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At this month's 16th International Conference on Data Protection, held in the Hague, those closest to the negotiations on the European Union Data Protection Draft Directive forecast that the Internal Market Council of Ministers would reach a "common position" by the end of this year. The text would still go for a second reading by the European Parliament, followed by adoption by the Internal Market Council. After that, the Directive would need to be implemented in national law. However, it looks as if we are nearer to the end of the process which started with the publication of the original draft directive in September 1990. The reasons for this statement are:

1. The EU heads of government gave political support at the June summit in Corfu to the policy of adoption of a common position by the end of 1994. This policy follows the recommendations of the high level group, chaired by German Commissioner, Martin Bangemann. Its *Europe and the Global Information Society* report recommends "a common and agreed regulatory framework for the protection of privacy."
2. The German presidency (July to December this year) has made the adoption of the data protection draft directive by year end a priority.
3. The detailed negotiations in the Council Working Group have resolved most of the problems over the last two years.
4. The initial fears in the business community that the Directive would hinder trade between Member States and countries outside the EU without equivalent laws have now been reduced. In addition, managers increasingly see that a reasonable common European framework for data protection law is better than an uneven national mix.

The consensus is, if anyone can achieve the adoption of the directive, the Germans can and will.



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