INFORMATION SOCIETY PROJECT OFFICE
ISPO
NEWS
INFORMATION SOCIETY
News Roundup from the European Commission's Information Society Project Office N°21 February 1998

GLOBAL CHARTER

COORDINATING POLICIES FOR THE GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY

EU launches debate on the impacts of globalisation on communications policies

What are your thoughts on the type of policies that should guide the development of the global Information Society? The European Commission would like to know.

In its Communication: *Globalisation and the Information Society: the need for strengthened international coordination* – which was recently presented by Commissioners Martin Bangemann and Sir Leon Brittain – the European Commission is encouraging an international dialogue with all interested citizens and organisations.

It is expected that the end result of this consultation will be an International Charter, which may be ready by the end of 1999.

Coordinated approach

The Communication's call for a coordinated approach to 'IS' policies is a response to the explosive growth of the Internet – which totals some 100 million users worldwide – and to the borderless electronic marketplace which it has created. Multimedia services and commercial applications are rapidly developing and the number of business sites is increasing daily. According to one estimate, the value of goods traded over the Internet could reach 200 billion ECU by the year 2000.

As an increasing portion of the global economy is goes on-line, the influences that shape the world economy are changing. Clear examples that can be seen today are: consumer habits are different, on-line commerce has an impact on business practice; individuals and businesses are creating 'remote presence' and extending their reach into markets far beyond their physical location.

This new behaviour is creating new business configurations, where companies of all sizes are establishing worldwide networks linking research, production, assembly and distribution. Thus, by shifting economic activity on-line, communications are binding the world's economies even closer together.

But the Communication argues that the creation of a truly 'global networked economy' requires consistency in rules, technical solutions and business practices at a global level.

The technical possibilities of open networks like the Internet are putting legal structures to the test in fields such as intellectual property and data protection. Many international organisations and bodies are involved and many are working in parallel. Differences in national laws are also being exposed. In the absence of legal certainty, it will be difficult in particular for consumers and small and medium-sized companies to develop adequate levels of trust and confidence for the networked economy to flourish.

New policy challenges

One area of particular concern is the current differences in the protection of personal data. The absence of an agreed international framework will hinder cross-border electronic trade and deter citizens' use of global communications. In presenting its approach to encryption and digital signatures, the Commission has recently underlined the importance of achieving international legal recognition of electronic authentication for ensuring trust and confidence in electronic commerce. The wide accessibility of content of all kinds also raises issues of public interest with numerous social and cultural, as well as economic implications. Differences in national or regional cultures and moral and ethical codes can also give rise to divergent national laws, which may cause problems, for example, in advertising.

Strengthened international coordination

Through this Communication, the European Commission argues that strengthened international coordination will help to reduce the number of regulations required and avoid uncertainty, incompatible rules, and market fragmentation. Rather than create a new international supervisory authority, the Commission aims to launch an international debate on coordinating the work of existing organisations. This could ultimately lead to a non-binding agreement such as an International Charter.

The first step in this process is today. The Commission proposes that an industry-led Round Table is organised at expert level to identify the most pressing issues, and to begin to develop mechanisms to solve them in an

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This newsletter is also available on the ISPO Web: http://www.ispo.cec.be

Editorial by
Jouni Backman
Minister of
Administrative Affairs
Finland

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IS A NETWORK FOR PEOPLE

Development of the Finnish information society has been rapid. The previous Cabinet of Ministers approved the principal statements based upon the report, Finland's Way to the Information Society, in the beginning of 1995. Finland's objective was to ensure its place as a leader in the Global Information Society.

Today this goal has been achieved. The information technology skills of the Finnish population are of high quality; the country's networks and information services have excellent regional coverage and meet ambitious criteria; telecommunication services are available at competitive tariffs and a broad range of Information Society applications is now in place. Finns are extremely active in opening up to the benefits that the Information Society offers – as this nation's Internet usage statistics show.

Compared to other countries, Finland registers one of the highest number of Information Society initiatives. Even more interestingly, many of these efforts are regional and local. Some have EU funding. Most of these actions are supported by education and training.

The Finnish Information Society strategy, defined in 1994, was also being criticised for its 'technology domination', for introducing severe values that heavily emphasise content, and pay too little attention to activities at the local level. Additionally, the original strategy did not give sufficient priority to the importance of the emerging Internet phenomenon. The strategy was also being criticised as being too central government-driven – despite the fact that responsibility areas for public authorities have proceeded well.

Today the objectives for developing the Information Society in Finland are increasingly focused at the industry subsidiary, regional or local level. This means that there is no longer a need for the strategy that is presently being designed to cover broad national issues in detail. The new strategy highlights the importance of addressing the Information Society from the citizens' view, a focus which is also the starting point for European level discussion.

The current Finnish Cabinet of Ministers is the first that has clearly committed itself to developing the Information Society. The most important and challenging chapter of Finland's Information Society programme states that every citizen should be provided with basic skills to live and work in the

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Information Society. The Ministry of Education has an action programme with a broad coverage. Many associations and private sector representatives are also active in pushing Information Society services toward citizens.

The national campaign, Finland: Number One in the Information Society has started well and it follows the basic principles of a 'bottom-up' approach to the Information Society model. In one useful example, school children challenge their parents in learning basics of Information Society.

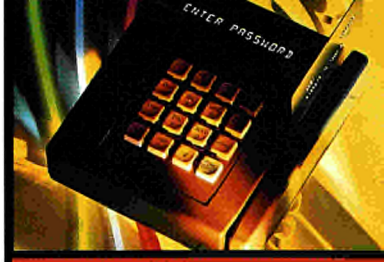
Finland has injected a strong regional flavour into its definition of the Information Society. As it develops, many traditional fixed-salary working patterns will lose their positions, both in the private sector and in institutions. For a sparsely populated country such as Finland this opens the door to totally new visions for development.

Many European Governments are now taking a more clear and visible role in Information Society development. This direction is welcomed, since even if the driving responsibilities in technology development and 'content' industry lie with the private sector, public authorities must create the legal framework and ensure equal opportunities for all. Information Society development requires international interaction and cooperation between governments and the private sector. There is no need for everyone to try to reinvent the wheel, but to benefit from the best examples provided by others. The great challenges and opportunities are shared and the solutions on how to proceed should be found together.

The importance of the EU is not only limited to the development of an internal legal framework. It has a role to play when international standards and rules, especially in network services and electronic commerce, have to be agreed upon. The EU is active in Information Society development issues beyond the boundaries of its Member States.

The ESIS conference in Brussels in March this year provides a good platform to present examples of concrete projects in different European countries. These projects and actions will speed up the European Information Society development.

Information Society is not only information technology but also much more. Management, collection, adding value, and intensive usage of information is important for the development of the technology itself. Information will be more and more clearly a significant factor of production, even more important than capital or raw materials. In international competition, know-how and high level of skills will compete with such factors as cheap energy, low taxation and labour costs and even overtake them. This is also a sound basis for a European strategy. ■



G7 PILOT PROJECTS

THE GLOBAL INVENTORY PROJECT (GIP)

The Information Society is everywhere and nowhere. It contains all the information anyone in any profession or interest group needs...but how do you locate it? The Global Inventory Project (GIP) – a G7 Pilot Project coordinated by the European Commission and Japan – is working to give clear answers to these questions.

"We offer a one-stop information resource, that tracks all national and international initiatives and Information Society resources," explains Judi Moline, G7 Program Manager, responsible for a part of the GIP.

"It catalogues projects, studies and other activities that help spread understanding of the Information Society."

The GIP is more than a list of available resources.

Says Moline:

"It adds value by providing common and versatile searching capabilities in many languages."

Participation in the GIP is open to international institutions, non-governmental organisations, private sector initiatives, and all others. If you don't understand the Information Society, or if you're interested in developing a strategic perspective on what this new phenomenon is and where it's headed, the Global Inventory Project will prove to be a very useful first stop.

The primary goals of the GIP are to:

- promote cultural exchange among countries, by identifying experiences that could serve as models;
- increase the understanding of the impact of Information Society (IS) on the economy, industry, and society, by providing people with references to national and international IS initiatives;
- compile studies and projects to be considered in developing future IS strategies;
- ensure that less-favoured population groups can benefit from information technologies, particularly in areas that can help raise their standard of living. ■

http://www.gip.int

U.S. National Inventory: http://nii.nist.gov/g7/g7.html

Contacts:

Judi Moline
G7 Program Manager and U.S. Contact for G7 GIP and SME Pilot Projects
jmoline@nist.gov

Jörg Wenzel
EC G7 IS coordinator
joerg.wenzel@bxl.dg13.cec.be

Patrice Husson
Project co-leader
patrice.husson@ispo.cec.be

MERCADO

ACCESS FOR ALL

Consumers are moving one step closer to practical and secure electronic commerce thanks to Mercado, a pilot project funded by the EU Esprit Programme. The aim of the Mercado multimedia electronic commerce and information service is to bring service to citizens through public multimedia kiosks and voice-activated information services. This pilot project is coordinated by the City of Nottingham, UK. Project partners are in Finland, Germany, Greece and the UK.

Mercado has the potential to host any number of retail or public services. In its pilot phase, the system's versatility will be illustrated through four services – on-line public transactions, links to the UK national office of economic affairs, a virtual shop, and an on-line pop festival. In addition to bringing public authorities a way to build frequent and friendly dialogue with citizens, the Mercado concept will also create a valuable channel to bring disadvantaged and low income people into the Information Society. When completed, this project will provide towns and cities with a single technical platform on which they can build multi-media services for their citizens, and bring local retailers on-line for a reasonable cost. ■

Contact: Robert Alan Stead
Nottingham City Council
Fax: +44 115 9154326
e-mail:
itclient@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE FOR ALL SMES

A Memorandum of Understanding on Open Access to Electronic Commerce for SMEs was signed between Jörg Wenzel, Chief Advisor of the Commission's Information Society Activity Centre and senior management of the Digital Equipment Corporation, one of the partners in the Mercado project. In signing this document, Digital commits itself to promoting the use of electronic commerce systems among small and medium-sized companies in Europe. The company will also participate in a special working group created between the European Commission and industry, to ensure a regular dialogue on this and related topics. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was drafted by the Commission services in consultation with four major European SME associations, and in consultation with all concerned industrial sectors. It provides a framework for consensus developments in EU RTD programmes and standardisation activities.

It will enable the key actors to reach a rapid consensus on key issues, ensuring that the emerging electronic marketplace is open for SMEs, with choice and interoperation between market systems. The key actors include suppliers of Information and Telecommunications solutions, the financial service suppliers (notably in payments), the suppliers of information, and service providers. Nearly 100 organisations have already signed the Memorandum and participated in the consensus development process. It remains open for signature by all organisations committed to interoperability. ■

Contact:
EC DG XIII/B/1 - MoU Secretariat
Tel: +32 2 2956956
Fax: +32 2 2962980
e-mail:
apas@postman.dg13.cec.be
http://www.eto.org.uk/ttrade/mou/

IDA PROGRAMME

IDA BRINGS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS INTO THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Ultimately, inter-administration data exchange must translate into friendly services for industry and citizens - this is the goal of the IDA Programme.

The IDA Programme started its work before the Information Society was born. Its goal: to encourage the interchange of data between European Institutions and all national administrations across the European Union. The primary strength of this programme is its innovative approach to creating links between national administrations, and many other authorities in EU Member States. IDA does not aim at purchasing equipment or funding the creation of individual telematics solutions. It helps create generic solutions and universal technical platforms – so that all administrations participating in this programme can benefit from their colleagues' experiences. Today the programme has completed its first phase, and IDA II is set to begin. The IDA II proposal has been adopted by the European Commission, and Commissioner Bangemann has submitted it to the EU Council of Ministers and European Parliament for approval.

THE CORE OF IDA II HAS TWO COMPONENTS

Bringing pilot projects on-line and encouraging the broad sharing of experience.

The first priority for IDA II will be to help all IDA pilot projects become operational services for Member State Administrations. A second focus is to ensure that the know-how gathered through all IDA projects is readily available to administrations across the European Union. The priority areas defined in the Commission proposal are: development of the Internal Market; Implementation of the EMU; Inter-institutional data exchange; Enlargement; Industrial competitiveness; Services to citizens.

Ensuring true interoperability.

IDA will develop generic services and replicable solutions (taking into account results of TEN-Telecom), to ensure cost effectiveness and true interoperability between all networks that are created with IDA support. The scope of activities covers: Generic services; Generic applications; Information content interoperability; Legal and security framework; Quality assurance; Interoperability with national and regional initiatives; and the spread of best practice. In summary, the goal for IDA II is to create the 'right climate' in which all Member State Administrations can purchase and build telematics services, that can be easily interconnected with their counterparts across Europe. The final goal is to encourage the progress of European Integration. For Europe's national administrations, the challenge is to use telematics as more than a technical solution for their internal administrative needs. But the ultimate benefit of IDA II's work will be better and more useful services to the real 'customers' of public administrations – Europe's citizens and industries.

THE GOALS OF IDA II

- To support the functioning of the Internal Market by stimulating the development of telematic networks between administrations.
- To harness the power of telematic networks between administrations for the benefit of citizens and the private sector.
- To foster administrative cooperation among Member State administrations and EU institutions.
- To ensure greater interoperability and avoid the needless proliferation of equipment, fragmented approaches and repeated research in the same area.
- To ease the build-up of telematics networks by deploying common generic services available from the market. ■

For further information:
IDA Central Office, DGIII B/6
Fax: +32 2 2990286
e-mail: ida-central@dg3.cec.be
World Wide Web:
http://www.ispo.cec.be/ida

IDA IN ACTION

The IDA Programme has supported more than 25 projects.

Customs and taxes: Upgrading of existing procedures to pan-European on-line databases and telematics services containing data from each Member State administration.

Fisheries: A ship identification database linking customs and fisheries administrations across Europe - to exchange customs, fleet register, catch reporting and license information.

Agriculture: Electronic data exchange to monitor veterinary control information at borders, the shipment of live animals, crop product and animal nutrition information.

Social Security: The rapid exchange of social security data between European administrations for: pensions; illness, maternity and unemployment benefits; family allowance; work accidents; migrant worker histories.

Public Procurement: Electronic issuing of Calls and receiving of Tenders for public contracts.

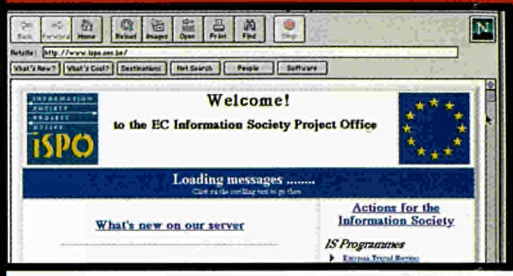
Employment: Electronic data on job vacancies; job applications; and general information on living and working conditions from across Europe.

Health: The electronic exchange of Health Care and disease information.

Statistics: Easy access for European companies and administrations to European statistics, and simple submission of data to the European Statistics Office.

European Agencies: Links between the European Agencies and public administrations in each Member State: European Environmental Agency; Trademarks Agency; Drugs Agency; Medicines Agency.

INFORMATION SOURCES



ISPO SITE JOINS THE 'ONE MILLION' CLUB

After only two years on-line the ISPO Web site has reached the magic number of hits – One Million. Not in total....every month! And it's steadily rising. If there was ever proof that the Information Society is a theme of growing importance and of interest to a large number of people, this is it.

Why is the site so popular? For many reasons, including its updates on the daily developments in the Information Society, news of EU funding for IS projects; a discussion forum and more. The most popular sections in recent weeks have been the Year 2000 and euro areas, the sections on Telecom Policy (Green paper on convergence) and Electronic Commerce.

Other useful electronic services include the broadcasting or downloading to your e-mail box of your personal copy of IS News. Far more people now read the electronic newsletter than its paper version.

So, a word of thanks to all those that helped bring the ISPO site to life, and to all our users – who have made *www.ispo.cec.be* a sterling example of the Information Society in action ■

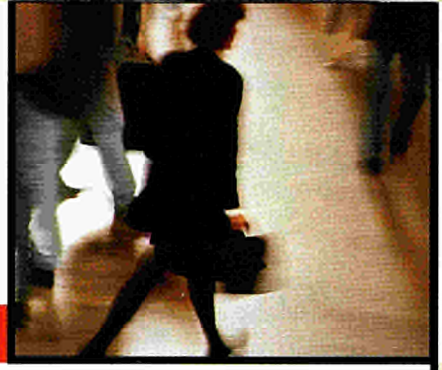
Feedback and suggestions for improvement of the site can be sent to: daniel.drabkin@ispo.cec.be

"Global Charter" continued from page 1.

internationally coordinated way. This would have to be followed up by a meeting with International Ministers to examine how to move towards the proposed Charter. ■

Please send your comments on the Communication to: eif@bxl.dg13.cec.be by the end of March 1998.
To read the full text of the communication point your browser to:
www.ispo.cec.be/eif/policy/com9850en.html

INFORMATION SOCIETY NEWS



ISPO CORNER

OPENING UP THE INFORMATION SOCIETY TO WOMEN (OPUS)

The ISPO funded OPUS project, designed to improve women's understanding of and participation in the Information Society, has three main strands of activity.
The first focuses on identifying and addressing women's needs in the Information Society and providing them with the relevant information. A survey was carried out among women, including women trainees from IRIS member organisations, to identify their experiences, perceptions, attitudes and requirements.
A manual and CD-ROM are being designed to deliver information workshops targeted at women at local information points, based in training organisations in Germany, Greece, Italy and the UK, set up under the project. A project logo and poster has been produced so that the information points have a common identity.
The design and production of a training package for training providers is the second strand of activity. This package aims to transform current training practice so that it responds better to changes brought about by the Information Society and takes particular account of gender.
The creation of a website and homepage on the Internet, featuring papers on women and the Information Society, written by specialists in the field, is the third strand of activity. ■

Contact: IRIS asbl
Rue Capouillet 25
B-1060 Brussels
Tel: +32 2 5349085
Fax: +32 2 5348134
e-mail: mail@iris-asbl.org

FIFTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME: SUBSTANTIAL SHARE FOR 'IS'

Funding for research projects related to the Information Society features as a priority for the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme, whose budget was adopted by the EU Council of Research Ministers on February 12.
Some 3.363 Million ECU, or 33.5% of the total budget was allocated to the topic: Creating a user-friendly Information Society.
The total Programme budget is 14 billion ECU, divided into four thematic areas – Quality of Life, Information Society, Competitive Growth and Energy/Environment. ■

More information on the Fifth Framework Programme can be found at:
http://www.cordis.lu/fifth/home.html

EVENTS UPDATE

FOR USERS ONLY!

Private and corporate citizens' conference: Brussels, 21-22 April 98

The upcoming Conference on the Citizen and the Global Information Society focuses on the most important technological link in the Information Society – the user.
To date, most of the attention surrounding the Information Society centred on technical and supply questions. This conference will leave this discussion aside to examine the societal and cultural values which are being profoundly affected by the change that these new technologies bring.
Other questions addressed will be: *'Can the European Citizen influence Global developments?'; 'How do we shape a citizen's platform to meet the challenges ahead?'; or 'How can our business survive in a global economy?'*
The conference programme focuses on the issues raised in the conference discussion paper, prepared for this meeting by Aidan White, Secretary General of the European Federation of Journalists.
The conference is organised by the Confederation of European Computer User Associations (CECUA) and is financially supported by ISPO. ■

Further information on the conference, including a copy of the conference discussion paper can be found at:
http://www.ispo.cec.be/citizen/

Conference Registration Office:
Tel: +32 2 7431540
Fax: +32 2 7431550

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CALENDAR

ESIS Conference
Brussels (B)
18-19 March 1998
European Commission ISPO
Fax: +32 2 299 41 80
e-mail: Androulla.Kaminara@ispo.cec.be
http://www.ispo.cec.be/esis/ESISConference.html

Multimedia Access to Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Heritage
Cairo (Egypt)
27-29 April, 1998
Regional Information Technology Institute
Fax: +202 3391380
e-mail: culture98@riti.risec.com.eg
http://www.cultureware.ritsec.com.eg/culture98

ED-MEDIA 98
World Conference on Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia
Freiburg (D)
20-25 June, 1998
Tel: +39 1 804 973 3987
Fax: +39 804 978 7449
e-mail: AACE@virginia.edu
http://www.aace.org

Beyond covergence
Twelfth boiennial ITS Conference
Stockholm (S)
21-24 June, 1998
Stockholm Convention Bureau "ITS 98"
Tel: +46 8 7361500
Fax: +46 8 348441
e-mail: 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
Ms. Pirkko Kuorehjärvi
Tel: +358 9 39672073
Fax: +358 9 39672030
e-mail: pirkko.kuorehjarvi@stakes.fi
http://www.stakes.fi/tidecong

Competing in the Information Society
New ways of doing Business
Genova (IT)
24-26 June 1998
European Trends Association
Tel: +39 362 231231
Fax: +39 362 221566
e-mail: etass@tin.it
www.aetnet.it/cis

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ISPO SECRETARIAT

Free phone service

Austria	0660 5835
Belgium	0800 13891
Denmark	800 1 8888
Finland	0800 113635
France	0800 91 7227
Germany	0130 821943
Greece	00800 3212635
Ireland	1800 553224
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Netherlands	0800 0222086
Portugal	0505 329635
Spain	900 993290
Sweden	020 791635
United Kingdom	0800 962114

Payphone: +32 2 2968800 or +32 2 2968900

Fax: +32 2 2994170 or +32 2 2994180

e-mail: ispo@ispo.cec.be

World Wide Web: http://www.ispo.cec.be

Mail:
Information Society Project Office
BU 24 0/74, rue de la Loi 200,
B-1049 Brussels

Design and production: POPLAR, Brussels