COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES :

FIRST COMMISSION REPORT

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

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Introduction

Following the communication from the Commission to the European Council in Dublin on a Community response to the challenge of the new information technologies (1), the final communique took note of the Commission recommendations and invited the Council of Ministers (Foreign Affairs- to study a common strategy on the subject.

To help evolve this strategy, the Commission will from time to time refer to the Council measures that it deems appropriate, including budget measures where necessary.

This Communication from the Commission is therefore an initial report on its activities concerning the new information technologies. Its purpose is :

(a) to suggest a general approach for the implementation of its recommendations;

(b) to report on the present status of the work and to describe the broad lines of the action which the Commission intends to take later which can only be fully effective if there is close cooperation between the Member States and the Commission;

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(1) European society faced with the challenge of new information technologies a Community response - COM(79) 650 final of 23 November 1979.

(c) to submit to the Council initial proposals, regarded as meriting
priority, on the development of microelectronic technology in the
Community and the steps to be taken in the telecommunications sector (2);

1. General approach suggested by the Commission for implementation of its
recommendations

The Commission considers that it would not be appropriate to adopt a
piecemeal approach whereby the Community framework would be selected
whenever it was feasible from the political or technical angle; such
a approach would waste unnecessary time in a field where the pace of
development is extremely fast.

It recommends the adoption of an overall Community strategy which does
not involve a centrally administered common policy automatically provided
with its own financial arrangements, but is aimed at dynamic integration
at operationel level of projects conducted by several partners :
companies, national governments and Community institutions.

It accords great importance to the fundamental concept of the sharing of
responsibilities, the only way to ensure that Community action is effec-
tive.

The Community's role will be firstly to ensure that full advantage is
taken of the Community-wide scale :

- by ensuring appropriate application of the competition rules in
the EEC Treaty,

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(2) First proposals for Community actions in the field of microelectronics

- by concerting public procurement policies,
- by promoting cross-frontier projects by undertakings, not
  necessarily involving all the undertakings in the sector or all
  the Member States.

Secondly, the Community institutions will be used as a staging post and
where appropriate a starting point for activities, including legislative
action, intended to create a climate of confidence and to encourage
actively the change necessitated by the development of the new infor-
mation technologies.

2. Lines of action

Broadly speaking, these are based on proposals in the document
COM(79) 650 final mentioned earlier.
They have three main aims :

- Measures intended to help society in general and the two sides of
  industry in particular to master the new technologies and adapt to
  their use. The various aspects include information, education
  training and retraining.

- Establishment of a uniform market for these new technologies throughout
  the Community, calling in particular for coordinated stages in the
  promotion of common standards and interfaces and the opening up of
  access to public contracts.

- Projects intended both to promote new markets for these technologies
  and to strengthen the corresponding industrial capacity.

In this programme a distinction has been drawn between immediate measures
and those calling for advance preparations, which will be implemented
only after the first year of activity. Each of the general lines of
action set out above will now be examined, with details of the activities
which the Commission regards as having priority.

3. Projects to prepare society for innovation

As far as consultations with the two sides of industry are concerned, the Commission has completed a paper on the impact of microelectronics on employment (3) which has been discussed in the Standing Committee on Employment.

With a view to establishing a European pool of studies and information, an interdepartmental working party has been set up to collect in the first instance information available in the departments and to share out the tasks of data collection, analysis and liaison. This organization will be of use only if governments and public authorities in the Member States cooperate with it and at a later stage call upon its services.

With regard to specialized training, the Commission is continuing to give its support to short advanced training courses in computer science and seminars to prepare educational specialists for work in industrial retraining programmes.

Concerning future developments, the Commission has given priority to a group of projects on information, education and vocational training, which will be defined within the next year.

4. Establishment of a homogeneous market

4.1. One of the projects given priority deals with the harmonization of future digital telecommunications networks and the opening up of access to contracts.

The Communication from the Commission containing recommendations on telecommunications relates to :
- the implementation of harmonization in the field of telecommunications,

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(3) Employment and the new microelectronic technology
COM(80) 16 final of 16 February 1980.

- the establishment of a Community market for the new "telematic" terminals,

- an initial stage in the opening up of access to public procurement contracts for telecommunications.

4.2. With regard to computers, an action for the development of standardization is under way as part of the multiannual data processing programme decided on by the Council (4). The continuation of the project depends on whether the Commission is able to take on the temporary staff which it had requested to manage this programme, and which it has not yet been authorized to recruit.

5. Creation of new markets and industrial capacity

5.1. Plans for exploitation of the enlarged information market are included in the third plan of action on scientific and technical information and documentation, which envisages the use of modern information processing techniques and their extension to economic and social information. This third plan is now under discussion in the CIDST (5) and a proposal for a Council Decision is likely as soon as the CIDST has delivered its opinion and the necessary consultations have been held (European Parliement, CREST (6), Economic and Social Committee), probably in the autumn.

5.2. Projects in support of computer applications, software and the development of pilot projects, included in the multiannual data processing programme referred to above, also depend on the availability of staff for the programme.

5.3. Microelectronic technology is regarded as the most urgent field.
    In response to the Council Resolution of 11 September (7), the Commission has prepared a proposal for a Council Regulation which is set out in

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(4) Decision 79/783/EEC of 11 September 1979. OJ N° L 231.
(5) CIDST : Committee for Scientific and Technical Information and Documentation
(6) CREST : Scientific and Technical Research Committee.
(7) Council Resolution of 11 September 1979 on a Community action promoting microelectronic technology - OJ N° C 231 of 13 September 1979.

its Communication on first proposals for Community actions in the field of microelectronics.

The aim is to provide Community industry with the resources needed to acquire and master, by the middle of the decade, the general capacity to design, manufacture and use integrated circuits of a technology suffi- ciently advanced to be competitive with the products of American and Japanese industry.

In substance, the proposal outlines arrangements for :
- coordination of national support policies
- aid for the collaborative development by users and equipment manufacturers of prototypes of highly specialized industrial equipment;
- a research and development programme concerning computer-aided design and testing methods;
- supporting conditions concerning the training of highly-specialized technicians and executives and the dissemination of information on
  products.

5.4. The Commission attaches particular importance to the project for an information system between the Community institutions and the Governments of the Member States. A system of this kind, which will promote and improve the efficiency of exchanges of information between these authori- ties by using the most advanced resources of integrated digital network technologies, will serve as a substantial incentive for industry, for the development of these networks and for the definition of data exchange standards.

To ensure maximum efficiency in the definition of the project, which will take several years of work to implement, the Commission is seeking the cooperation of the Member States in carrying out the essential premiminary work, i.e. the evaluation of requirements. Its own staff

has made a start on this work and three stages are planned prior to final implementation : initial project definition, design studies and developments to be carried out from the aspects of the evaluation of requirements, technical and economic feasibility and the definition of standards.

6. Use of Community resources

The Commission, which in its initial proposals is anxious to resort as little as possible to the Community's budget resources, is planning to call on existing financial instruments to contribute a maximum to the development of infrastructures to support the new technologies, including telecommunications and in particular their space segments. It is continuing its examination of the situation and of suitable measures at Community level.