



An Information Society For All

**Communication on a Commission Initiative for
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Why *e*Europe now?

*e*Europe is a political initiative to ensure the European Union fully benefits for generations to come from the changes the Information Society is bringing. These changes, the most significant since the Industrial Revolution, are far-reaching and global. They are not just about technology. They will affect everyone, everywhere. Bringing communities, both rural and urban, closer together, creating wealth, sharing knowledge, they have huge potential to enrich everyone's lives.

Managing this transformation represents the central economic and social challenge for the Union. It will impact profoundly on European employment, growth and productivity for the next five years and for decades afterwards.

*e*Europe is intended to accelerate positive change in the Union. It aims at ensuring this change towards the Information Society is cohesive, not divisive. Integrating, not fragmenting. An opportunity not a threat. In essence, *e*Europe aims at bringing the benefits of the Information Society to the reach of all Europeans.

The key objectives of *e*Europe are:

- **Bringing every citizen, home and school, every business and administration, into the digital age and online.**
- **Creating a digitally literate Europe, supported by an entrepreneurial culture ready to finance and develop new ideas.**
- **Ensuring the whole process is socially inclusive, builds consumer trust and strengthens social cohesion.**

This is a crucial time and a unique opportunity for the Union. Acting together in partnership, Information Society can be shaped towards our values, principles and strengths. Such chances are rare. They must be seized.

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Introduction

The world economy is moving from a predominantly industrial society to a new set of rules - the information society. What is emerging is often referred to as the *new economy*. It has tremendous potential for growth, employment and inclusion. Yet Europe is not fully exploiting this potential as it is not moving fast enough into the digital age. The present initiative aims to accelerate this process.

The underpinning dynamics of the new economy are strong. Digital technologies make accessing, processing, storing and transmitting information increasingly cheaper and easier. The sheer scale of information available creates huge opportunities for its exploitation through the development of new products and services. Transforming digital information into economic and social value is the basis of the new economy, creating new industries, changing others and profoundly affecting citizens' lives.

Enterprises in all sectors are starting to transform their business into e-business – requiring restructuring of the entire company. Many sectors (e.g. airlines, book selling, stock brokerage, publishing, telecoms, computer sales) now have leading players who did not exist a few years ago. The key to their growth has been to use the Internet to increase productivity and broaden their network presence. All companies, big and small, need to respond to the transformation of the marketplace.

Experience in the United States shows that new technologies can drive growth and create jobs. Internet-related companies alone today account for 2.3 million direct jobs - not counting the considerable indirect employment effects - up from 1.6 million in 1998. The uptake of digital technologies, in the context of flexible labour and capital markets and reduced regulatory impediments to competition, have led to productivity growth and paved the way for the lasting, strong and non-inflationary economic growth in the US. Although the quantitative implications of the new economy are not yet fully understood, recent evidence from the Federal Reserve indicates that its impact on growth and employment is significant.

Europe needs to build on its strengths. It has a leading role in mobile communications and digital TV. Yet the uptake of the Internet has been relatively slow. These industries are currently converging, giving Europe the opportunity to capitalise on its technological strengths and to harness its educational excellence and release its entrepreneurial potential. In parallel, European content production, based on its cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, must be promoted. By combining digital literacy with strength in mobile communications, Europe can lead the next great leap to a wireless Internet world.

The success of the new economy will depend on consumers' ability to take full advantage of the opportunities on offer. For this, they need to acquire the skills that will enable them to access the information they seek and interact successfully on the Internet. Consumer confidence must be built if markets are to develop.

Markets in the new economy will only be developed in Europe if high quality content is available. Businesses need to develop a stronger culture of service to encourage new customers into these markets. Seed capital markets must be supportive of entrepreneurship.

At the European level several measures have been taken to promote the information society: advancing the liberalisation of telecommunications, setting a clear legal

framework for e-commerce (e.g. privacy, authentication, security), and supporting the content industries and R&D. These policies are still evolving, as are the structural reforms necessary to enable productivity growth from the uptake of digital technologies, and issues such as a favourable tax environment and intellectual property rights will remain on the agenda. They already provide a firm basis on which to build.

However, technologies and markets today move at a much faster pace than perhaps ever before in economic history. There is no time to wait until these policies deliver. The change happening now will reshape the European economy and society within the lifetime of this Commission. A major effort has to be made to advance certain policies ahead of the current schedule. This is why an initiative – *eEurope* - needs to be taken now.

The objective of the *eEurope* initiative is ambitious. It aims to bring everyone in Europe - every citizen, every school, every company - online as quickly as possible. Accessing and using the Internet, whether via a computer, a mobile phone, or a TV set-top box, must become commonplace. To achieve this, Europe needs to address its weaknesses and exploit its strengths. It must overcome the handicaps that are holding back the rapid uptake of digital technologies:

- generally expensive, insecure and slow access to the Internet and e-commerce
- an insufficient digitally literate on-line population
- lack of a sufficiently dynamic, entrepreneurial, service-oriented culture
- a public sector which is not playing a sufficiently active role in enabling the development of new applications and services

The *eEurope* initiative builds on the current policy framework, concentrating on priority actions which address these handicaps. Where European strategy matters. Where European action can count. Where inequalities between Member States in terms of access and utilisation of Internet can be reduced. Where there is European-added value in developing common approaches to problems. These actions are:

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Each action focuses on specific ambitious targets which need to be achieved urgently. The European Commission cannot achieve these targets alone. A joint effort of the Member States, the European Commission, industry and citizens is required. These efforts should be extended to accession countries.

Europe has already successfully realised such historic political projects as the Single Market and the Euro. There is no reason why the Union cannot take the political step to produce a similar forward looking, dynamic response to the new economy. If Europe can succeed and realise the enormous potential of the new economy, a prosperous future is possible for all Europeans.

1. European youth into the digital age

Education is a crucial factor determining economic and social progress and equality of opportunity in our societies. It becomes even more vital in the digital age to ensure life-long-learning and the emergence of new generations of creators, researchers, entrepreneurs and to empower all citizens to play an active role in the information society. Achieving this starts at school. Much is already being done in the Member States to bring schools into the information age. In the employment guidelines, Member States are committing themselves to putting all schools on-line in 2002. The aim of the present initiative is to further accelerate this process and turn digital literacy into a basic competence for all young Europeans. This concerns three main areas:

- Mastering of the Internet and multimedia resources;
- Using these new resources to learn and acquire new skills;
- Acquiring key skills such as collaborative working, creativity, multidisciplinary, adaptiveness, intercultural communication and problem-solving.

Educational systems must create favourable environments for pupils and teachers to fully benefit from new technologies. Emphasis must be placed both on the technological platform (equipment, access, contents and services) and on the way it is used. Educational contents must reflect and draw strength from Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity. The success of the initiative ultimately depends on the involvement of teachers and school managers, and the willingness of industry to work together with the education sector, for instance through public-private partnerships, to supply high-quality, tailor-made products, services and contents.

Targets

The following targets should be met by Member States with full support of the European Commission's relevant instruments in the fields of the information society, research, education, culture and cohesion policies:

By the end of 2001:

- All schools should have access to the Internet and multimedia resources.
- Support services, including web-based information and educational resources, should be made available to all teachers and pupils.
- Access to Internet and multimedia resources in public centres should be made available to all youngsters, including in less-favoured areas.

By the end of 2002:

- All teachers should be individually equipped and skilled in the use of Internet and multimedia resources.
- All pupils should have access to high-speed Internet and multimedia resources in their classroom.

By the end of 2003:

- All pupils should be "digitally literate" by the time they leave school.

2. Cheaper Internet access

The liberalisation of the market for telecommunications infrastructures and services in the Union took a new direction from the 1st January 1998. The evidence of falling prices and increased consumer choice indicates that this policy is delivering positive results. Nevertheless, much needs to be done. The distribution of the benefits of competition is still uneven from one Member State to another. Truly pan-European services are still underdeveloped, partly as a result of fairly different and sometimes excessive licensing conditions and procedures. The position of the incumbent is generally still dominant, notably in the local loop.

The traditional telephone network is increasingly used for the provision of internet access and new bundled services. This makes access to unbundled services in the incumbents' local loop a pressing issue for competitors. Alternative infrastructures, such as wireless and cable networks, would be vital to offer cheaper and faster access to the Internet, but they are not sufficiently developed yet.

These aspects are the subject of the *1999 Communications Review* – a comprehensive review of the telecoms regulatory framework. On its basis the Commission will propose, in Spring 2000, a number of legislative changes aimed at progressively relaxing regulation as markets become more competitive. However, under the traditional legislative procedures the proposals would take up to three years to be fully implemented in the Member States. In such a dynamic market, this is too long.

Therefore, the Council and the European Parliament are invited to make all possible efforts to accelerate the legislative process. Moreover, Member States can through their own decisions speed up liberalisation and urgently address issues that would give consumers more choice and lower prices for high-speed access to the Internet.

Targets

Member States – on the basis of Commission's recommendations – should commit themselves to undertake measures ensuring the following results:

By the end of 2000:

- Incumbents should offer unbundled local loops under non-discriminatory terms and conditions in order to allow all operators to provide innovative services.
- Leased lines tariffs should be significantly reduced, including cross border leased lines.
- Licence requirements for communications services should be significantly lightened and as far as possible individual licences should be replaced by general authorisations.

By the end of 2001:

- The allocation of frequencies for multimedia wireless systems should be established.

3. Accelerating e-commerce

E-Commerce, or the buying and selling of goods and services using the Internet, is already worth 17 billion Euro in the EU. It is expected to reach 340 billion Euro by 2003. However, this figure is well below the USA, where with a similar sized economy, e-commerce revenues are more than three times higher. However, Europe has strengths in several key areas, for example security and encryption technologies and electronic banking. Widespread use of the Euro for electronic transactions will significantly contribute to the emergence of an EU-wide electronic marketplace. These strengths must be built on.

Europe needs to accelerate the growth of e-commerce, especially for SMEs, so that they can consider the whole European market as their market. This requires a reliable Internal Market legal framework, which provides legal security, removes barriers to cross-border services, encourages on-line innovation and consumer trust. To this end, a number of legal initiatives are under way at Community level. Their rapid adoption and implementation should be a priority. Europe also needs public administrations to lead by example by facilitating and using electronic procurement, including the use of open and compatible systems and to ensure efficient physical distribution channels (e.g. postal and delivery services) to support online trade.

In general terms, regulation of e-commerce should be limited because of the speed of change and the implications of globalisation. More emphasis must therefore be placed on the role of self-regulation and “co-regulation”, especially in helping to build consumer confidence, and global co-operation must further be developed.

The rapid growth of Internet business has caught many firms by surprise. SMEs, especially, are suffering from a lack of qualified employees, knowledge and appropriate skills to properly integrate networking techniques into their business functions.

Targets

By the end of 2000:

- The Council and the European Parliament should make every effort to ensure that the remaining e-commerce-related directives are in place.
- The Commission will propose changes to the EU’s public procurement legal framework to allow the use of electronic means in all public procurement procedures and transactions. Member States should actively encourage the use of electronic means for public procurement.
- Member States and the Commission should encourage online dispute settlement and alternative consumer redress procedures.
- Member States and the Commission should launch a campaign to help SMEs “go digital” by facilitating the transfer of technical know-how through traineeships and a network of centres of expertise.
- The Commission will support the creation of a .eu top-level domain to encourage cross-border electronic commerce within the EU and assist those companies wishing to establish an EU-wide Internet presence.

4. Fast Internet for researchers and students

Universities and research laboratories have been in the forefront of exploiting the Internet, which has brought enormous benefits to the academic and research community. Communicating via e-mail and accessing information over the Internet are now key elements of academic and professional life. However, online collaboration is not an established practice in Europe.

Individual Member States are upgrading their research and education networks, but the level of connectedness varies quite extensively within the Union. This leads to a 'variable geometry' of the Internet in Europe. The implications of this are, not only that some researchers and students are disadvantaged compared to their better connected peers, but also that pan-European collaborative activities remain limited in Europe and users cannot grasp latent opportunities to explore the full potential of digital communication.

The possibilities which interactive networking brings can be exploited to develop a whole new approach to learning and training– eEducation – where students access a host of academic and research material and facilities on-line. Fast Internet access will also facilitate more effective interactive research - with geographically distant researchers sharing data and instruments to develop new knowledge - prefiguring the emergence of a new working method- eResearch. What is needed is both a network capable of supporting end-to-end multimedia communications with a guaranteed quality and the development of innovative content, practices and tools to demonstrate usage of virtual campuses and virtual institutes.

The objective at the European level is therefore to help to unleash the full potential of the Internet by ensuring full access to the best and fastest Internet for all European education and research communities. Member States and the Commission should commit their programmes to meeting user needs, while the full possibilities of industrial co-operation and of public/private partnerships should also be explored.

Targets

By the end of 2000:

- The available Internet infrastructure for European researchers and students should be upgraded. In addition enhanced services and applications for teaching and researching must be developed, to support innovative practices.

By the end of 2001:

- At least one university and one scientific research faculty per country should have a campus network capable of supporting multimedia communications. This should be extended rapidly to all universities, research facilities, higher education institutions and other professional training and re-training facilities.
- All European students should be able to access on-line interactive multimedia lectures from a virtual European campus comprised of at least one university or open and distance institution or training facility in every Member State.

5. Smart cards for secure electronic access

Simple cards to access health services, electronic payment, mobile internet, public transport, pay TV and many more applications. This is what smart cards can do. Affordably, securely, for every citizen, and working everywhere. These cards can be individual, multifunctional or embedded in different devices. If Europe can lead the development of these technologies, huge markets will open up. Along with endless new opportunities for consumers and business in the future.

To succeed, Europe must act together. A critical mass of users is required. Hence the importance of a European wide uptake of this technology. A new infrastructure will need to be rolled out across the Union to allow the use of smart cards wherever you are - mirroring the success of GSM mobile phones.

For this to happen European suppliers, service providers and public administrations will have to work closely together to define common specifications in areas such as mobility, security, privacy and user control.

Industry-wide cooperation is also required to accelerate the establishment of a competitive “trust” infrastructure for the Internet (i.e. ‘Public Key Infrastructure’ or ‘PKI’). European industry is invited to participate and take the lead in defining precise targets, methodology and operational proposals. Public services should make full use of this infrastructure (e.g. in the health/transport domains).

Targets

By the end of 2000:

- The Commission, with the Portuguese Presidency, will organise a “Smart Card Summit” (in April 2000) with high level representatives from all key sectors concerned to give further impetus to the work on common specifications. A timetable for future action will be agreed.
- Inter-sector agreement should be reached on common specifications for a generalised smart card infrastructure.

By the end of 2001:

- Implementation of the agreed common specifications should begin, to ensure open access to basic payment services in various sectors (e.g. e-commerce, public phones).

By the end of 2002:

- Use should be extended to additional applications which need strong security and/or mobile access (e.g. fixed or mobile access to medical data, corporate intra/extra-nets).

6. Risk capital for high-tech SMEs

A European entrepreneur, a university student, or a company employee has a good new idea. Will it be financed, developed and commercialised in the EU? Possibly. More probably in the US, where the entrepreneurial culture is more conducive to risk taking, and where early stage capital for high growth innovative companies is three to four times higher than in the EU and more concentrated in high tech industries.

This matters because if an idea becomes commercially successful, thousands of jobs can be created. The EU has created nothing like the same number of successful companies in the information technology field as the US. Availability of early stage finance is vital in a world which is transforming rapidly into a new economy and where creativity, access to finance, and speed to market are among the major determinants of competitive advantage. Unless the European Union and the Member States can provide the right environment for ideas to be commercially developed and financed in the Union, they will go elsewhere – or be left undeveloped, and the benefits lost.

Europe is behind because there are still far too many barriers discouraging risk taking. Some of these barriers are already being tackled in the Risk Capital/Financial Services Action Plans. But the situation today is still an underdeveloped risk capital market in the EU, directly affecting the EU's performance in the new economy. Given the urgency of improving Europe's performance, an additional broad-based effort should be undertaken to strengthen the supply of early stage capital finance in all parts of the Union. This will directly benefit the information technology industries and content producers.

Strengthening the interfaces between the providers of risk capital and the generators of ideas with commercial potential is the other key element. Both sides need to understand the needs of the other side better – and this will help improve the returns on early stage investment.

Targets

By March 2000:

- The Commission will carry out a major policy review with Member States to improve the coherence of available instruments (EIB, EIF, 5th Framework Programme for R&D, MEDIA, TEN-telecom, regional/ social funds, growth/employment initiative) and examine how they can be better used to stimulate early stage financing. This should contribute to discussions at the Special European Summit in Lisbon.

By the end of 2000:

- The Commission will, on the basis of this review, propose innovative forms of capital raising, including public-private partnerships coupled with refocusing some Community spending (e.g. mentoring, business angels, incubators etc.).

By the end of 2003:

- The remaining obstacles to the creation of a fully integrated pan-European risk capital market should be removed.
- The level of early stage finance in the European Union should have at least tripled. Such progress will mainly rely on efforts by the private sector.

7. eParticipation for the disabled

Developments in digital technologies offer extensive opportunities to overcome barriers (socio-economic, geographical, cultural, time, etc.) for people with disabilities. Accessible technologies which address their specific needs enable their participation in social and working life on an equal basis. A challenge for the coming years is thus to reduce the remaining gaps between technologies and this user group.

European industry has so far failed to exploit the full market potential for products and services targeted at people with disabilities. These can often be developed with little extra cost by using 'Design-for-All' principles (or "Universal Design") - an approach that implies taking account of specific needs of disabled in the design process. Member States have already committed themselves to taking account of the needs of the disabled in Declaration 22 of the Amsterdam Treaty. Efforts must now be made to implement this commitment in the Information Society domain.

The legal framework in Member States of the Community varies widely in this area. Standardisation of products specifically targeted at this sub-market is often lacking. For many years, there were up to 10 different text-telephone protocols in the Union. Today, after considerable effort, there is one proposed standard for Europe. The Commission will commit itself to ensuring that standards for products and services should be disabled-friendly. European industry must rise to this challenge.

Attention must be given to improve education and training opportunities and ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Care networks should be designed to provide special multilingual online services to increase the independence and security of disabled people. Digital technologies can ease the administrative formalities involved in operating both private and public social service systems.

Targets

By the end of 2000:

- The European Commission and Member States should review the relevant legislation and standards programmes dealing with the Information Society, with a view to ensuring their conformity with accessibility principles and accelerating standardisation processes.
- The European Commission will propose a recommendation to Member States to take account of the requirements of people with disabilities in the procurement of information and communications products and services.

By the end of 2001:

- The European Commission and Member States should commit themselves to making the design and content of all public Web sites accessible to people with disabilities.

By the end of 2002:

- The European Commission will support the creation of a Network of Centres of Excellence, at least one in each Member State, that will develop a European curriculum module in Design-for-All to train designers and engineers.

8. Healthcare online

The efficient provision of quality health services to all citizens in the future is one of the most difficult challenges facing all European governments. Health care technology and treatment is improving dramatically at the same time as most governments are faced with ageing populations, pressurising future health spending in the medium to long term. Thus there is a double challenge: to improve the quality and accessibility of health care for all the citizens of the Union, whilst constraining overall costs.

These challenges will be impossible to meet without the deployment and widespread use of fully integrated, interoperable and modernised health systems. Digital technologies can improve the productivity and scope of health care. This potential is not being fully exploited – only 1% of total health spending is used on information technology. In summary, secure services have to be developed linking hospitals, laboratories, pharmacies, primary care centres and homes of people.

Fragmented health markets in the EU also hamper innovation and the spread of best practice. Health care is a major business. EU governments spend, on average, over 8% of GDP on health. Consequently, building a single market in health care products and services will have an important impact on the future competitiveness of Europe.

In this context, the Union has every incentive to co-operate in the protection and improvement of public health (Article 152 of the Treaty). This does not mean harmonising health care at European level. However, it does mean working together by conducting research, agreeing standards and product specifications and building pan-European medical libraries.

Targets

By the end of 2000:

- Healthcare best practices in networking, health monitoring, surveillance of communicable diseases and on links between hospitals, laboratories, pharmacies, doctors, primary care centres and homes should be identified.
- The priorities agreed for a number of key pan-European medical libraries-on-line and health care expertise centres to be operational by the end of 2004.
- The priorities in the field of standardisation of health care informatics, to be implemented by the end of 2000.

By the end of 2003:

- All European citizens should have the possibility to have a health smart card to enable secure and confidential access to networked patient information.

By the end of 2004:

- All health professionals and managers should be linked to a telematic health infrastructure for prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

9. Intelligent transport

The volume of transport is increasing sharply across Europe and with this comes a range of problems. Road traffic accidents killed 43,000 and injured 1,5 million in the EU last year and there have been a series of major accidents in tunnels, on railways and at sea. Congestion on the roads is estimated to cost €120 billion a year and in June 1999 over 37% of flights were delayed. Increased burning of fossil fuels is having a negative effect on the environment.

With digital technologies, it is possible to make transport safer and to enhance the quality of public transport particularly in big cities. Effective use of traffic management and information services has already reduced pollutant emissions, fuel consumption and journey time. The use of the “variable message signs” on motorways has reduced rear-end collisions by 30% (in fog by 85%); advanced driver assistance and anti collision systems have reduced accidents by around 50%.

Within the current environment, improvements of air traffic management systems will not be sufficient to satisfy the peak demand expected by most airspace users. Therefore, in addition to a better organisation of airspace, it will be necessary to seek a new digital technological and operational solution, which needs to be carefully validated to ensure that it is acceptable to all stakeholders and that the safe operation of aircraft is guaranteed during the transition.

Member States should provide the adequate resources to achieve the targets below. At the European level, the Commission will provide its full support through relevant Community Programmes, including the definition and implementation of GNSS-2 (Galileo) next generation Global Navigation Satellite System.

Targets

By the end of 2001:

- All citizens on the move throughout Europe should have full access everywhere to multi-lingual support, call localisation and fully organised provision of emergency services through the 112 number.

By the end of 2002:

- All new cars sold in Europe should be equipped with more efficient active safety-enhancing systems.
- To support the development of value-added personalised traffic and travel planning information services so as to cover 50% of medium and large European cities.
- All main trans-European networks should be covered by systems offering traffic incident/congestion information and management.

By the end of 2004:

- All major air routes should be serviced by airborne, ground-based or space-based infrastructure capable of contributing to reduce congestion to acceptable levels while enhancing safety levels.

10. Government online

All European citizens and businesses have an interest in better and easier access to public sector information. One way to achieve this is by making better use of the Internet. Better public information online would make the Internet more relevant to daily lives and so boost the number of Internet users and thereby have spill-over benefits of wider participation in the Information Society. The potential of the Internet could be harnessed to realise the objective of the Amsterdam Treaty to ensure full transparency for citizens on the activities and decision making of the EU Institutions and further ensure that these decisions are taken as openly as possible.

Much work has been done by both Member State governments and European Institutions to set up Internet web sites and provide citizens with online access to government information. The best sites are well designed to suit the needs of the non-technical user and permit access to a wide range of legal and administrative information. More needs to be done to make all government sites an easy tool to obtain information and to interact with government services, while respecting Community standards on data privacy.

The lack of easy access to key statistics and business data hampers industry and inhibits the development of private sector value-added services which have been a particularly successful feature of US public information.

The aim of this action is to make public information more easily accessible by extending and simplifying Internet access. This will also stimulate the development of new private sector services based on the new data sources that become available. The potential benefits of this action are therefore widespread:

- It will bring government services closer to the citizen;
- It can reduce government expenditure by cutting bureaucracy and red tape;
- It will create jobs in value-added services providers.
- It will create better Europe-wide market information

Targets

By the end of 2000:

- Member States should ensure easy access to at least four essential types of public data in Europe: legal and administrative information, cultural information, environmental information and real time traffic conditions and congestion data.
- Member States and the Commission should extend the use of the Internet to ensure consultation and feedback on major political initiatives. The aim would be to go beyond simply publishing legislation and white papers on the web and establish a discussion and feedback forum possibly with independent moderators.
- Member states and the Commission should ensure that citizens have two-way electronic access to basic interactions (e.g. tax forms, applications for funding etc.) which enables them both to receive information and submit returns.