

**ESIS CONFERENCE**

## TRACKING AND SHAPING THE FUTURE INFORMATION SOCIETY

**What are the latest developments? What's needed? First survey results give insiders' view of how the Information Society is developing in the European Union.**

What is the current shape of the European Information Society today? Who are the principle players? Who are the key players? Which sectors of industry are at the forefront and which are lagging behind?



Commissioner Bangemann during his speech given on the occasion of the ESIS Conference in Brussels on 18-19 March

What partnerships are developing, and what are the primary barriers to the rapid spread of Information Society services to all citizens?

These and related key questions formed the centre of the

discussions at the first Conference on the European Survey of Information Society (ESIS). The conference was a unique event aimed at tracking developments in the Information Society in the European Union Member States. It brought together national and European policy makers, members of industry, trade unions, the social partners, educators and high level key players on Information Society. The common goal of all participants was to learn from each others' experiences in the Information Society and to better understand the challenges and benefits that this rapidly evolving sector will bring.

**Broad scope of participants**

The importance of the topic was illustrated by the broad scope of participants from across the European Union, Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean countries, Latin America and the Far East. Some 550 participants from 35 countries attended the meeting in Brussels. In the true Information Society spirit, hundreds more participated on-line, as the event was 'Web-

casted' across the Internet.

The conference programme included a lunch-time address by Mr. Martin Bangemann, European Commissioner responsible for industrial affairs, information technologies and telecommunications. He stressed that co-operation was the key to improving co-ordination of world-wide policies affecting the rapidly growing global 'on-line' economy.

**Keynote presentations**

Keynote presentations were given by Mr Matti Aura, Finnish Minister for Transport and Communications and Mr José Mariano Gago, Portugal's Minister of Science and Technology. They offered comprehensive reviews of their countries' Information Society (IS) policies and approaches. High-ranking representatives from across the European Union also presented the role of public authorities in formulating IS strategies, the factors enabling the creation of a favourable environment for IS and the organisational and public awareness aspects of IS at national and regional/local level.

Members of the European Parliament, Mr A. Alavanos and Mr R. Paasalinna, were moderators for the panels addressing the issues of arts and culture in the Information Society, and electronic democracy – or how governments can use electronic information services to come closer to their citizens.

Other conference panels covered topics such as: education, employability and work organisation, social integration, small and medium-sized companies, sustainable development, consumer protection and the empowerment of the user. Several concrete project examples were presented together with the relevant ESIS results.

**Summary of survey results**

The core of the ESIS discussions was the review of results of the first ESIS meeting.

- **IS is an issue in every country.** Nearly all EU Member States have launched national Information Society initiatives. Activities vary from country to country (some being launched as early as 1994 others as recently as 1998), but all focus on creating an overall national strategy in promoting Information Society developments.
- **Better links between projects are needed.** It was found that IS projects launched in the Member States are isolated and have few links with other projects.
- **Education and training is the most popular area.** Nearly 50% of all projects fall under this category. This is because most projects will have an education and training element, and because it is now becoming widely accepted that education and training is a key building block for developing an economy which will fully



Editorial by Dr. Elly Plooijs-van Gorsel Member of the European Parliament for the Liberal Group (ELDR)

**THE EU/US LINK: BUILDING A TRANS-CONTINENTAL CIVIL SOCIETY**

How the Transatlantic Information Exchange Service (TIES) uses the Internet to create close EU/US links – between countries and citizens At the dawn of a new Century, Europeans and Americans together face challenges as critical and opportunities as great as those faced when the 'New Europe' was being built 50 years ago.

The New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA), signed in Madrid in December 1995, confirms the joint commitment of the European Union and the United States to shape this new environment. The NTA recognises that our ability to seize new opportunities and deal efficiently with upcoming challenges depends on deepening the commercial, cultural, social, scientific and educational ties among our people. The European Parliament is very keen on contributing to strong transatlantic partnerships, not only on a political and economical level but also among citizens. The decision to include the NTA in the 1998 budget clearly illustrates the Parliament's commitment to EU-US relations.

The successful conference on 5 May last year in Washington "Building Bridges across the Atlantic: people-to-people links" was an important force behind the strengthening of relations between citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. It was there that the Transatlantic Information Exchange Service (TIES) project was conceived. TIES is an Internet-based project which brings together thousands of Web sites across Europe and the United States. Its aim is to encourage EU and US citizens to increase their transatlantic contacts by providing a meeting place for organisations such as universities, libraries, farmers, SMEs, city-councils, seniors, etc., and a forum within which they become actors in promoting transatlantic cooperation via the Internet. The project demonstrates our commitment to put current technology to work to enhance international opportunities for American and European citizens and organisations. The greatest obstacles to the use of these new technologies for exchanges between people is the lack of awareness and understanding of their potential and the still limited access to these innovations by many of our citizens – especially in Europe. Another difficulty is the identification of the potential partners and funding.



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*"Tracking and shaping the future Information Society" continued from page 1.*

benefit from the Information Society. More than half of the projects in this area target adult education.

- Electronic commerce is a priority. Some 30% of all projects have an electronic commerce component.
- More content than technology. Most projects focus more on content than technology development, and they use conventional and ISDN lines.
- National, regional and local authorities are involved – 30% of all projects are being led by these players.
- The coming 12 months will reveal key information on IS impact. More than half of all IS projects are currently at above the 60% completion, the coming year is certain to reveal new trends and facts.
- Some 60% of projects have a total cost of less than 1 MECU.
- SMEs are well represented. Some 25% of all projects target SMEs as primary users. The manufacturing sector is poorly addressed, with a participation of 13% of projects.
- Local creation/international scope. Most projects are created at the regional level, and targeted at national and international markets – 50% of development efforts are local/regional, not even national.
- EU funding: a catalyst for trans-national cooperation. The majority of the trans-national projects involving more than one Member State are co-financed by the EU. This highlights the important role of EU as a facilitator of trans-national cooperation.
- Primary obstacles to an open Information Society. One of the biggest obstacle to the development of further projects cited by project participants was the lack of qualified people. Other typical points cited are high development infrastructure costs.

*Participants agreed that at today's time of high unemployment in Europe, we must not ignore the opportunities offered by the Information Society. It is clear, they agreed, that our educational systems need to respond to the challenges of the Information Society.* ■



*Photo on left. Mr. José Mariano Gago, Portuguese Minister of Science and Technology (left), one of the keynote speakers at the ESIS Conference, and Prof. Dias Coelho, president of the Portuguese Mission for the Information Society*



**THE PARALLEL SESSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE ADDRESSED A NUMBER OF ISSUES AND THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS**

**a) Defining success factors of projects and actions**

- Incorporating awareness as clear strategy for motivating participants.
- Ensure clear leadership and the high motivation of promoters and the commitment of key players.
- Integrating the project in a general strategy for change (e.g. administrative reform, political re-engineering etc.). It is clear that there is a need for an integrated strategy for change and that high levels of awareness and clear leadership is needed in order to generate motivated participation and commitment.
- Long term commitment (e.g. contractual commitments between partners).

**b) Identifying main barriers to overcome**

- Inertia and resistance to change.
- Lack of awareness among potential end users and decision makers which causes weak demand for services.
- Access costs for certain types of applications are prohibiting to certain categories of users.
- Infrastructure constraints are particularly important for applications with a social dimension.
- Tendency to opt for a competitive approach between projects where collaboration between players would provide better results for all concerned.
- Low of consumer confidence in the use of the Internet as users particularly with respect to security, privacy, uses and product quality.
- Low of availability of information to consumers in their own languages
- Lack of guidance on their rights of consumers in the Information Society.

**c) Best practice elements**

- Multi-disciplinary applications should be favoured.
- Involvement of policy makers, researchers, industry and users as early as possible in the design of the projects.
- Promote the availability of public information on-line.
- Open and flexible approach – e.g. by Memoranda of understanding between relevant players – should be promoted
- Guidance tools should be incorporated (e.g. mapping the net, catalogues, information brokers, search engines).
- Design of applications to include as wide access features as possible.

- Public sector procurement of IS applications should include a "design-for-all" clause (e.g. to take into consideration persons with disabilities).
- Actively promote inter-operable, user friendly systems with multilingual facilities.
- Promote the development of new business practices and the promotion of standards.
- Promote the exchange of information and findings between different initiatives/projects across Europe.
- Enhance the catalyst role of local and regional players particularly for applications targeting SMEs.
- Promote the development of a clear, easy to understand and neutral tax environment.
- Actively promote the participation of consumer organisations.
- Promote the learning opportunities offered by the creative use of ICTs.
- Where appropriate, promote common structures and guidelines for access to the information.
- Involve the traditional media in the awareness plans.
- Promote the participation of multiplier groups (e.g. associations, fora etc.).
- Development of clear strategies and incentives for the development of public/private partnerships.
- Constant review of evolving consumer and citizens needs.
- Ensure that sufficient funding is available from the start of the projects

**d) Recommendations for further actions to the Commission and/or local and national administrations**

- Continue to monitor the Information Society activities at local/regional and national level.
- Continue to put considerable effort into increasing public awareness but also in highlighting the relevance of Information Society for the way we work, live and are educated. The Information Society Forum will continue to play an important role and will be organising a major awareness event in 1999 - the Information Society Day.
- The importance of the development of public - private partnerships for the launching of initiatives was evident and the Commission and the Member States, regional and local authorities need to further promote this aspect.
- On the basis of the work done so far within ESIS, other related activities at Member State level and internationally, there is a need to launch a global discussion at appropriate fora on the methodological aspects of monitoring developments in the Information Society.

- Further promote the development of synergies between projects and initiatives and to minimise any effort being wasted on "rediscovering the wheel". To this aim, a workshop will be organised by ISPO in 1998 in order to further discuss the development of synergies between inventories, as well as discuss the methodological aspects of monitoring Information Society developments.
- Promote the development of suitable content which reflects the needs and values of the European citizens.
- Support the launching of the proposed measures to help disadvantaged social groups actively participate in the Information Society developments in order to promote social inclusion.
- Promote further projects which focus on enhancing the democratic rights and participatory mechanisms for citizens, traditional manufacturing and SMEs.
- Promote the better understanding of the optimal use of Information Society technologies for environmental impact reduction and the promotion of a wider business and public awareness of the sustainability options for a "Model Europe" approach.
- Provide a good example by the commitment of the European Union Institutions and Member State governments to use the new ICT tools as much as possible in their everyday management procedures.
- Promote the development of a European standard for Internet content selection which will reflect European values.
- Provide guidance on the interactive use of the Internet for minors.
- It is clear that the Information Society poses a communication challenge for all concerned and in particular for the media. This conference ended with a Round Table bringing together members of the media and it was clear that the media should fulfil their role as communicators in awaking the general public and motivating people to actively participate in the developments of the Information Society. Additional activities focused on journalists and the media should therefore be organised in order to highlight this communication challenge. ■

*The full text of the conference conclusions, as well as speeches and photographs from the conference can be found at: <http://www.ispo.cec.be/esis/Presntation/Conference.htm>.*

*The results of the ESIS survey are available through: <http://www.ispo.cec.be/esis>.*

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## SUCCESS STORIES

# ENABLING THE DISABLED

## REMOVING PAST BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

A blind man in the Netherlands is running a business server platform. In Spain, a severely handicapped person is managing a virtual team of 20 people working across Europe. A woman, who has driven less than 25 kms from her home in the past decade is now part of a 'web team' where members are located in different European countries and regions. Each of these people earns a good living by working from home.

These are just three of many examples of how ISdAC – the Information Society disAbilities Challenge – is bringing a new life, and significant new work opportunities, to the 36 million disabled people located across Europe. ISdAC received the European Telemark Award in November 1997 (see IS News 19, December 1997). The main message that

ISdAC has for European institutions, national governments and people across Europe, is that the Information Society has succeeded in removing the barrier between what an 'able' and 'disabled' person can achieve in the workplace.

The scope of ISdAC and the people it represents means that this effort is rapidly evolving from a business catalyst to a strong lobby for all disabled people in the workplace, and for their place in the Information Society.

With support from the European Union's Telematics for Urban and Rural Programme and the ACTS programme, members are now examining how to create a democratic 'digital voice' to attract the attention of decision makers in Europe, and to play a more active role in the decision-making process.

Other EU programmes are also creating new greater opportunities for the disabled. TIDE, HORIZON, and HELIOS have generated a wealth of project examples that illustrate how Europe's disabled community is becoming more integrated in the economic fabric. ■

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"The EU/US link" continued from page 1.

TIES provides a means to remedy these difficulties. The Transatlantic Information Exchange Service is setting a new standard for the use of the Internet in transcontinental civil society cooperation. It is at the very centre of the three trends of the 21st Century: transatlantic cooperation, citizen's empowerment and the Internet.

Its creation has been made possible thanks to the financial support of the European Union, the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

A prototype of the TIES Web site was presented to the leaders of the United States and the European Union at the EU-US summit on 5 December 1997 in Washington. It was publicly launched at the EU-US summit in London on 11 May, in the presence of Members of the European Parliament, American Congressmen, a classroom of European Union and United States pupils and the children of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. ■

The URL is: <http://www.tiesnet.org>

## INFORMATION SOURCES

# ACCESS TO ALL OF THE LEGISLATION, ALL OF THE TIME

## EUR-LEX – 'THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE MULTILINGUAL LEGAL INFORMATION SOURCE'

The European Union has just taken a big step closer to citizens in every corner of the European Union, by offering direct on-line access to a wealth of official documents and related European legislation. This is EUR-Lex, the new Internet-based service which provides all legal texts published by the European Institutions, prepared and launched by EUR-OP, the official publisher of the institutions of the European Union.

Now, at the click of a mouse, anyone with an Internet connection can consult, download and search texts such as: the L and C series of the Official Journal – the EU daily publication of EU legislation – and the text of European legislation and recent judgements by the European Court of Justice. EUR-Lex is free of charge and will provide all documents in the eleven official languages of the European Union.

The first version of EUR-Lex was recently opened to the public, and it's growing rapidly – with some 1,500 new files being placed on the server every day. When completed, in late 1998, this service will probably be the most extensive multilingual documentation source of its kind anywhere in the world.

Phase 2, which will be completed by the summer, will offer access to all European legislation that is currently in force. By the end of 1998, users will also have online access to new draft legislation presented by the Commission to the European Parliament and Council of Ministers, and to other documents that accompany the legislative process. ■

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex>



## EUR-LEX – KEY FEATURES

### Stage 1 – Now on-line

Coverage of the L and C series of the Official Journal and links to the existing sites of the Council, the Commission and the Court of Justice for Treaties, consolidated texts and case law. Includes a system where successive amendments to legislation can be incorporated into basic texts. Currently, some 4,500 basic instruments are included. Some 2,000 of these have been modified by some 3,500 amending instruments. This consolidation process is done in eleven EU languages.

### Stage 2 – Summer 1998

Complete directory of EU legislation that is currently in force, containing the full text of legislation. As the consolidation progresses, newly consolidated texts will be published in EUR-Lex.

### Stage 3 – Autumn 1998

Preparatory legislative texts will be available. This includes European Commission communications (COM documents), European Parliament documents, opinions of the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

### Stage 4 – Winter 1998

The EUR-Lex service will be complete. ■







**ISPO CORNER**

**HARNESSING "ICT" TO  
CREATE NEW JOBS**

The central Scottish county of North Lanarkshire and the city of Vichy, in France, completed a study at the end of 1997 which helps them better understand the impact of the Information Society on their businesses, citizens and cultures, and how they can harness the power of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

The feasibility study provided a strategic framework within which the partners are considering future action. The study emphasised three major aspects of development in the Information Society:

- how to ensure access to ICT for all sections of the community and business sectors
- the integration of ICT support services from the public sector economic and social development agencies
- the targeting of resources to address the support needs of priority groups within the community.

The study was undertaken by the Institute for Social and Economic Research in Scotland (INSER) on behalf of the partners and was managed by North Lanarkshire Council. It was partly funded by ISPO. It looked at how groups that are currently disadvantaged in the labour market can use ICT to develop in the local economy. A key part of this effort is to encourage local businesses to take a more global view of their activities, by using ICT to increase contacts with partners and potential customers in other regions and countries. The study has also been a proving ground for a variety of ICT applications, such as information exchange through an Internet web site and the creation of video conferencing centres to allow frequent contact and the lively exchange of information between various towns and communities and their outside contacts. ■

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**EVENTS UPDATE**

**TELEWORKERS REVIEW  
ANOTHER YEAR OF  
PROGRESS**

Teleworking enthusiasts from across the European Union are expected to attend the European Teleworking Information Day on May 28.

Two important aspects of this gathering are an update by European Commission officials on current EU teleworking initiatives and information efforts to promote this concept; and presentations by specialists from companies that use teleworking as a part of their everyday business.

Presentations will be given by last year's European Telework Award winners: Hans de Jong, the Netherlands Ministry of

Transport, Public Works and Water Management (Award for Best Contribution to Sustainability); Jos Goffin of IBM Belgium (Award for Competitiveness) and Fiorenza Scotti, Information Society dis-Abilities Challenge – ISdAC (Award for Originality).

This is also the official launch of Telework Week 1998, to be held from 2-9 November, where this initiative's ambitious plans will be revealed. This year's target is to surpass the significant Europe-wide impact of last year's record-setting 1997 Telework Week. ■

*For further information on this Information Day, the Telework Week, the 1998 Teleworking Call for Initiatives and the 1998 Telework awards, point your browser to:  
http://www.eto.org.uk*

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**CALENDAR**

**Online Collaboration Berlin 1998**  
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9-10 June, 1998  
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e-mail: [ICEFBerlin@aol.com](mailto:ICEFBerlin@aol.com)  
<http://www.o,line-work.com>

**Rencontre réelle de villes virtuelles**  
Namur (B)  
16 June, 1998  
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Fax: +32 81 724967  
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<http://www.info.fundp.ac.be/~cita/renc.html>

**Les technologies de communication dans l'entreprise et les qualifications professionnelles**  
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17 June, 1998  
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**ED-MEDIA 98**  
**World Conference on Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia**  
Freiburg (D)  
20-25 June, 1998  
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**Beyond coverage**  
**Twelfth biennial ITS Conference**  
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21-24 June, 1998  
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e-mail: [its98@stocon.se](mailto:its98@stocon.se)  
<http://www.its98.org>

**3rd TIDE Congress**  
**Improving the quality of life for the European Citizen**  
European Commission DG XIII  
Helsinki (FI)  
23-25 June, 1998  
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**Competing in the Information Society**  
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