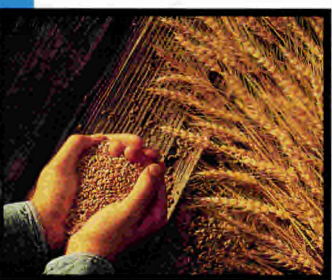


**INFORMATION SOCIETY & THE REGIONS**

## REGIONAL 'IS' STRATEGIES: NEW COOPERATION FOR BETTER COHESION



For Europe's less-favoured regions, the goal of becoming players in the Information Society has encouraged them to build a dialogue between one another that favours cooperation over competition.

Even more significantly, this 'IS' challenge has revived new contacts *within* these regions – between authorities, social partners and other local actors – to make economic regeneration a team effort where all players are pulling in the same direction.

Recognising the benefits of the rapid development of the Information Society – and the potential dangers of exclusion – some 22 of Europe's less-favoured regions are participating in the European Commission's Regional Information Society Initiative (RISI), a joint action of DG V (Social Affairs), DG XIII (Telecommunications and Information Market) and DG XVI (Regional Policy)

This pilot scheme was created in 1996 to encourage the development of consensus and partnership amongst key regional players around a Regional Information Society Strategy and to translate their commitment and cooperation into strategic priorities expressed in Regional Action Plans. These Action Plans will serve as common frameworks for action, identifying key applications in these regions, and for assessing their technical and financial feasibility, commercial viability, social acceptance and their potential economic contribution to regional development.

These activities were seen as providing a sound basis for the best allocation of existing financial resources, including Community support under the Structural Funds. The activity within each region has been coordinated by a Steering Group of key players, assisted by a Regional Information Society Unit.

**Joint action**

The RISI was inspired by the Inter-Regional Information Society Initiative (IRISI), a joint action of the governments of six European regions: the North West of England, Sachsen in Germany, Nord Pas-de-Calais in France, Valencia in Spain, Central Macedonia in Greece and Piemonte in Italy. All these regions faced severe economic and unemployment problems, fuelled by a base of declining industries. They also shared the need to develop new skills and economic activities, and to solve the social problems of integrating rural areas into their core economic activities.

In late 1994, these six regions committed themselves to a long-term approach to developing the Information Society from a regional perspective. They also pledged to work toward these objectives as a joint effort. The IRISI pilot action was funded by the European Commission Directorates General XIII and XVI.

Today, with the IRISI pilot action completed, these six regions continue to maintain and develop their initiatives. In every case, the awareness of the populations of the risks and opportunities of the Information Society has been increased; new region-wide partnerships have been developed; and strategies and priorities for action have been defined. Most importantly, these partners have started a series of demonstration applications, and are moving rapidly toward the most important part – the implementation of their Information Society strategies.

Participants in these strategy building processes emphasise that the cooperative nature of this initiative helped each region achieve its goals faster and more efficiently than 'going it alone'. Perhaps the most important lesson these less favoured regions learned is that their true competitors are not each other, but North America and the Pacific Rim.

**Key benefit**

While the approach and type of initiatives was different for each region participating in IRISI, a common approach for the participating regions was their focus on awareness and networking activities, the demonstration of the potential benefits of using Information and Communications Technologies and on including all actors in the social dialogue and strategy building process.

In all cases, the IRISI initiative has been a lever for regional development, and has created a platform for region-wide and cross-sectoral development. The key benefit here is that this new brand of cooperation within the regions and between them avoids needless over-investment and counterproductive competition between regions.



*Editorial by Barbara Roche MP President of the Telecommunications Council January-June 1998*

**TELECOM LIBERALISATION: KEYSTONE OF A 'PEOPLES EUROPE'**

The opening of the European market to competition in telecommunications is a great opportunity for businesses and consumers. Already today – in the first months of liberalisation – consumers are beginning to see services that are focused on their needs. This, combined with reduced costs, is opening services to a wider number of people, and building the true foundations of the Information Age. In the past, the privilege of low-priced or tailored telecom services was available only to big business, who could side-step the high cost of international calls and enhanced services by creating their own private networks. An open European telecom market means that these same advantages will soon be available to Europe's smaller companies. This will be a major step forward in terms of competition, and a move which will certainly stimulate employment. The lower prices that liberalisation brings will boost the development of new services and applications. We must ensure that this blossoming of the Information Society is inclusive, and that these new services and technologies work for everyone in society. It is vital that all citizens are encouraged to get involved, and share the benefits of the Information Society. This is especially true for those that do not own a computer. These potential new users must feel that the Information Society is relevant to them, and not an elitist tool. Merely transposing European Directives into national law is not enough to build a 'single telecom market'. We must look to national regulators and the Commission to ensure that the agreements all Member States have made in Brussels are enforced in national markets. I look forward to seeing close cooperation between Member States, national regulators and the Commission to see that this new and open telecom market brings concrete benefits to all citizens. 1 January 1998 is not the end of the European institutions' involvement in telecommunications. During the UK Presidency, among other issues, we look forward to the Council discussing action to encourage the early introduction of Third Generation mobile services. This will enable us to make the UMTS standard another European success story, just as we have seen GSM become the effective world standard for digital mobile services. We also hope to make progress on a Directive on digital signatures. A European framework for digital signatures will be essential if we are to seize the opportunities presented by electronic commerce – which will mean more jobs and more growth for Europe. By creating a single competitive telecom market in Europe, we can ensure that one of the cornerstones of a People's Europe – the ability to overcome the traditional barriers of geography and borders – will be within reach of a wider cross-section of our citizens and companies. This is an achievement we can all be proud of. I would like to pay tribute to Commissioners Bangemann and van Miert, and MEPs Mel Read and Wim van Velzen – and all of their colleagues – for working so hard to make this dream a reality. ■

*This is an edited version of a speech given by Mrs Roche on the occasion of the event "1998 - a new era for telecommunications", held in Brussels on 19 January 1998.*



**INFORMATION SOCIETY  
& THE REGIONS**

*"Regional 'IS' strategies" continued from page 1.*

The IRISI pilot action has resulted in a broad basis of experiences and achievements, which have been documented in the final reports of each of the six regions, in a report on the network of the IRISI and an evaluation of the IRISI pilot action by a team of independent experts.

**Examples and achievements**

A few examples from these reports may illustrate the approach followed and achievements made by these regions:

- One of the major benefits for all IRISI regions has been the enhancement of regional planning capability and a growth of competence and self-confidence:

*"The development of the regional Information Society strategy leveraged the region's previous experience in developing pilot programmes..."* (Nord Pas de Calais)

*"...the region has learned much from the project and, in the process, increased its strategic capacity for region-wide development..."* (North West England)

*"For the first time producers, users, academics, regulators and the regional authorities have come together and shared their expertise, needs and development plans.... This kind of coordination of the key regional players has transformed them into considerable regional assets..."* (Central Macedonia). These are typical comments from the participating regions. In all cases, the IRISI initiative has been instrumental in becoming a lever for regional development, and for providing a framework for region-wide and

cross-sectoral development thereby avoiding needless competition and over-investment.

- The North-West England Information Society Initiative based its Strategy and Action Plan on a broad consultation of all relevant organisations in the region, and received contributions from more than 500 people, attending sub-regional awareness and strategy seminars.

- Central Macedonia, used a regional TV station to broadcast its Information Society message. It also hosted a series of workshops.

- The Saxony regional Information Society initiative hosted more than 50 events which attracted nearly 10,000 people.

- The Community of Valencia got its message to the public by building partnerships with saving banks, SME associations, a network and service providers, investment clubs. It created the Foundation for the Valencia Office for the Information Society (OVSI). Each participating institution provided additional funds. Learning from this example, Saxony has adopted a similar model – the Saxonian Development Agency for Telematics Applications.

- The Region of Nord Pas-de Calais organised more than 30 workshops and created seven thematic round table discussions with experts. All key regional players were involved in this reflection, which aimed to build consensus on long term visions and objectives, on opportunities and priorities for action in their region. This regional authority also formed a partnership with the journalism school to establish an information agency specialised in

publicising and promoting the regional initiative.

- North West England raised peoples' awareness by creating 16 different working groups (some geographically-focused, others based on application types) which brought together some 400 people.

**A learning experience**

The IRISI pilot action has been a learning experience from which many successes and useful results have emerged. For the participating regions, the outcomes have exceeded the expectations. The final report from North West England, typical of the conclusions of the other regions, states *"IRISI has not been the sole cause of the change in the 'spirit of times' or 'zeitgeist'... but for a modest investment it has created returns in the North West that few would have thought possible. If a zeitgeist ever had a kick-start, it had it here. We want it to continue."*

A key factor for the success of each regional initiative had been their commitment to a collaborative approach, resulting in the establishment of the IRISI Network as a vehicle for joint learning, for the sharing of experience and expertise, and for mutual encouragement and support. Without this supportive framework for common learning and support, it is likely that some of the six would have fallen by the wayside. Indeed, it has been the publicly expressed view of one external evaluator, that none of the six regional initiatives would have survived without their Network. ■

*For more information:*  
IRISI: <http://www.iris.polito.it/>  
RISI: <http://www.ispo.cec.be/risi/>

**ERIS@**

Understanding the benefits of inter-regional collaboration, all regions participating in the IRISI and RISI schemes recently declared their intent to establish a European Regional Information Society Association (ERIS@). On the occasion of the ESIS conference on 20 March in Brussels, the first joint plenary meeting was held. The objectives of ERIS@ are two-fold: in the first

instance it will facilitate the exchange of information and experience between ERIS@ member regions and in the medium to long term it aims to act as the "voice of the regions" on policy issues relating to the Information Society and Regional Development.

As one of the main mechanisms for facilitating inter-regional networking, ERIS@ members approved the creation of inter-regional thematic working groups in six priority areas comprising

education and training, public administration, SMEs, rural areas, healthcare, social affairs. Members also approved plans for hosting best practice workshops, establishing a policy working group and start preparing an ERIS@ General Assembly provisionally scheduled for September 1998. ■

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**INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION**

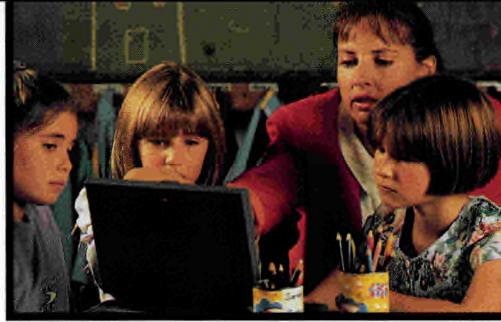
**BUILDING THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN INFORMATION BRIDGE**

EuroMed Net '98, the first regional conference to focus on the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society, brought together some 350 enthusiastic participants from across the Mediterranean countries and the EU to exchange ideas, and to discuss the creation of an IS strategy which will bring these regions closer. Attendance at the meeting, which was held last month in Cyprus, included IT specialists and scientists, industry leaders, entrepreneurs and public officials from Euro-Mediterranean ministries. The conference highlighted the large number of initiatives that have been undertaken in the Mediterranean countries, showcasing examples of innovations and best practise across the region. This provides an excellent basis for further cooperation with the EU. The Conference report highlighted the need to rapidly implement an exhaustive list of regional initiatives, such as:

- Creation of a Euro-Mediterranean IS High Level Committee to develop a Euro-Mediterranean IS strategy.
- Establishment of an ICT business roundtable where European and Mediterranean Chief Executives can exchange views.
- Promote and support the development of national IS strategies for the Mediterranean, and for the networking of key players in the private and public sectors of these countries.
- Develop a network of national IS Project Offices.
- Enlarge the scope of the European Survey of Information Society (ESIS) to include the Mediterranean countries.
- Rapidly interconnect Euro-Mediterranean research institutes via the Internet by extending the European TEN 34 initiative to all Mediterranean countries
- The launching of a new EU package of cooperative pilot projects in areas including education, promotion of cultural heritage and tourism, healthcare networks, technologies for industries and electronic commerce.

The overall conclusion from participants was that this meeting proved that the scientific, business and institutional environment of the Mediterranean region is ready and mature to pursue cooperative pilot projects and to implement these regional initiatives. ■

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[androulla.kaminara@ispo.cec.be](mailto:androulla.kaminara@ispo.cec.be)



# NETD@YS BRINGS THE INFORMATION SOCIETY TO EUROPE'S SCHOOLS

Netd@ys Europe '98 is now rolling. The second year of this Europe-wide initiative aimed at bringing schools, libraries, museums and many other learning places closer to the Information Society is planned for the week of 17-24 October. This initiative, launched by the European Commission in the framework of the action plan "Learning in the information society", benefits from the active support of Ministries of Education from the Member States, the European Economic Area and of many private sponsors

Judging by last year's over-whelming interest – with over 1,000 events and 15,000 participating schools – this year's event will be even more dynamic.

This result highlights the strong demand from grass-root institutions and organisations to help to raise public awareness regarding the use of new technologies for learning. The initiative has also been a catalyst to help

and encourage public authorities in several countries and regions to implement their strategies for equipping schools and for Internet access. Netd@ys Europe '98 is expected to generate even greater demand.

Netd@ys Europe 1998 is thus a most important and attractive platform and brand name for schools and other educational organisations to promote their experiences and to showcase how they successfully use new media for learning and teaching.

With emphasis on three key-words – awareness-raising, content and networking, the primary objectives of Netdays '98 are:

- To consolidate the 1997 experience regarding the development of school networks, promotion of trans-regional and trans-national cooperation and to launch awareness-raising and teacher-training projects in these new information and communication technologies.

- To create links with any kind of organisations that may enhance the educational value of the Internet (public libraries, museums, theatres, cultural and youth organisations, cyber-centres, job and multimedia resource centres ...).

- To increase participation by local partners (local banks, businesses, associations, regional and local press), in the sponsoring of promotional activities.

- To link up Netd@ys Europe with similar initiatives in other parts of the world (mainly in the United States, Canada, Japan and Central and Eastern Europe). ■

Join the Netd@ys now in consulting the Netd@ys Europe 1998 Web sites: [www.netdays.org](http://www.netdays.org) or [www.europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/netdays/home.html](http://www.europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/netdays/home.html)

For further information contact: Alain Dumort EC - DG XXII Head of sector "New Technologies in Education and Training" Tel: +32 2 2966418 Fax: +32 2 2966297 e-mail: [netdays@dg22.cec.be](mailto:netdays@dg22.cec.be)

## DISTANCE LEARNING FOR 'TRAVELLER' FAMILIES

An effective, inexpensive solution to distance learning



Nearly 1 million children across Europe are potentially excluded from following a normal course of studies because their parents' professions involve 'occupational travel'. Occupational traveller families work in a number of professions, such as circuses and related entertainment fields, as barge operators, and in other professions where the family travels together throughout the year. While educational structures exist in most European countries to allow children of travelling families to study by correspondence, the weak link is that there is very little dialogue possible between the student and teachers. Or between the teacher and the parents.

The TOPILOT project is set to drastically improve the quality of distance learning, with its combination of local multimedia (interactive CD-i discs) and inexpensive mobile communication (using GSM telephony). Using the TOPILOT package, a student follows courses, tutorials and exercises on the interactive disc. Through the GSM link to this unit, the system automatically submits the results of the student's work to the teacher. Teachers can even track the student's progress and give feed-back to students and parents as needed, as the family moves from place to place. The power of CD-i technology is that it can contain the range of learning materials that a student is exposed to in a normal classroom situation – multi-media learning materials, textbooks, games, drawings, animations, or video fragments. The first pilot tests began with tutors in September 1997, using teaching content specially developed for the target groups. In March 1998, a 'live' second phase began with about 180 children across Europe. The project team that developed the TOPILOT concept consists of 15 schools and research institutes in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Philips Interactive Media and the Expertise Centre for Digital Media provided technical insight. The project is funded by the EU's Tele-matics For Education and Training Programme. ■

Contact: Kasper Peters, EFECOT Tel +32 2 2274066 Fax +32 2 2274069 e-mail: [kasper.peters@efecot.onderwijs.net](mailto:kasper.peters@efecot.onderwijs.net) <http://edm-topilot.luc.ac.be>

## NETD@YS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

To benefit from a European Commission grant for participation in activities related to Netd@ys Europe 1998, a detailed project draft and financial dossier must be submitted before 30 April 1998 (date as per postmark). The following points should be taken into account:

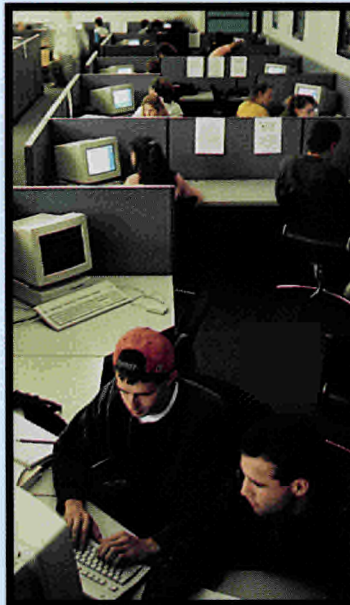
- Emphasis on the pedagogical value of the use of Internet in schools and in all learning places.
- Targeted at primary and secondary schools, including technical and vocational institutions (especially schools and institutions involved in the Socrates programme and the Comenius sub-programme) and at the initiation and training of teachers in the use of new technologies.
- Participation of institutions indirectly related to the edu-

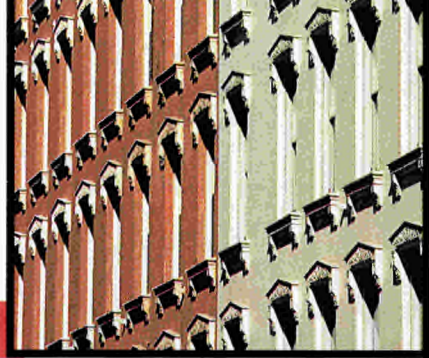
ational world (museums, public libraries, theatres, job centres, youth organisations, etc...).

- Creation of new networks or the extension of already existing networks; promotional activities on specific societal issues such as the fight against intolerance and racism, the fight against violence at school, the environment, the introduction of the euro and the preparation of younger generations for the challenges of the third millennium, etc. Special attention paid to projects involving partnerships developed at local, regional, national and/or European level, as well as to those reflecting a European dimension.

- The EU grant covers only part of the total project cost; this grant can by no means exceed 50% of the total cost.

It is worth noting that the purchase of hardware or software equipment is not eligible for co-financing by the European Commission. ■





**ISPO CORNER**

# ACCESS FOR ALL

## FRANCE PLANS INFORMATION LINKS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

By evaluating the possibility of using electronic information tools as a standard part of social housing, French authorities are taking a positive step toward creating an Information Society that is truly for all citizens. The French social housing authorities, the French Governmental Architecture and Planning Office and the European coordinating committee on social housing are participating in ISIS, an ISPO supported project which is studying the feasibility of installing 'intelligent' services in social apartment blocks. The objective of ISIS is to identify a portfolio of tenant and building management services which can be combined on one

network and offered to social housing locations. Services such as meter reading for power and water utilities, welfare and medical services for the elderly can be offered over this type of shared service. The fact that services can be shared on a common network allows service providers to offer them at a low cost and still make a profit, say project spokespersons. This concept makes it possible for social housing organisations across France to connect their buildings to information networks which can be operated to show returns on the capital investment. Project managers are pleased with the progress of ISIS. Feasibility studies will be available in June and large-scale trials could begin in the second half of 1998. The final multi-service network will be developed jointly by IT manufacturers, systems houses and service providers. ■

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*ISIS project leader*  
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 Fax + 33 1 53837649

**EVENTS UPDATE**

## EXPERT HEARING ON CRYPTOGRAPHY

The political discussion on encryption and digital signatures for computer transmissions is expected to take a major step forward on April 23-24, at the European Expert Hearing on Cryptography in Copenhagen. The aim of this hearing is to clarify specific questions on the development and use of digital signatures and encryption and to provide a basis for the further political discussion of these issues. Experts from industry, the academic world and government will discuss market trends, business needs and legal issues surrounding cryptography. This will also be an opportunity for Information Technology companies to present digital signature and encryption products and services. This is a follow-up to the Commission's Communication

on "Ensuring trust and confidence in electronic communications". The document emphasises that cryptographic technologies, in particular digital signatures and encryption, are a major enabling factor for the development of the Information Society. Digital signatures allow for the identification of correspondents and the integrity of data; encryption protects privacy and confidentiality of data. The hearing is organised by the European Commission Directorate General XIII (Telecommunications, the information market and the exploitation of research), and the Danish Ministry of Research and Information Technology. ■

*For additional information:*  
*Hearing Web site:*  
<http://www.fsk.dk/fsk/div/hearing/>  
*Commission Communication:*  
<http://www.ispo.cec.be/eif/policy/97503toc.html>  
*European Internet Forum:*  
<http://www.ispo.cec.be/eif/>

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 Newcastle upon Tyne (UK)  
 24 April, 1998  
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 Lori Hettle  
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 Fax: +44 191 202 6974

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 29-30 April, 1998  
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**Online Collaboration Berlin 1998**  
 Berlin (D)  
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**3rd TIDE Congress**  
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 European Commission DG XIII  
 Helsinki (FI)  
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 Fax: +358 9 39672030  
 e-mail: [pirkko.kuorehjarvi@stakes.fi](mailto:pirkko.kuorehjarvi@stakes.fi)  
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**Competing in the Information Society**  
**New ways of doing Business**  
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[www.aetnet.it/cis](http://www.aetnet.it/cis)

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