A Three-Pronged Approach to the Information Society

Meeting the EU's ambitious "Lisbon Goals" of higher growth, more and better jobs and greater social inclusion will mean embedding Information & Communications Technologies (ICTs) throughout Europe's economy and society. Directorate-General Information Society is responding in three, closely interlinked ways.

Information and Communication Technologies are central to all aspects of the Lisbon goals, boosting industrial competitiveness, stimulating higher growth, improving the efficiency and quality of public services, and offering previously unavailable access to goods and services.

Progress on all these fronts is closely interlinked, so DG Information Society focuses its work around three interrelated pillars:

- **Stimulating research** as a key for future innovation and competitiveness;

- The **eEurope initiative**, supporting the development and implementation of the Information Society;

- The **regulatory framework for electronic communications**.

IST: Europe's Top Research Priority

The EU's research activities - organised into "Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development" - complement national and regional research efforts, helping Europe pool its resources and build technological leadership in areas critical to European competitiveness and quality of life.

They therefore focus on the work that can only be done at the European level, funding research activities which bring together academic researchers, small and large companies and governmental organisations across Europe to create a **European Research Area** (ERA).

Given the strategic importance of ICTs to the Lisbon targets, it is vital that Europe masters these technologies, rather than simply importing them. In the EU's current sixth Framework Programme for Research (FP6), **Information Society Technology (IST) is the largest priority in terms of funding.**

Work focuses on three main areas:

- Pushing the limits of miniaturisation and minimising the costs and power consumption of microelectronic components and micro-systems;

- Developing mobile, wireless, optical and broadband communication infrastructures, as well as software and computing technologies that are reliable, compatible with each other, and able to accommodate new applications and services;

- Developing intuitive, user-friendly interfaces which can interpret our speech, gaze, touch, gestures and various languages, coupled to more powerful and flexible knowledge technologies.

With a budget of over €3.6bn for 2002-2006, IST research is the EU's largest research priority

eEurope 2005

eEurope was launched in 2000 with an ambitious goal: to bring every citizen, school and business online and to exploit the potential of the new economy for growth, employment, and inclusion.

eEurope does not make new funds available, but works by helping Members States to learn from each other's efforts and by providing a policy framework to focus existing programmes and accelerate legislative development.

The first eEurope Action Plan (2000-2002) had three priorities: a cheaper, faster, more secure Internet; investment in people and skills, and greater use of the Internet. Nearly all of its 64 objectives were reached by the end of 2002.

The current eEurope Action Plan (2002-2005) focuses on areas:

- **where the Information Society can have the greatest impact:** public services such as eHealth, eGovernment and eLearning, as well as promoting a favourable environment for eBusiness;

- **which are critical to the development of the Information Society**: ensuring higher security for information infrastructures, and the wider availability of broadband (high speed) Internet access.

Information Society
Development
Stimulation
Regulation

Information Society   **European Commission**

eEurope 2005: Related Initiatives

eEurope also provides the overall policy umbrella for a series of initiatives and programmes:

- **MODINIS** (€22.8m, 2003-2005): supports eEurope activities such as benchmarking indicators, exchanges of best practice, etc.;

- **eTen** (€315m, 2000-2006): supports 'public e-services' in the areas of eHealth, eGovernment, eLearning, eInclusion, trust and security services, and services for SMEs;

- **eContent** (€100m, 2000-2004) and **eContentplus** (proposed follow-up): supporting the development of European digital content;

- **Internet Action Plan** (€40m, 2000-2004) and **Safer Internet Action Planplus** (proposed follow-up): combating illegal and harmful content

- **European Network and Information Security Agency**: developing a culture of network and information security.

Europe's Next IS Strategy

A mid-term review of eEurope 2005 in the first half of 2004 led to an updating and fine-tuning of the Initiative, and initiated a wider reflection of Europe's overall Information Society strategy for the future.

A new Commission Communication is planned for November 2004 to launch the debate for a new generation of Information Society policy beyond 2005.

Regulating the Electronic Communications Sector

The third pillar of DG Information Society is the EU's regulatory framework for electronic communications, launched in July 2003.

The overall aims are to **promote competition,** to **reinforce the single market** and to **safeguard consumer interests** in the electronic communications sector.

Building on the liberalisation of telecommunications achieved by the EU in the 1990s, today's Framework is **'technology neutral'**, reflecting the convergence seen in the ICT sector. It provides a stable and predictable regulatory environment to encourage investment and innovation.

The Framework builds upon general concepts of competition law, and so sees regulation as essentially a **temporary phenomenon**, required to make the transition from the formerly monopolistic telecommunications industry to a fully functioning market system.

To develop in the short term, new market entrants need regulatory support. However, as normal market conditions emerge, regulation can be rolled back, and competition law, as applied to industry in general, will replace sector-specific intervention.

The key task now is to ensure that the Framework is fully implemented and remains fully appropriate in an environment characterised by rapid technological and market changes.

The Framework sees regulation as essentially a temporary phenomenon …

See Also:

- Factsheet 1: DG Information Society: At A Glance

- Factsheet 6: eEurope: Looking Ahead

- Factsheets 13 & 14: eCommunications Regulation

- Factsheet 18: Safer Internet & Safer Internet *Plus*

- Factsheet 19: eContent & eContent *Plus*

- Factsheet 26: eTEN

- Factsheet 28: IST Research in FP6

All Factsheets and more can be downloaded from "Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal", below.

Further Information

- **DG Information Society:**
  http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm

- **Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal**
  http://europa.eu.int/information_society/

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