INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

TELECOM AGREEMENT

69 COUNTRIES SUPPORT THE INFORMATION SOCIETY .... AND PUT IT IN WRITING

In a landmark decision, the governments of 69 countries that account for well over 90% of the world's revenues from telecommunications services signed an Agreement that encompasses far-reaching commitments on market access and national treatment for basic telecommunications services. The negotiations covered all local, domestic long-distance and international basic telecommunications services - including voice telephone, data transmission, telex, telegraph, fax, private leased circuit services, etc. - provided on a facilities-basis or by resale, through any means of technology (e.g. cable, wireless, satellites). This process was driven forward by the World Trade Organization (WTO), which brought these govern-

ments into discussion and helped negotiations reach a successful conclusion. By establishing a well-defined set of rules for services and service providers, the Agreement promotes liberalisation, ensures comprehensive legally binding market access commitments, and guarantees a high level of legal security and predictability for telecom services in nearly every country in the world.

European Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan commented: "This Agreement is of historic importance to the future of the world trading system as well as to the world economy, not just in telecommunications. It will boost sales and investment in the telecoms sector, cut costs for business and ultimately improve the cost and quality of communications for ordinary people. It will also remove further obstacles to the development of the Information Society."

The EU led the negotiations from the front for the last 18 months, convinced from its own internal liberalisation process that open telecoms markets are good for business.

Commenting on the Agreement, Renato Ruggiero, Director-General of the WTO, said that this deal goes well beyond trade and economics. "We are making access to knowledge easier. Now countries of all sizes and stages of development are on a common level. The real landmark is that

INFODEV

THE KEY QUESTIONS

Henri Bretaudeau, World Bank Senior Public and Donors Relations officer, Telecoms and Informatics Division profiles the infoDev Programme

What is the aim of infoDev and how is it funded?

*info*Dev funds activities which help countries evolve into an information economy and society. By providing funds and brokering partnerships *info*Dev has become a network for the exchange of ideas. Activities funded by *info*Dev are done through a well-coordinated partnership involving the World Bank Group, other multilateral institutions, bilateral donors and the private sector; with the agreement and active cooperation of governments of recipient countries. A contribution of $250,000 or more to the 'core' fund entitles a private donor to separate representation at Donors' Meetings. Smaller contributions are accepted, but do not carry the right to participation in Donors' Meetings.

What are the objectives of infoDev?

*info*Dev's main objectives are to: Create market-friendly environments; reduce poverty and exclusion of low-income countries and social groups; improve education and health; promote protection of the environment and natural resources; and increase the efficiency, accountability and transparency of governments. Initiatives funded by *info*Dev include awareness activities such as the Global

Knowledge '97 conference which examines the issue of knowledge for development in the information age (Toronto June 23-25); initiatives to stress the importance of a Telecommunications reform; the development of information infrastructure strategies; and the launching of pilot projects. *info*Dev encourages proposals from all interested people and organisations. These can include governments, non-governmental organisations, multilateral institutions, private sector firms or individuals. *info*Dev grants are generally awarded for US $250,000 or less. Larger projects must be approved by the *info*Dev Donors' Committee and have an outstanding reason for requiring a more funding.

On what basis are proposals evaluated and selected?

Important criteria include, but not limited to: replicability, sustainability, political feasibility, support and demand from local participants, and complementarity with other initiatives. A more complete description of the evaluation criteria is in the Guidelines for Activity Proposals.

Please send your proposals (in hard copy or electronically in Microsoft Word or e-mail) to:

*info*Dev Work Program Administrator
Industry and Energy Department
The World Bank
1818 H Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20009 USA
e-mail: infodev@worldbank.org
(http://www.worldbank.org)

infoDev

BEING CONNECTED: A NEW PRIORITY FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

How can we bridge the knowledge gap being created by the Information Society?

The role that Information Technologies (IT) can play in economic development is well known. What is new today is the general recognition among governments and civil societies in developing countries that 'being connected' is a pivotal element for sustainable growth. Connectivity is the new strategic key to economic survival for developing countries. They are realising more and more that being disconnected equals being excluded from the global dynamics of development. Against this background, the World Bank has started a profound reflection on how to support developing countries in their need for inter-connectivity. It is clear that the dimension of the demand is enormous. There are nevertheless several alternatives to answering this challenge. On one hand private capital is available to respond to the financial needs for Information Technology ventures around the world, which are still considered to be profitable. This said, the availability of private resources alone cannot bridge the information gap for these countries.

The rationale of the World Bank's initiatives for development is based on this initial assumption. Private capital will flow only if an appropriate, predictable and stable regulatory environment is implemented in developing countries. So it is imperative for both the Bank and for institutions such as the European Commission, to encourage the creation of a regulatory framework for the introduction of the 'Information Society model in developing countries. A second important point is that private capital will not fulfil the demand in isolated and unprofitable areas. In these areas, the World Bank will fulfil this demand by combining different proposals, by matching user demand with solutions. In other words it will operate like a knowledge clearing house, organising awareness campaigns, training courses and providing the link between sources of financing and the best projects available at the moment. The World Bank's instrument to achieve this is the *info*Dev programme, which provides support for the connection of developing countries to the Information Society. To date *info*Dev has been extremely successful (see box); we have in fact received hundreds of requests for support. The fight against information exclusion is not ended. More than ten years after the Maitland report on "Missing links" the world still runs the risk of polarising into the knowledge-rich and knowledge-poor ... into the connected and the disconnected. Some developing countries - with a conservatism that is almost reactionary - are in fact still resisting change and condemning their population to lag even further behind their counterparts. It is against this background that initiatives like *info*Dev or the Commission programmes for cooperation find their rationale: being instruments of change, mediation and promotion of the Information Society model in developing countries. ■

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

information and knowledge are recognised as the raw materials of growth and development in our global world."

For the consumer this telecom deal means lower costs Price reductions will be very significant. Families separated by great distances will benefit from the advantages that this Agreement brings in inexpensive and high quality long distance services. It is also good news for companies - which today spend more on telecom services than they do on oil. While there are no well-established figures, experts estimate that the telecom liberalisation encouraged by this move will generate a global income of some one trillion dollars over the next decade - equivalent to four percent of today's worldwide GDP.

An important step forward that the Agreement brings to the world economy is the opening of 90 percent of the world's telecommunications market to competition, says Ruggiero. "From this new competition many practical new benefits will flow. People and nations will be able to communicate more easily and understand one another better; consumers will enjoy more choice and better quality; services will be modernised and investment in the sector will increase. A significant benefit will be the creation of many new jobs," he says.

However, the most significant innovation is probably, as noticed by the WTO Director-General that "This is the first time that so many countries with very different telecom cultures, and at different levels of development have sat around a table and agreed on such a sweeping set of reforms for the telecom industry. This fact alone sends one very positive message: that every one of the 69 signatory countries supports the development of the Information Society ... and are willing to put it in writing." ∎

SUCCESS STORIES

DATABASE QUERY NOW SPEAKS YOUR LANGUAGE

Imagine if a German business person working in a small company in Eisenach could access a database in Toulouse, and query the French provider's server in German ... and receive an answer in German.

This dream of many a local European businessman is now a reality, thanks to the Spirit multilingual software tool that was recently developed as a 'Technologies for Business Processes' project of the European Union's Esprit Programme. Using the software, users can now query full text databases in their mother tongue, if the user's language is different to that of the database. The package currently operates in French, German and English, and a Russian version is being prepared.

In its latest release, Spirit integrates the results of the Esprit EMIR project on multilingual querying, which helps locate information without language barriers. This tool is particularly attractive for searching the many European databases whose instructions are in one local European language. This local language obstacle will be gone forever, as all users will be able to accurately describe their request for information in their local language. ∎
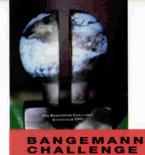
Contact: Patrick Mordini, T.GID
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BANGEMANN CHALLENGE

BANGEMANN CHALLENGE WINNERS SHOW THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN ACTION

Live projects, not feasibility studies or 'wish lists'

The Information Society really works and is bringing a better quality of life to the people of Europe. For proof of this we need go no further than the quantity and quality of practical examples of information services that have emerged from the Bangemann Challenge.

The real strength of this effort, initiated last year by Mats Hulth, the Mayor of Stockholm, is that it highlights real, live services affecting cities and citizens today, and not proposals, feasibility studies or wish lists.

The Challenge has demonstrated in a concrete way how Europe's cities are using electronic information services to bring public administrations closer to the citizen, and the Information Society within reach of every member of society. Another important achievement is the creation of a 'contact network' across Europe.

The next step is the Global Bangemann Challenge - opening the competition to every major city in the world (500 projects are expected from 100 cities worldwide). It's starting now and winners will be chosen in 1999.

But for now ... congratulations to the Bangemann Challenge winners - and to all project teams.

Summaries of some of the winning projects are given in this issue. The remainder will be given in the next issue of IS News.

Winning projects

TELEWORKING

Paris: CATRAL Neighbourhood Offices Network

The time management agency of the Regional Council of the Ile de France is making teleworking easier by opening neighbourhood offices on the city outskirts which each accommodate between 50 and 100 telecommuters. Some 40 companies are interested in renting space for the first two offices opening in early 1997. A total of 80 offices will open in the next five years.

The development of teleworking in large cities brings several advantages – reduced commuting time, less car travel (and pollution), and an increase in job creation possibilities around the new centres.

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TELECOM AGREEMENT

INSIDE THE WTO AGREEMENT ON BASIC TELECOM SERVICES

KEY FEATURES:

- On 15 February 1997, 69 World Trade Organization Member governments signed an Agreement annexed to the Fourth Protocol to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). This document will remain open for acceptance until 30 November 1997. The commitments will enter into force on 1 January 1998.

- Governments worked to set aside national differences on how basic telecommunications might be defined domestically. They negotiated on all public and private telecom services that involve end-to-end transmission of customer supplied information (e.g. relay of voice or data from sender to receiver).

- Services covered by this Agreement include voice telephony, data transmission, telex, telegraph, facsimile, private leased circuit services (i.e. the sale or lease of transmission capacity), fixed and mobile satellite systems and services, cellular telephony, mobile data services, paging, and personal communications systems.

- Value-added services were not covered in this Agreement. These are telecom services where suppliers 'add value' to the customer's information by enhancing its form or content, or by providing for its storage and retrieval. These are already included in 44 schedules (representing 55 governments) that are in force as a result of the Uruguay Round.

- The results of these negotiations are to be extended to all WTO members on a non-discriminatory basis through the "most-favoured-nation" (m.f.n.) principle. However, the legal basis for these negotiations made it possible for each government to decide, at the end of the negotiations, whether or not to file an m.f.n. exemption on a measure affecting trade in basic telecommunications services. At the end of the negotiations on 15 February 1997, 9 governments filed lists of m.f.n. exemptions. ∎

Teleworking in Sweden

Special mention was given to the Stockholm Flex-Live project. Here, some 80% of Sweden's Siemens Nixdorf employees work outside the office 1 to 4 days a week. Employees are given notebook computers and mobile phones, and work from home. A shared office structure allows them to come into work for meetings and regular contacts. The results – productivity is up, costs are down, and employees don't ever want to go back the old ways of working.

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e-mail: per-erik.andersson@sni.se

DISTANCE LEARNING

Antwerp: remote learning/training using multimedia for public administration employees

The SMART system is an electronic distance learning resource developed by the City of Antwerp to provide professional training to its employees. The system is based on a dynamic training concept where all employees can be reached by a core of central resources, and where employees can train themselves by accessing information when they need it. Five classrooms in various locations equipped with video conferencing facilities allow employees to participate in the same course without travelling to the same location.

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e-mail: orca@antwerpcity.be

Barcelona's Electronic University

An information service based on e-mail, Internet web pages, library resources and multimedia tools is the basis for the Virtual Campus in Barcelona. Through the service, which is connected to Barcelona's Scientific Ring infrastructure, students can dialogue with professors and each other, access information, browse and download documentation for their studies. The service is now being opened to a new range of students – many of whom may not have the time to follow university courses – part time students, working professionals, and students interested in following distance programmes.

Contact: Francesc Noguera
Tel: +34 3 2532300
e-mail: fnoguera@uoc.es

Stockholm: An on-line school that spans the world

The Sofia Distance School was created to teach Swedish to Swedes living around the world. Its 200 students are largely the children of missionaries and foreign aid specialists working in remote locations, and other Swedes living abroad. From any location in the world, and using a computer and modem, students can download course material from the central server in Sweden. This distance learning concept has endless possibilities for new approaches to training and education.

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UNIVERSITY NETWORKS

Edinburgh: Electronic links between 11 university campuses

The EaStMan project has developed state-of-the-art high speed links between 11 universities in the Edinburgh area. Five new sites are currently being added, including links between hospitals. The project aims to provide an easy-to-use multimedia information service which combines the resources of educational institutions, hospital academic departments and private sector partners. Services will include video on demand, conferencing, teaching and self-paced learning, a multi-media library for business courses, real-time audio and image archives, etc.

Contact: George Howat
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e-mail: g.howat@ed.ac.uk

Antwerp: Regional telematics solutions for SMEs

This project has created a series of electronic information services to help small businesses work more efficiently; these services were designed to meet the specific needs of the companies operating in this trading region. EDIGO/SEAGHA brings paper-free (and trouble-free) electronic order processing to some 50 Small and Medium Sized companies in the Southern Holland/Northern Belgium region. To get the service up and running, EDIGO/SEAGHA provided free consulting services and specialists to help participating companies connect.

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e-mail: mertensm@antwerpcity.be

Manchester multimedia network

Local arts and cultural organisations in the Manchester area have come together to create this information services network. It brings participants several advantages: an on-line information sharing resource to allow partners to work together on joint project proposals for funding, promotion, etc.; a new promotion and information medium which allows Manchester to project itself as a dynamic cultural centre. By combining their resources in this common network, these small organisations now have a powerful information tool that was previously reserved for large cultural organisations backed with substantial funding.

Contact: Dave Carter
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e-mail: dave.carter@mcrl.poptel.org.uk

ESIS TRACKS THE PROGRESS OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The Information Society Project Office (ISPO) at the European Commission has initiated what is probably the first ever inventory of all projects and efforts related to the Information Society (IS) across Europe. The longer term goal of this project, which is called ESIS (European Survey of Information Society), is to serve as a decision support system for the implementation of new IS actions.

The ESIS inventory will track a broad range of commercial and publicly-funded Information Society projects in Europe and will provide an overview of major Information Society actions across the European Union.

The data will be gathered in each Member State by 15 companies hired by the ISPO to survey the local situation. Four types of information will be collected:

- *An inventory of existing Information Society projects.*
- *An overview of the major actions taken for the promotion and launching of the Information Society.*
- *An overview of existing major network facilities that can potentially be used for Information Society applications (gas, rail, water, cable TV, etc.).*
- *An update of the names, functions and coordinates of the contact persons from the responsible organisation(s) for Information Society issues in each country.*

These findings will be made available to all people and organisations with a strong interest in the progress of the Information Society, including: industry and social partners in Member States; individual organisations and research bodies; various European Commission Directorate-Generals and other European Institutions. ∎

For further information, please contact:
Ms. Androulla Kaminara ESIS project coordinator
Fax: +32 2 2994180
e-mail : aka@ispo.cec.be
ISPO Web page: http://www.ispo.cec.be

ISPO CORNER

BUILDING A WORLDWIDE CONSUMER INFORMATION NETWORK

Last year, ISPO launched a Call for Proposals for actions to promote the development of the Information Society and bring it closer to the European citizen (see article in *ISPO News n°5*, September 1996). After evaluations of the 116 proposals received, 16 projects were selected for funding. In this and upcoming issues of *IS News*, we will highlight some of these projects, starting with the ConsumerNet project.

The problem is not a choice of products, it is access to reliable information about them. In today's information age there is more news than ever about products and their benefits; but very little of this information is unbiased, and it's difficult to tell what is promotional and what's not.

The ConsumerNet project funded by ISPO is set to change this. It gives consumers clear and unbiased information about products, as provided by consumer organisations around the world.

This project will create has created a coordinating body to help combine the resources of consumer organisations and other neutral information providers who have a site on the Internet. This project involves:

- Setting up a quality assessment programme for consumer information on Internet that is linked to a database.
- Building a site on Internet that uses the information generated from the quality assessment programme.
- Defining and constructing of an intelligent search engine for the database in different languages.
- Disseminating the information based on requesters' specific interests - the World Wide Web or e-mail.

For more information, contact Henk Nicolai Consumentenbond Tel: +31 23 5327232 Fax:+31 23 5345377 e-mail: hnicolai@pi.net http://www.ispo.cec.be/ispo/call/projhome.html

ISPO INFORMATION DAY - 14 APRIL 1997

ISPO (Information Society Project Office) is organising an Information Day and a proposers forum for potential participants in the 1997 call for proposals under the **Information Society work programme**. The objective of this work programme is to promote the development of the Information Society and to bring it closer to the citizens, notably to those who need to be specially encouraged and helped. The Information day will be held in Brussels, Belgium on 14 April 1997 at the Centre Borchette, Rue Froissart 36, Brussels, Belgium. The total number of attendees is limited to 250. Registrations should be submitted to ISPO before 31 March 1997 by 17.00. ■

For further information and registration please contact the ISPO Secretariat (contact details: see box below) A registration form is available at the ISPO Web site: http://www.ispo.cec.be

CALENDAR

Esprit Information Day
Brussels (B)
3 March 1997
Fax: +32 2 6406697
e-mail: v.wouters@ecco-congress.be
http://www.cordis.lu/esprit/home.html

Le commerce electronique, facteur de croissance des PME Electronic Commerce in Support of SMEs
Lyon (FR)
5-6 March 1997
Tel: +33 478 241806
Fax: +33 472 741833

The Information Society & Electronic Commerce
Brussels (B)
6 March 1997
Stephanie Holmgren
AEA Europe
Tel: +32 2 5027015
Fax: +32 2 5026734
E-mail : Stephanie_Holmgren@aeanet.org

Frauen in der Informationsgesellschaft (Women in the Information Society)
Koln (DE)
17 March 1997
Petra Henseler
Tel: +49 234 7003024
Fax: +49 234 7094194
e-mail: bif@rz.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
http://frauen.safira.de

G7 pilot project: A Global Marketplace for SMEs First annual conference
Bonn (DE)
7-9 April 1997
D3 Group c/o Empirica GmbH
Tel: +49 228 985300
Fax: +49 228 9853012
e-mail: Info@G7EC.DE
http://www.G7EC.DE

First European Conference on sustainable island development
Minorca (SP)
23-26 April 1997
Consell Insular de Menorca
Fax: 34 71 366199
e-mail: eurisland@insula.org
http://www.insula.org/conf.htm

JENC8 - 8th Joint European Networking Conference
Edinburgh (GB)
12-15 May 1997
JENC8 Secretariat, c/o TERENA
Tel: +31 20 639 1131
Fax: +31 20 639 3289;
e-mail: jenc8-sec@terena.nl
http://www.terena.nl/jenc8

Stockholm IT Week
Stockholm (SE)
26-30 May 1997
Anette Holm
Tel: +46 31 130842
Fax: +46 31 7110597
e-mail: anette.holm@itweek.stockholm.se

EEMA '97 Electronic Commerce and Messaging in Europe
Maastricht (NL)
15-18 June 1997
Tel: +44 1386 793028
Fax: +44 1386 793268
e-mail: cgibson2@attmail.com
http://www.eema.org

Online Cooperation International Conferences on Teleworking
Berlin (DE) 23-24 June 1997
Singapore, 28 August 1997
ICEF
Tel: +49 30 3276140
Fax: +49 30 3249833
e-mail: 100770.3137@compuserve.com

Electronic Commerce in the framework of Mediterranean Countries Development EUROMED Working Conference
Metsovo (GR)
4-6 July 1997
Deborah Nute
EGNATIA EPIRUS Foundation
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Fax: +30 651 36695
e-mail: egnatia@cc.uoi.gr

Role of Universities in the Future Information Society
Prague (CZ)
24-27 September
Karel Kveton
Tel: +42 2 24310369
Fax: +42 2 3117529
e-mail: rufis-call@mail.vc.cvut.cz
http://www.cvut.cz/cp1250/cc/icsc/NII/index.html

ISPO SECRETARIAT

Free phone service

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Denmark	800 1 8888
Finland	0800 113635
France	0800 91 7227
Germany	0130 821943
Greece	00800 3212635
Ireland	1800 553224
Italy	1678 76790
Luxembourg	0800 2929
Netherlands	060 222086
Portugal	0505 329635
Spain	900 993290
Sweden	020 791635
United Kingdom	0800 962114

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