years. The uncertainties of our technical adolescence are behind us. Now is the time for us to form a mature partnership of equals, in order that we may concentrate on the challenges of spreading the benefits of videotex around the world."

Mr. Fox also visited Algeria to discuss areas where the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Canadian companies could provide technical advice in the development of Algeria's national broadcasting system.

Asia Pacific Foundation study

The text of a study prepared by John Bruk of Vancouver on the feasibility of establishing an Asia Pacific Foundation has been released by Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs Allan J. MacEachen. The work was undertaken by Mr. Bruk at the invitation of Mr. MacEachen's predecessor, Mark MacGuigan, in October 1981.

The idea of establishing an Asia Pacific Foundation has been discussed for some time as a means of enhancing the relationship between Canada and the countries of Asia and the Pacific, a region of growing importance for Canada both politically and economically. Such a foundation, while somewhat removed from government, would enjoy support from the various levels of government and the private sector.

The study requests the immediate setting up of a board of founding directors who would seek incorporation of the foundation. It is also asking the federal government to commit $20 million (Cdn) over three years and that provincial and territorial governments match the federal donation.

Mr. Bruk's study is being reviewed by the government which will announce its response to his recommendations in the next few weeks.