



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COM(97) 460 final

96/0283 (CNS)

Amended proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

ADOPTING A MULTIANNUAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME TO STIMULATE THE  
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN EUROPE (INFORMATION SOCIETY)

(presented by the Commission pursuant to Article 189 a (2)  
of the EC-Treaty)

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The Commission has decided that a legal basis should be proposed for a number of budget lines, and has sent to the budgetary authority a Communication on this issue (Communication of the Commission to the budgetary authority on the legal basis and the maximum amounts, SEC(94) 1106 final, of 6 July 1994). The present proposal is submitted in line with this communication to cover budget line B5-331, and concerns a multiannual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the information society in Europe (Information Society).

The development of the information society in Europe is the result of a permanently evolving interaction between market, social, and cultural forces, which affects the way people live, learn and work. Many people are already undergoing profound change in their social and working lives, and worry about the growing impact of the development of the information society on employment, training, and styles of life and work. Many people and enterprises in Europe are not fully prepared for the new information and communication technologies, which may lead to serious disadvantages for Europe's possibilities to reap the potential benefits the information society offers in terms of higher economic growth, more employment (albeit different) and better quality of life.

It is therefore necessary that ordinary people and businesses become more involved in the identification of their needs, in the development of applications to support those needs, as well as in the management of the process to implement the information society in general. This cannot be achieved by market forces alone, which tend to concentrate on short-term return on investment, and therefore often neglect accompanying measures aimed at longer-term socio-economic benefits.

Some initiatives were already taken at the level of the Member States, but without accompanying actions at the level of the European Union there is a considerable risk of duplication of effort, lack of synergy and multi-speed development which will increase already existing distortions between and within Member States, as regards access to the information society.

In order to guarantee a successful transition to a mature information society, it should be avoided that entire groups of people or social and economic actors be marginalized or develop an attitude of rejection. This would be likely to happen in the absence of targeted efforts to promote widespread access to and familiarity with information services and applications which are more and more useful and relevant to personal and business needs.

The European Union must contribute to a better understanding by citizens, companies and institutions of the issues, opportunities and risks at stake, helping to create confidence in progress, and to mobilize popular support for the information society.

So far, the following steps have been undertaken:

In the White Paper on "Growth, competitiveness, employment - The challenges and ways forward into the 21st century" (COM(93) 700 final), submitted by the Commission on 5 December 1993, the Commission acknowledges that the implementation of the information society is critical for the future of Europe. The document stresses that information and communication technologies and related services have the potential to promote steady and sustainable growth, to increase competitiveness, to open new job opportunities and to improve the quality of life of all Europeans.

The White Paper was examined by the European Council in Brussels on 10 and 11 December 1993. The Council gave its full political support and requested that a report be prepared on the information society by a group of prominent persons, providing concrete recommendations for action.

The report of the high level group on the information society of 26 May 1994 "Europe and the global information society - Recommendations to the European Council" emphasised, amongst other things, the urgency of responding to the new challenges.

The report was submitted to the European Council in Corfu on 24 and 25 June 1994, who recognised the importance of the opportunity and the scale of the challenge facing Europe. It requested the European Commission to prepare an Action Plan containing a set of measures that the Union and the Member States should take as soon as possible in order to establish the information society in Europe under the best possible conditions.

The Commission responded to this request by means of a communication of 19 July 1994 to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "Europe's way to the information society. An action plan" (COM(94) 347 final). This plan underlines that although initiative must clearly lie with the private sector, the Member States and the Union must obviously support these efforts, thus confirming the initial political impetus given by the White Paper and the European Council meeting in Corfu, by implementing a dependable and stable framework, and setting an example in those fields for which they have responsibility.

It was in this perspective that the Action Plan structured the different policies and actions under four main headings: the legal and regulatory framework; networks, basic services, applications and content; social, societal and cultural aspects; and promotion of the information society. On this basis, first steps have been initiated. In particular, the Commission has prepared a Communication on the impact of Information Society on other policies, which highlights the need for a broad approach to information society policy development.

In order to bring about a broad consensus amongst all the players in the economic, social, cultural and academic fields, the Commission has set up the Information Society Forum and the High Level Expert Group on the Social and Societal Aspects of the Information Society.

The first interim report of the High Level Expert Group of January 1996 contained a set of first reflections in view of the preparation of a final report.

In its first annual report to the European Commission of June 1996 the Information Society Forum recommended that the Commission should launch EU-wide awareness raising initiatives, implement actions best suited for the promotion of best practices, promote the use of new technologies, give extra attention to explore the economic and

social implications of the information society, and to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the information society.

On 24 July 1996 the European Commission adopted a Green Paper on 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First', which is intended to deepen the political, social and civil dialogue on the most important social and societal aspects of the information society. In the light of the reactions received, the Commission will present action proposals in 1997.

The Midrand Conference in South Africa, by bringing together representatives from all layers of society (government, business, labour, academia and community) proved that there is a need to develop links between European initiatives and projects with an international dimension from developing countries; to create an inventory of information society initiatives in the developing world; to develop national and trans-national fora to disseminate information, enhance co-ordination and spread the knowledge of learned lessons and best practices. The Chairperson's conclusions at the Midrand Conference underlined that special emphasis should be put on the development of integrated systems to meet people's basic needs, particularly in rural areas. Applications for developing countries should focus on universal access, local content, empowerment of SME's, with equal engagement in the development of the physical infrastructure and of human resources.

The Rome Conference highlighted that the information society needs to be constructed in the Mediterranean by further developing telecommunications and research networks, education and training systems, as well as fostering common initiatives like workshops, training and pilot projects. At the same time it was stressed that the needs in terms of new information and communications technologies be given consideration when governments, the scientific community and the European Union join forces to develop information society initiatives.

The second European Union/Central and Eastern European Countries Forum on the Information Society in Prague (follow up of the first Forum held in June 1995 in Brussels) confirmed the need to foster awareness actions of all issues (social, legal and political) involved in the development of the information society, particularly for those European countries which are reforming their economies. An action plan oriented towards the implementation of European level co-operative projects was presented for follow-up.

The Commission's White paper on "Growth, competitiveness, employment", the report of the high level group ("Bangemann Report"), the Action Plan, the first annual report of the Information Society Forum, the conclusions of the Midrand, Rome and Prague Conferences, the growing world-wide activity in the field of the information society, in particular the major studies launched by the OECD and the interest shown by the G7 countries, have considerably broadened the scope of the activities undertaken so far in the context of the development of the telecommunications policy and the trans-European information networks.

Thus, the broader concept of the "information society" makes it necessary to explore new perspectives and to stimulate new activities, in particular of a cross-sectoral nature. As recognised in the Communication on "The Information Society: From Corfu to Dublin. The new emerging priorities"; the multifaceted nature of the information society implies a need for greater policy coordination between the various Community policies and

between the Communities different instruments and funding mechanisms. In particular, this includes increasing public awareness of the possible impacts of the information society, launching actions that demonstrate best practice and sharing of experiences and knowledge amongst the different actors in Europe, as well as ensuring that experiences and best practices are exchanged at international level and that the global dimension of the information society is taken into consideration.

The activities foreseen under this proposal therefore include three action lines:

### ACTION LINES

#### (a) measures to raise awareness:

- the dissemination of information and promotion of actions aimed at a better understanding of the opportunities, benefits and possible risks of the information society, for instance with regard to different user groups, professional associations etc., and monitoring of the evolution of people's awareness through regular surveys,
- the gathering and identification of citizens' and users' needs, and the stimulation of the interest of industry, in particular small and medium sized enterprises (SME's), in providing services and applications to meet these needs, for instance through presentations of EU information society activities, networks, applications and concrete opportunities to be exploited,
- the demonstration of potential impacts of the information society at regional level, the promotion of exchange of relevant information between cities and regions, and giving visibility to the general public on concrete projects being implemented to service their needs,
- the organization and follow-up of fora on the development of the information society, advising the Commission on the challenges to overcome,

#### (b) measures to help establish the information society in Europe:

- the analysis of the technical, economic, social and regulatory aspects, the appraisal of the challenges raised by the transition to the information society, as well as the identification of actions necessary for the optimization of the socio-economic benefits,
- the assessment of the opportunities and barriers which disadvantaged social groups and peripheral and less favoured regions may face in accessing and using information society products and services; the identification of appropriate measures to overcome these obstacles and to grasp the related benefits, the promotion of information systems and services serving in particular the needs of elderly, disabled and unemployed people,
- the analysis of current initiatives at European and national level regarding the provision of applications, based in particular on a permanent inventory of projects which facilitate the deployment of the information society,
- the provision of transparency, based in particular on a permanent inventory, concerning ongoing policies and programmes at European and national level,
- the contribution, on the basis of identified best programmes and practices, to the European wide take-up of successful examples in information society policies, projects

and services, for instance by supporting demonstration actions, in particular in small communities acting as small-scale, flexible test sites where new approaches can be tried out, with the wide participation of citizens from different social groups, as well as with the active involvement of social partners and voluntary associations,

- the promotion of synergy and cooperation between ongoing studies and activities at European and national level, in particular by catalytic brokerage action helping in the creation of partnerships among interested organisations and individuals,

- the identification and evaluation of the financing mechanisms needed to develop the information society, in particular those able to help stimulate public/private partnerships for the deployment of applications of public interest,

- the identification of obstacles to the functioning of the Internal Market in the area of the information society and the consideration of measures to guarantee the full benefit of the area without frontiers for its development,

- the launching of actions to ascertain the priorities of SME's and regarding the obstacles hampering the use by SME's of information technologies, in close coordination with Commission efforts to mobilise different groups of ICT users,

(c) measures to take into consideration and make use of the global dimension of the information society:

- the enhancement of visibility of the global dimension of the information society, in particular through an inventory of initiatives taken worldwide, the exchange of information with third countries, and notably with developing countries, and through the collaboration in the preparation of demonstration actions, either bilaterally or in collaboration with international organisations,

These activities shall not duplicate existing possibilities for actions in fields already covered under other instruments, e.g. in the fields of research and development, trans-European networks, information content and standardization. In order to avoid overlap, to complement other initiatives, and to bring more expertise into this programme, the relevant services shall be associated with the development of activities. They shall be invited to participate in the definition of the work programme, on which calls for proposal will be based, the evaluation and selection of proposals, as well as the review of results.

In the light of the above mentioned, the Commission invites the Council to adopt, after consulting the European Parliament, the attached decision. For the adoption of this decision the EC Treaty does not provide for other powers than those defined in Article 235.

Amended proposal for a

**COUNCIL DECISION**

**ADOPTING A MULTIANNUAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME TO STIMULATE  
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN EUROPE (INFORMATION SOCIETY)**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 235 thereof,

Having regard to the Commission proposal,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament<sup>1</sup>,

Whereas the establishment of the information society can, by introducing new forms of economic, political and social relations, help the Community to cope with the challenges of the next century, in particular the creation of new jobs, as indicated in the White Paper on 'Growth, competitiveness and employment - the challenges and ways forward into the 21st century';

Whereas the European Council in Corfu on 24 and 25 June 1994 took note of the Recommendations of the High Level Group on the information society as presented in the report 'Europe and the global information society' and the Commission established an Action Plan consisting of concrete measures at both Community and Member States level;

Whereas the European Council in Florence on 21 and 22 June 1996 underlined the potential of the information society for education and training, for the organization of work and for employment creation;

Whereas the pace of progress in the development of the information society depends on a large extent on the awareness, understanding and support by citizens and public and private organisations, of the possibilities of applications of new information and communication technologies to service people's and business' needs;

Whereas the establishment of the information society will require availability, for each citizen, company or public organization, in every part of the Community, of information of any nature they need;

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<sup>1</sup>OJ No

Whereas the establishment of the information society will gradually reorganize the nature and content of human activity in all areas, and have important cross-sectoral effects in areas of activity hitherto independent;

Whereas the measures necessary for the implementation of the information society have to take into account the economic and social cohesion of the Community as well as the continuity in the functioning of the Internal Market;

Whereas the definition of these measures requires preparatory analyses, aimed at improving understanding of the various fields which may be affected by Community actions related to the information society;

Whereas the first interim report of the High Level Expert Group on the Social and Societal Aspects of the Information Society of January 1996 contained a set of first reflections in view of the preparation of a final report;

Whereas the first annual report of the Information Society Forum to the European Commission of June 1996 recommended that the Commission should launch EU-wide awareness raising initiatives, promote actions best suited for the promotion of best practices, promote the use of new technologies, give extra attention to explore the economic and social implications of the information society, and to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the information society;

Whereas the European Commission on 24 July 1996 adopted a Green Paper on 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First', which is intended to deepen the political, social and civil dialogue on the most important social and societal aspects of the information society; in the light of the reactions received, the Commission will present action proposals in 1997;

Whereas the measures necessary for the implementation of the information society have to take into account the global dimension of the information society;

Whereas the G7 Ministerial Conference on Information Society and Development in Midrand, South Africa from 13 to 15 May 1996 recognised that the "information society model" should be pursued for the benefit of the developing countries, to solve their unique needs and challenges, to support their sustainable growth and to ensure their effective participation in the emerging global "wired" economy;

Whereas the Rome Conference on 30 and 31 May 1996 recognised that one of the elements of the political dialogue between the European Community and the twelve countries involved in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, started in November 1995 with the Barcelona Conference, is indeed the construction of a truly open information society in the Mediterranean region which will benefit in terms of growth, competitiveness and employment to users, industries and service providers of information and communication technologies;

Whereas the second European Union/Central and Eastern European Countries Forum on the Information Society in Prague on 12 and 13 September 1996 confirmed that the issues involved in the development of the information society are particularly important to European countries which are reforming their economy and underlined the need to provide platforms for information exchange and discussion;



Whereas existing possibilities for actions, e.g. in the fields of research and development, trans-european networks, information content, social policy, and standardization, shall not be duplicated;

Whereas progress of this programme should be continuously and systematically monitored; whereas at the end of this programme there should be a final assessment of results obtained compared with the objectives set out in this Decision;

Whereas it is necessary to fix the duration of the programme;

Whereas, for the adoption of this decision, the Treaty does not provide for other powers than those defined in Article 235,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

### **Article 1**

1. A programme (Information Society) is hereby adopted with the following objectives:

- increasing public awareness and understanding of the potential impact of the information society and its new applications,
- helping to establish the information society in Europe, by promoting widespread access to and familiarity in the use of new information services and applications.
- giving consideration to and making use of the worldwide dimension of the information society.

2. The programme shall cover a period from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 2001.

3. The Budgetary Authority shall authorize the appropriations within the framework of the annual budgetary procedure and in compliance with the financial perspective.

4. The activities foreseen are actions of a cross-sectoral nature, complementing Community actions in other fields. None of these shall duplicate the work being carried out in these fields under other Community programmes.

### **Article 2**

In order to attain the objectives referred to in Article 1, the following actions shall be undertaken:

(a) measures to raise awareness:

- the dissemination of information and promotion of actions aimed at a better understanding of the opportunities, benefits and possible risks of the information society,
- the gathering and identification of citizens' and users' needs, and the stimulation of the interest of industry, in particular small and medium sized enterprises (SME's), in providing services and applications to meet these needs,

- the demonstration of potential impacts of the information society at regional level, the promotion of exchange of relevant information between cities and regions, and giving visibility to the general public on concrete projects being implemented to service their needs,

- the organization and follow-up of fora on the development of the information society, advising the Commission on the challenges to overcome,

(b) measures to help establish the information society in Europe:

- the analysis of the technical, economic, social and regulatory aspects, the appraisal of the challenges raised by the transition to the information society, as well as the identification of actions necessary for the optimization of the socio-economic benefits,

- the assessment of the opportunities and barriers which disadvantaged social groups and peripheral and less favoured regions may face in accessing and using information society products and services; the identification of appropriate measures to overcome these obstacles and to grasp the related benefits,

- the analysis of current initiatives at European and national level regarding the provision of applications, based in particular on a permanent inventory of projects which facilitate the deployment of the information society,

- the provision of transparency, based in particular on a permanent inventory, concerning ongoing policies and programmes at European and national level,

- the contribution, on the basis of identified best programmes and practices, to the European wide take-up of successful examples in information society policies, projects and services,

- the promotion of synergy and cooperation between ongoing studies and activities at European and national level,

- the identification and evaluation of the financing mechanisms needed to develop the information society, in particular those able to help stimulate public/private partnerships for the deployment of applications of public interest,

- the identification of obstacles to the functioning of the Internal Market in the area of the information society and the consideration of measures to guarantee the full benefit of the area without frontiers for its development,

- the launching of actions to ascertain the priorities of SME's and regarding the obstacles hampering the use by SME's of information technologies, in close coordination with Commission efforts to mobilise different groups of ICT users,

(c) measures to take into consideration and make use of the global dimension of the information society:

- the enhancement of visibility of the global dimension of the information society, in particular through an inventory of initiatives taken worldwide, the exchange of

information with third countries, and notably with developing countries, and through the collaboration in the preparation of demonstration actions, either bilaterally or in collaboration with international organisations.

### **Article 3**

In carrying out the objectives outlined in Article 1 and the actions defined in Article 2, the Commission can use any relevant means, and in particular:

- the award of contracts for the execution of tasks relating to analyses, exploratory studies, detailed studies of specific fields, realization of demonstration actions, as well as the coordination, evaluation and co-financing of actions;
- the organization, the participation in and the granting of support for meetings of experts, conferences, consultations of persons or of groups having common interests, seminars, and the publication and the dissemination of information;
- the contribution to the activities of international organizations in relation to the information society, and in particular those aiming to encourage the access of the developing countries to the potential of the information society.

### **Article 4**

1. The Commission shall be responsible for the implementation of the programme.
2. The Commission shall be assisted by a committee of an advisory nature composed of representatives of the Member States and chaired by the representative of the Commission.

The representative of the Commission shall submit to the committee a draft of the measures to be taken. The committee shall deliver its opinion on the draft within a time limit which the chairman may lay down according to the urgency of the matter, if necessary by taking a vote.

The opinion shall be recorded in the minutes; in addition, each Member State shall have the right to request that its position be recorded in the minutes.

The Commission shall take the utmost account of the opinion delivered by the committee. It shall inform the committee of the manner in which its opinion has been taken into account.

### **Article 5**

The procedure laid down in Article 4 (2) shall apply to:

- the adoption of the work programme,
- the criteria and content of calls for proposals

- the assessment of the projects proposed under calls for proposals for Community funding and the estimated amount of the Community contribution for each project where this is equal to or more than ECU 500.000,
- the measures for programme evaluation,
- participation in any project by legal entities from third countries and international organizations.

#### **Article 6**

1. A mid-term evaluation report on the activities launched and results obtained will be presented by the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council after the first two years of the programme. Upon completion of the programme, the Commission shall present to the European Parliament and the Council an evaluation report on the results obtained through implementing the actions referred to in Article 2.
2. Measures shall be taken to monitor the effectiveness of spending to date on moves to establish the information society in Europe to ensure best use of Community funds for future programmes.
3. The results of monitoring measures shall be made available to the advisory committee provided for in Article 4(2).

#### **Article 7**

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council

The President.

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