Towards 2010: Renewing Europe's Information Society Policy

The final year of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan provides a good opportunity to consider how European Information Society policy should evolve over the next five years if the EU is to reach its "Lisbon Goal" of higher growth, more and better jobs and greater social inclusion by 2010.

The "Lisbon strategy" is a March 2000 commitment to turn the EU into the world's most dynamic and competitive economy with social and environmental policies ensuring sustainable development and social inclusion by 2010.

Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) are crucial to reaching this goal, due both to their contribution to overall economic performance and the benefits they offer European society at large. The European Commission therefore launched the eEurope initiative to give the development of the Information Society impetus.

The mid-term review of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan (see box) confirmed that its main targets are valid until the end of 2005 – midway between the Lisbon commitment and the 2010 finishing line.

So how should the EU's Information Society policy develop over the second half of the course? In what areas can EU level policy make a difference and how can Europe best build on the achievements of the last five years?

A Changing Context

There are massive growth opportunities in the ICT sector, while new and potentially disruptive technologies are on the horizon.

The global ICT market is growing fast and is becoming increasingly competitive with new entrants, like China, India and Brazil. Investing in research and development (R&D) is essential to remain competitive in such a dynamic environment.

Policies must respond to these rapid changes and overcome the barriers to modernization. There are many areas that are affected by ICT developments, such as intellectual property rights and privacy.

Different EU Information Society initiatives must be linked up and the important part that governments can play as suppliers and users of ICTs must be properly exploited.

In what areas can EU level policy make a difference, and how can Europe best build on the achievements of the last five years?

Key Issues

Tackling these challenges and developing a coherent, forward-looking European policy means addressing a number of key issues:

- Digital communications are creating huge market opportunities for **content and services**. The availability of content, however, is dependent on progress towards widely accepted digital rights management systems.

- **eInclusion, citizenship and digital literacy** policies ensure that new and complex ICTs do not leave some sectors of society behind,

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eEurope at a Glance

The eEurope initiative was launched in June 2000 with the aim of accelerating Europe's transition towards a knowledge based economy and to realise the potential benefits of higher growth, more jobs and better access for all citizens to the new services of the information age. It is not a public expenditure programme – rather, it provides a policy framework to better focus existing programmes and to accelerate the adoption of relevant legislation.

The first phase – the eEurope 2002 Action Plan – included 64 targets to be achieved by end 2002. The majority of these were successfully completed. eEurope 2005 was launched in June 2002, focusing on promoting a secure, broadband infrastructure, eBusiness and public online services (eHealth, eLearning and eGovernment). A mid-term progress report (February 2004) reported steady progress in most areas, but found that more effort was needed to share experience and to tailor services to user needs, and that strong political leadership was required. An update in May 2004 proposed 15 complementary actions to achieve eEurope's specific objectives and speed progress, but did not substantially change the Action Plan's balance or structure.

creating a 'digital divide'. This becomes more and more important as ICTs permeate society.

- The use of **ICTs in public services** can both improve the quality of the services themselves and increase democracy and transparency. This will help to meet challenges as diverse as Europe's ageing population and the administrative burdens on small businesses.

- **Skills and work:** applying ICTs in the workplace can raise efficiency, improve the quality of work and provide better jobs. To achieve this requires both reorganization of business processes and investment in ICT skills. The importance of ICT skills for employment, productivity and workforce participation means that all Europeans should be given access to these skills.

- **The ICT industry** is a major economic sector in its own right. In a world where spectacular growth elsewhere, particularly in Asia and Latin America, is attracting production, research and standardization activities away from Europe, the EU must be made more attractive to investment and the creation of high-quality jobs.

- **Interoperability:** As ICT networks and platforms converge to provide a wider range of services over different platforms, making hardware and applications compatible becomes increasingly urgent. While interoperability and standards are generally developed by market operators, governments may need to support the search for common solutions or call for the use of open standards;

- **Trust and dependability:** If ICTs are to permeate our lives they must prove worthy of our trust. Building citizens' confidence in the Information Society will, in particular, involve privacy issues, unfair or illegal commercial practices, unsolicited communications (e.g., "spam"), illegal and harmful content and the protection of minors. In addition, infrastructures ranging from banking to transport rely heavily on ICT and are mutually dependent, so failures may have far-reaching consequences. Ensuring the dependability of systems and networks is therefore crucial.

- The efficient use of ICT by enterprises is critical to improving European competitiveness. The **exploitation of ICT by business** remains uneven, however, particularly among Europe's millions of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), many of which lag behind larger enterprises in both ICT infrastructure deployment and the level of sophistication of ICT use.

The eEurope 2005 Action Plan is succeeded by i2010. (see box)

See Also:

- Fact Sheet 35: i2010 – A practical Policy Framework for achieving economic Growth and Jobs

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

Further Information

- **eEurope 2005:**
  http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/

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

- **Information Society and Media Directorate-General:**
  Av. de Beaulieu 24, 1160 Brussels
  infso-desk@cec.eu.int
  http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm