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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Towards A Global Partnership In The Information Society:

**EU Perspective In The Context Of The
United Nations World Summit On The Information Society (WSIS)**

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunisia in November 2005 is the single most important political event in this area since the term Information Society was coined by the European Union in the mid-Nineties. Its aim is *"to develop a common vision and understanding of the Information Society and to draw up a strategic plan of action for concerted development towards realising this vision"*.[1] It takes place at a time when there is world-wide recognition that society at large is changing - and will continue to do so - as a result of the fast-paced changes of information and communications technology, thereby driving economic, social and cultural changes to an extent never before thought possible.

These important changes have already been addressed in various other international forums, such as the G8 through the Okinawa Charter, the UN debates and in particular through the creation of the Digital Opportunity Task Force or the UN ICT Task Force. Other initiatives, e.g. by the World Economic Forum or the Global Business Dialogue on e-Commerce, have been launched in the private sector.

The EU vision of the Information Society, as expressed through its comprehensive set of policies developed over the last decade, has attracted world-wide attention. At its meeting in Lisbon in 2000, the European Council committed itself to the development of a knowledge-based economy. This has not gone unnoticed. Most countries are rethinking their economic and social policy approaches and have expressed their interest in the EU approach, in particular with regard to eEurope, the new electronic communications regulatory framework, research and technological development policy, and EU policies in the social, economic, educational and cultural sectors as well as trade and development.

During the preparatory process for the Summit, many countries have expressed their expectations that the European Union should play a major role, in particular in providing insight into its Information Society policies, sharing its experiences and undertaking a commitment to assist developing countries and emerging economies in this field. The EU ought to respond positively to meet these expectations and offer to share its approaches and also to learn from the experience of its partners world-wide.

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[1]   Resolution 56/183 adopted by the UN General Assembly in January 2002

This Communication aims to assist in:

> ➢ Clarifying the context by setting out the main objectives of the WSIS and identifying the key issues for the EU, thereby allowing the EU to adopt a position in order to:
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> ➢ Preparing the co-ordination of EU contributions to and positions on the preparatory process and the Summit;
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> ➢ Proposing orientations to the Council and the European Parliament to prepare conclusions that will form the basis for the EU position during the negotiations on the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action.

2. THE PREPARATORY PROCESS OF THE WSIS

The Summit was initiated by a resolution[2] of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 1998 and further endorsed by a resolution[3] of the United Nations General Assembly in January 2002. The latter calls for active participation in and an effective contribution to the Summit and its preparation by all the relevant United Nations and intergovernmental organisations, including international and regional institutions, as well as non-governmental organisations, civil society and the private sector. The Summit will take place in two phases: the first hosted by the Swiss Government in Geneva in December 2003 and the second hosted by the Tunisian Government in Tunis in November 2005. This Communication will focus primarily on preparations for the first phase of the WSIS, namely the Summit in Geneva.

As usual with UN Summits, the WSIS preparatory process encompasses a regional track with conferences on all continents and several preparatory committees. Four regional conferences have been held (Bamako, Bucharest, Tokyo, Punta Cana), each adopting a declaration setting out the main political interests and objectives as regards the Information Society of the continent concerned. The Commission has provided financial support to the regional conferences of Bamako and Punta Cana, for African and Latin American countries respectively, in order to assist these regions in their preparatory processes. The regional conferences have fed substance into the preparatory committees.

The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings are the main events where substantive discussions on the preparation of the WSIS take place between stakeholders: governments, private sector, civil societies. The first and second PrepCom meetings were held in July 2002 and February 2003 respectively, with the third and last scheduled for September 2003. The last period of the preparatory process will focus on negotiating a Political Declaration and a Plan of Action for approval and adoption by Heads of State and Government at the Summit in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003.

The preparatory process is rather complex, not only because of the broad range of topics covered by the term "Information Society", but also because of the many different interests of governments, the private sector, civil societies and international organisations that participate in the process. Moreover, the participation of civil society and the private sector, for which the prevailing rules in the UN system are still evolving, has caused procedural difficulties.

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[2]   Resolution 73 adopted during the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, Minneapolis, 1998.
[3]   Resolution 56/183 adopted by the UN General Assembly in January 2002.

The development of the Information Society raises concerns in some parts of the world. Its cultural and social impact, particularly in terms of access to information and transparency as well as the empowerment of minorities or political opposition, worries some governments. In addition, some developing countries consider that the underlying economic model is favourable to industrialised economies and they intend to link the adoption of economic openness in this field to trade negotiations.

3.   THE CHALLENGES OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AND THE EU APPROACH

This section outlines the challenges raised by the Information Society. They concern both industrialised countries and developing ones as well as the nature and quality of relations between them. In this context, the EU approach and experience are briefly presented as a reference for the proposed EU positions.

3.1.   Challenges for the Summit

The Information Society is an ever-increasing reality. There are many concrete examples of this in our daily life. But the changes are not just about technology: they are far-reaching and global, implying new ways of communication, new economic and social structures and new ways of governance. The economy is increasingly becoming a knowledge-based activity. Like an evolutionary process, the emergence of the Information Society is the product of an array of different forces whose potential can be either exploited or missed.

The challenges lie in the development of a shared vision of the Information Society and a common understanding of both the role of the individuals and nations therein and the governance structures that will emerge. There is thus a need to address issues that have taken on an extra dimension with the diffusion of the Information Society.

At the same time, the development of the Information Society is still hampered by technical and regulatory obstacles and other barriers, which must be removed if its full potential is to be grasped, whilst at the same time ensuring that appropriate regulation taking into account the needs of the Information Society and its citizens is maintained. The increasingly global Information Society also raises issues that – due to their cross-border nature – are in the interest of countries world-wide, such as security or global governance.

The digital divide will be a central theme of the Summit. The diffusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) implies both challenges and promises for social and economic development. This is nowhere more apparent than in the world's poorest countries. ICTs offer considerable opportunities for decreasing social and economic inequalities and supporting sustainable local wealth creation, thus helping to achieve the broader development goals. But if not properly developed, the Information Society might result in further marginalisation of the poor and disaffected, thus adding a digital dimension to existing gaps and exacerbating such gaps in and amongst developing countries as well as in industrialised ones.

3.2.   The EU Approach

At the Lisbon European Council, the EU confirmed the Information Society as one of its political priorities and spelt out its objective: to make the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The set of policies and actions constitute a capital of experience that the EU is willing to share.

The European Union launched the *e***Europe initiative** in 2000 as the main driver for achieving the Lisbon goals.[4] The objective of this initiative was ambitious: to bring every citizen, school and business online, and to exploit the potential of the new economy for growth, employment and inclusion. The recent *e*Europe 2005 Action Plan (endorsed at the Seville European Council in 2002, covering the period 2003-5) takes a further step towards the development and use of a world-class infrastructure that can deliver modernised public services. It focuses on the use of ICTs to make public services more productive and accessible, to produce a favourable environment for e-Business and to secure a broadband information infrastructure, including in remote or less populated areas and it promotes a multi-platform approach aimed at using all the available platforms (e.g. PCs, mobile phones, digital TVs) to broaden access to the Information Society.

This is complemented by the **new regulatory framework** for electronic communications[5], which will bring benefits to consumers, businesses and all other stakeholders by ensuring a competitive environment for the delivery of electronic communications services, stimulating investment, innovation, creating scope for price reductions, and increasing consumer choices. The new framework will speed up the transition to a knowledge-driven economy, providing clear and stable rules and improving certainty for investors. Furthermore, the EU aims to increase **investment in Research and Development** and technological innovation to 3% of GDP by 2010. [6] In addition to these new instruments, a variety of existing EC policies and actions contribute to the development of the European model of information society, and are relevant in this context, notably in the fields of copyright, e-Business, data protection, transparency etc.

Numerous partner countries have shown their interest in the EU approach.[7] Several have taken the eEurope initiative as a reference for developing their own actions. Policy and regulatory dialogues between the Union and its partners have been established, which find a natural extension in the implementation of co-operation programmes. This is the case with the EU's partner countries in Asia,[8] Latin America[9] and the Mediterranean.[10]

These co-operation programmes include demonstration projects in the fields of education, health, local governance and, more generally, "digital inclusion". Complementary initiatives aim to strengthen research and stakeholder networks between the EU and its partners. The experience gained in the Community, in co-operation with the emerging countries, could find an extension in the dialogue with the signatory countries of the Cotonou Agreement, as recommended by the EU-ACP Council.

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[4]   http://www.europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/index_en.htm
[5]   http://www.europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/telecoms/index_en.htm
[6]   Communication of the Commission "Investing in Research: an Action Plan for Europe" COM(226) 2003, April 2003
[7]   For example, EU accession countries have adopted an eEurope+ Action Plan, inspired by eEurope, and the Northern European countries have developed a comparable strategy. Also, South-East Asia and emerging economies like Brazil, Mexico and Morocco have adopted e-Strategies.
[8]   ASIA IT&C has worked together with Asian developing countries since 1999, supporting projects in fields such as agriculture, teaching, health, transport, tourism and electronic trade.
[9]   "@LIS" (Alliance for the Information Society) launched in 2002 in Seville.
[10]   "New Approach for Telecommunications Policies" (NATP) and a programme for the development of the Information Society (EUMEDIS)

4.   EU PRIORITIES FOR THE WSIS POLITICAL DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION

Draft documents for the Political Declaration and the Plan of Action to be endorsed by the Summit were released on 21 March 2003. These are still far from final versions and will be further refined at an open-ended intergovernmental drafting meeting in July 2003. Nevertheless, the structure of these documents was formally agreed upon during the preparatory process and will be taken as a basis for the preparation of this Communication.

The Political Declaration and the Plan of Action to be adopted by the Summit have the same structure. This causes a certain amount of overlapping between the two texts. For reasons of clarity, both documents are taken into consideration simultaneously in this section. EU orientations are formulated separately and, where appropriate, suggestions for the Plan of Action are made.

4.1.   General considerations on the Declaration and the Plan of Action

4.1.1.   Objective and vision for the Political Declaration

For the EU, the Political Declaration should aim to:

−   agree on a vision, which could provide a sound basis for an appropriate framework at global level and a reference for regional and national policies and actions;

−   formulate key principles, which could form the basis for agreement on the main issues raised by the global Information Society;

−   deliver a political message, inviting every country and all individuals to seize the opportunity represented by the Information Society.

Furthermore, the development of an open, inclusive, sustainable and peaceful Information Society has to build on a core set of principles which are fundamental for a democratic society. These principles are not primarily addressed in the Information Society debates. Nevertheless, the EU takes the view that, in conformity with its fundamental texts,[11] the following principles need to be solemnly upheld and extended within the Information Society:

> ➢ The right of freedom of opinion and expression in accordance with the provisions of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
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> ➢ The right of access to information is one of the fundamental pillars for the creation of a free and equitable society. The broad sharing and dissemination of information and knowledge is the key to the mutual understanding of values in the world and peaceful, sustainable development of societies. At the same time, due account must be given to property rights, including intellectual property.
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> ➢ The right to education, which is enshrined, inter alia, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other instruments, as essential for the eradication of poverty, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination; in the information society a specific effort on digital literacy is required.

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[11]   The EU Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Council of Europe

> ➤ The promotion and preservation of cultural diversity, as enshrined in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on cultural diversity[12] and defined as the freedom of expression, media pluralism, and the possibility for all cultures to have access to the means of expression and dissemination, as well as the necessity of intercultural exchanges.
>
> ➤ The promotion of peace and human dignity through the use of ICTs, and in particular through a commitment to build better democracy based on a higher degree of transparency, enhanced participation and good governance at national and local levels; upholding the rights of the individual, particularly in relation to capacity building of the individual, data protection and security.
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> ➤ The development of the Information Society with an ethical dimension referring to a cyberspace subject to universally held ethical values, such as truth, justice, solidarity and shared responsibility.

4.1.2. Objective and characteristics of the Plan of Action

The Plan of Action aims to implement the common vision and understanding of the Information Society, as laid down in the Political Declaration. For the EU, therefore, it should:

– identify priorities to make the Political Declaration a reality;

– identify concrete and tangible goals, allowing the potential of ICTs to be harnessed for sustainable economic and social development, particularly in the field of poverty alleviation and combating illiteracy in all countries of the world, and supporting the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals;

– constitute a common reference for the contributions of all stakeholders, thus providing an agreed frame for coherent and cumulative actions and synergies;

– include clear indications in terms of follow-up, monitoring procedures and methods.

In this context, the EU believes that the Plan of Action should take account of the following guidelines as it is drawn up:

> ➤ The Plan of Action should focus on a limited number of core political priorities and reflect a clear global consensus, in order to mobilise political support and reach a critical mass in terms of actions. These should be integrated into policy and programme formulation at both national and international levels.
>
> ➤ For this purpose, advantage should be taken of the multiple achievements and the mass of experience available. The Plan of Action must therefore build explicitly on the results of existing experience and knowledge and provide for systematic use of experience and know-how sharing.
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> ➤ A key factor in making the Plan of Action a reality is the effective mobilisation of all stakeholders, governments, civil society and the private sector, together with a method to allow the various players to make effective contributions. In other words, a definition of

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[12] adopted on November 2001.

shared goals and the establishment of a common basis to start from are needed in order to ensure synergy and consistency between the initiatives undertaken by the various players.

➢ A clear indication is needed on how commitments will be followed up, by providing a roadmap for action and a basis for evaluation of the Summit accomplishments over time. In addition, the EU's experience shows that it is of strategic importance to use as much as possible harmonised indicators and a common metric for the assessment of progress and for benchmarking exercises between countries and regions.

4.2. Key principles as outlined in the preparatory process

A number of principles, which both the Political Declaration and the Plan of Action build upon, have been agreed during the preparatory process. This section gives a brief description of these principles and formulates proposals for an EU position.

4.2.1. *Enabling environment, development of infrastructure and access, overcoming barriers*

In EU policies, these various issues are closely related and addressed within the context of eEurope. This includes in particular the need for legal and regulatory frameworks which foster investment, promote the take-up of electronic communications services by the public at large, promote openness and interoperability and create an enabling environment for the development of information infrastructure and services through adequate research and innovation policies.

An enabling environment also includes stimulating measures designed to have a "prime pumping" effect on the development of new services and applications. This could give rise to innovative partnerships between the public and private sectors.

The challenge is to combine the mobilisation of markets forces with the necessary leading role of governments for appropriate frameworks and stimulation and the solidarity mechanism. Developing countries would benefit from establishing appropriate regulatory and policy frameworks, including in particular areas affecting consumers, whose confidence and trust in communications services is a precondition for the integration of developing countries into the international ICT market through better and cheaper access to information technology and communication by increased trade and investment from the private sector, whether local or foreign. Furthermore, countries should be encouraged to join the ITA agreement on information technology goods and liberalise and pro-competitively regulate basic telecommunications.

Proposed EU position for the Declaration:

➢ To support the development of regional and national e-Strategies as a key element of the WSIS Political Declaration.

Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:

➢ To promote the development and implementation of trustworthy, transparent and non-discriminatory legal and regulatory frameworks for electronic communications;

➢ To support technical assistance for e-Strategies and to establish the appropriate regulatory frameworks;

> ➢ In the context of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), encourage countries to join the ITA agreement on information technology goods and commit to liberalisation and pro-competitive regulation of basic telecommunications.

4.2.2. *Role of governments, civil society and private sector*

The successful deployment of a global Information Society depends greatly on the commitment and association of all stakeholders. The EU has done this when developing its own policies. Therefore, the EU has taken a firm stance and promoted the full association of the private sector and civil society in the preparatory process leading up to the Summit itself. In particular, the Plan of Action should reflect this approach by a combination of governmental, including international governmental organisations, actions and partnerships involving the various stakeholders.

The diffusion of the Information Society depends to a large extent on the way local authorities act out their role as the first level of interaction between the citizen and public realm. This crucial role of local authorities should be recognised in the World Summit and a specific role should be mapped out for them in the Plan of Action.

> **Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:**
>
> ➢ To ensure that all stakeholders can participate directly in the negotiations on the Plan of Action and undertake clear commitments in the follow-up process.
>
> ➢ To support stakeholder initiatives, notably the Summit of the Cities to be held in Lyon (France) on 4-5 December.

4.2.3. *Capacity building*

With regard to capacity building, the EU will focus on two priorities for the Summit: **e-Learning** and **e-Government,** while emphasising the necessity to also build capacity through shared research and technological development and encouraging training and mobility actions.[13]

A key factor to enable progress towards the Information Society is the development of human capital. E-Learning facilitates access to learning resources and services, as well as world wide exchanges and collaboration. It is a powerful tool for personal development, for bridging the digital divide, and for fostering local content and linguistic and cultural diversity. E-Learning also offers improved conditions for lifelong learning, reaching people outside the formal education process and fostering continuing professional development. E-Learning can support – coupled with traditional didactical methods - the development of the cognitive and digital skills allowing both access to - and use of - knowledge for individually and socially relevant purposes. Widespread diffusion of digital literacy - together with universal access to ICT infrastructure - represents in fact a key condition for bridging the digital divide.

e-Government should concentrate on more efficient delivery of public services and better management of financial, human and public resources and goods at all levels of government,

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[13] Decision N°1513/2002/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 27 June 2002 concerning the sixth framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities, contributing to the creation of the European Research Area and to innovation (2002 to 2006)

in particular at local level, under conditions of sustainability, participation, interoperability, increased effectiveness and transparency. Citizens and businesses must be the focal point in the design of online services that are readily accessible to all.

Proposed EU position for the Declaration:

➢ To provide broad political support for "investing in people", paving the way for a world-wide movement of co-operation in the field;

➢ To promote the participation of both women and the young in the process;

➢ To extend the benefit of ICTs to help foster inclusion and empowerment of minorities and disadvantaged groups.

Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:

➢ To launch a global co-operation initiative in the field of e-Government and e-Learning.

4.2.4. *Building confidence and security*

Security, privacy protection, property protection and general governance of the sector are indispensable for the purposes of building people's confidence in the Information Society. This is particularly relevant in terms of consumer concerns regarding of loss of privacy, unfair or illegal commercial practices as well as in relation to illegal and harmful content and the protection of minors. On-line piracy is another issues of concern to businesses and consumers alike. The security of networks has emerged as one of the critical issues for the continued growth of electronic commerce and the use of new technologies more generally. Therefore, more effort has to be made to achieve greater reliability of the systems and applications which store and transmit data.

Within a global culture of cyber security it is important to strike the right balance between measures to enhance security and the need to ensure the protection of data and privacy as well as to avoid the creation of new barriers to trade. At the same time, the objective is to make cyberspace an "area of freedom, security and justice". In this context, an adverse impact of the digital revolution on gender equality – such as for example ICT and media based violence against women, including criminal misuse of ICT for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and girls - should be avoided and fought against by any available means.

Communication networks are global, and security issues highlight the need both for closer international co-operation and for a common approach. Although many initiatives need some adjustment to local environments, it is clear that international co-operation should be more widespread.

To improve the overall security of networks and information systems in the EU, the Commission has recently adopted a proposal to establish a European Network and Information Security Agency, which should become a centre of excellence for cyber security matters. This model could be linked to other initiatives internationally, thus enhancing international co-operation.

> **Proposed EU position for the Declaration:**
>
> ➢ To strike the right balance between security objectives, trust, protection of data and privacy;
>
> ➢ To avoid the creation of additional trade barriers or excessive burdens in the sector;
>
> **Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:**
>
> ➢ To invite each country to set up a focal point for security matters and to develop an open co-operative network between them.

4.2.5. *ICT applications for Development*

The EU will support and use ICTs not as a priority sector, but rather as a tool to achieve the objectives within the focal areas and cross-cutting themes of the new EC development policy. ICTs are not to be considered in isolation, but as part and parcel of an overall development strategy and policy dialogue with beneficiary countries.[14] e-Inclusion presents a major challenge in the ongoing transformation brought about by the information revolution. e-Inclusion encompasses actions aiming at greater cohesion within the Information Society context, including access and participation for all, gender issues, the use of ICTs in daily life , work, education and e-Health. In particular, e-Health applications could contribute to more efficient work of health applications, better delivery of health services and to higher quality of medical care.

Information Society tools and instruments can help to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals of combating poverty and hunger, eliminating illiteracy, reducing infant mortality, advancing the status of women, improving maternal health, fighting disease, and promoting sustainability. However, they also present an additional challenge in the form of the so-called digital divide, a further widening of economic and social gaps as a result of the unequal opportunities of access to these tools and instruments.

As with other development challenges, the decision to embrace these new opportunities belongs to developing countries themselves and the relevant stakeholders, notably the local communities. Ownership by them is indispensable. The international community, for its part, can play an active role by pointing to the potential benefits of new policies and assisting interested countries in designing appropriate policies as a function of their situations and priorities.

To this end, the Commission is implementing a specific pilot project on capacity building for information and communication technologies in developing countries, in association with other major international institutions, such as the UN-ITU and the World Bank Group. This action for capacity building in developing Countries has been initiated by the European Parliament [15] and will contribute to the design of better end more country led ICT policies, notably in Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

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[14]   Communication on Information and Communication Technologies in Development: The role of ICTs in EC development policy, COM(2001) 770 final, 14.12.2001

[15]   Budget line B7-623 in budget years 2003 and 2003.

EU proposed position for the Declaration:

➤ To recognise the potential of ICTs to contribute to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

EU proposed position for the Plan of Action:

➤ To support a global initiative in the field of e-Health.

➤ To support a global action aiming at mobilising ICTs for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, notably by mainstreaming ICTs in development assistance.

➤ To implement and mainstream the pilot initiatives on capacity building for information and communication technologies in developing countries with the UN-ITU and other international institutions.

4.2.6. *Promoting cultural and linguistic diversity*

The emerging global networked knowledge society will be central to shaping a global culture of co-operation, involving a multitude of different but co-operating cultures - turning the threat of cultural divisiveness into the asset of cultural diversity.

An inclusive Information Society founded on the preservation and promotion of diversity of cultural expression fosters mutual understanding and respect. ICTs and the media as a whole can and should stimulate linguistic and cultural diversity, including through the facilitation of production, distribution, diffusion and access to local content. They can also enhance the capacity of governments to develop active policies to that end. In this respect, production and diffusion of appropriate local content available in the user's mother tongue is of vital importance.

The process of globalisation, facilitated by the rapid development of ICTs, though representing a challenge for cultural diversity, creates the conditions for a renewed dialogue among cultures, the promotion of knowledge and mutual understanding as well as contributing to peace and stability. In this context, the EU welcomes the adoption of the Universal Declaration on cultural diversity in November 2001 by UNESCO, and supports the implementation of its Action Plan, including the point related to the opportunity of an international instrument on cultural diversity.

The EU promotes the involvement of different stakeholders in the development of multilingual, affordable applications that improve the overall quality of life, particularly in key areas such as education and health, both globally and at local community level.[16] Promotion of cultural diversity and identities, including the creation of varied information content and the digitalisation of people's educational, scientific and cultural heritage, is an important priority in the development of the Information Society. Research on the social and cultural impact of ICTs should be continued.

Proposed EU position for the Declaration:

➤ To give priority to cultural and linguistic diversity by promoting the creation and dissemination of and access to local content.

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[16]   e.g. within the framework of the eContent initiative

4.3.   EU priorities in addition to the key principles outlined by the preparatory process

The issues listed in this section are referred to in the Declaration and Plan of Action. However, the EU wants to underline their importance by highlighting them as additional priorities deserving special attention.

4.3.1.   Governance of the Information Society

The EU has always stressed the need for a global and inclusive approach of the Information Society associating the various stakeholders. To this regard, an enabling environment, based on full participation of the private sector and civil society is essential. This would aim at fostering entrepreneurship by creating appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks as well as encouraging the take-up of the Information Society by citizens.

The increasingly global Information Society raises many issues that are – due to their cross-border nature – in the interest of countries world-wide, including emerging and developing ones: e.g. questions related to security, protection of data, intellectual property, privacy, Internet governance; but also the global solidarity effort for co-operation: activities of multilateral organisations, increase synergies between public donors, increase priority to ICT in the development aid policies. Whilst some issues have already been addressed at global level, others are still pending.

EU proposed position for the Declaration:

➢ To reaffirm that the development of the Information Society must be an inclusive process based on full participation of all countries; such an inclusive process has also to be open to the participation of the private sector and the civil society. This reality has to be reflected in the international governing bodies of the Information Society, including for Internet governance.

4.3.2.   Promoting economic growth

The importance of the communications sector lies in its role as an engine for growth and in its impact on all other sectors of the economy. The EU has addressed this issue recently and foresees various measures to secure sound growth in the sector.[17]

The restructuring of business processes to make use of ICTs is essential, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and public policies should support this process. The use of digital technologies – if accompanied by the adoption of new forms of work organisation and appropriate workers' training - can enhance the role of enterprises in promoting entrepreneurship, accumulating knowledge, upgrading skills, thereby increasing productivity, incomes and jobs, and promoting a better quality of working life. As a incentive for the take-up of ICTs, governments can support the introduction of e-Business, notably by setting the rules and using e-Business in their interaction with the business community.

The production of knowledge depends greatly on the protection of intellectual property, including in digital format. Economic operators need incentives to invest in new products and services and need to know that they enjoy adequate protection, including against piracy and

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[17]   Communication on Electronic Communications – The Road to the Knowledge Economy, COM(2003) 65 final, 11.2.2003

counterfeiting. At the same time, it is important that laws provide for adequate exceptions to these rights, facilitating the dissemination of protected works, taking due account of general interest concerns.

Proposed EU position for the Declaration:

➢ To reaffirm the clear message to the private sector that the communications sector and in particular the use of ICTs continue to be an engine for economic growth;

➢ To foster entrepreneurship as the basis engine for the dissemination of ICTs throughout all levels of society.

Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:

➢ To promote the creation of appropriate frameworks for e-Commerce and encourage governments to use electronic transactions in their public procurement processes.

4.3.3.   Promoting Research and Development and innovation

Research and Education have historically proved to be key factors driving the evolution of society. One of the key mechanisms is shared research and technological development through the measures of the 6th RTD framework programme, which includes substantial measures to help build research capacity through international human mobility and research training. In addition, R&D and innovation are strategic fields in the development of new products and applications, including locally relevant developments, which are the key to effective take-up by users. These activities may include the promotion of open source software and interoperable platforms.

From this point of view, Networks and Network Services (Grids being one such example) have emerged in recent times as one of the most effective vehicles for disseminating information and knowledge, thereby aiding the process of cross-fertilisation of ideas. A global initiative would increase the synergy of inter-networking in terms of the creation, wealth and distribution of information, particularly within the current inter-connection of National Research and Education Networks (NRENs). The EU can draw on long-standing experience in this field, notably with the GEANT network and its extension to developing regions by way of co-operation programmes (EUMEDIS, @LIS).

Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:

➢ To support increased co-operation in Research and Development, innovation and research training.

➢ To develop a World-Wide Research and Education Network based on the experience of GEANT.

4.4.   Strategies, programmes and methods for implementation of the Plan of Action

The draft Plan of Action includes indications of the ways and means of implementation, which warrant the following comments.

4.4.1. Dialogue and partnership at the heart of the process

The Summit should be the opportunity to give new impetus to dialogue and (RTD) partnership in the field and to trigger new ways of co-operation and implementation, taking advantage of the participation of civil society and the private sector in the process. Indeed, the Plan of Action will be a combination of governmental, including international governmental organisations, actions and partnerships organised on a pragmatic basis between the various groups of stakeholders. The challenge is to combine the mobilisation of markets forces with the necessary leading role of governments for appropriate frameworks and stimulation and the solidarity mechanism. In this context, a central set of actions focuses on the promotion of global e-Strategies designed to produce an enabling environment and a framework for all such actions to be undertaken.

The private sector would be involved through partnerships with other stakeholders. It could also consider the development of new markets as an investment and commit itself to providing ICT goods and services at preferential conditions for specific categories of users, notably non-profit-making organisations directly involved in poverty alleviation.

Along the same lines, interaction with civil society will enhance the ability to develop collective creation of knowledge and know-how. This could be done by developing networks of stakeholders in the various fields, and mobilising resources, in particular those of local authorities, local entrepreneurs and NGOs, and may include local community development and CyberVolunteer programmes and activities.

4.4.2. Redirecting efforts along WSIS priorities

A promising way would be to scale up locally successful ICT-related projects dealing with priority applications like health and education programmes, building on existing experience. Appropriate mechanisms could be put in place to accompany the process in order to 1) facilitate the extension of the project, 2) support limited replications in pilot projects, and 3) prepare the roll-out of broader programmes based on the success of the pilot projects.

Furthermore, a cumulative knowledge process through systematic networking of grassroots initiatives and the creation of websites should be fostered, in order to facilitate exchanges of information and experience, disseminate good practices and to benefit from synergies and peering effects on a large scale.

International R&D programmes could include a focus on low purchasing power markets, including research on appropriate technologies and innovative marketing and distribution mechanisms for these markets. The main aim is to redirect part of the R&D effort and to offer developing countries the possibility to participate. Projects should be based on local experience and knowledge but also benefit from capacities of multinational companies.

The development of an appropriate monitoring and benchmarking exercise for developing countries and emerging economies through indicators evaluating progress towards well-identified goals is another important component for the success of initiatives. Indicators and periodic reports may also provide a basis for benchmarking and peer reviews and contribute to the dissemination of best practices.

Proposed EU position for the Plan of Action:

➢ To scale up locally successful ICT-related projects;

➢ To foster cumulative knowledge through systematic networking;

➢ To encourage R&D for Development;

➢ To develop appropriate benchmarking and monitoring indicators.

4.4.3. *International and regional co-operation*

The Information Society is not a competence area of one single agency within the UN system. Telecommunications issues are dealt with by the ITU, but also UNESCO or the WHO are exploring the role of ICTs in their respective fields of competence. Recently, the UN ICT Task Force was created in order to address more specifically Information Society issues and to strengthen the synergies between the activities of the different UN agencies.

The EC and the Member States are participating and contributing to the different activities of these organisations as well as to those of other multilateral organisations, such as the World Bank or the OECD. The Summit will entail requests for co-operation and the EU will give its support according to its priorities as laid out in this Communication, based on existing funding mechanisms and development assistance.

On the other hand, in economic integration areas, regional markets (e.g Mercosur) could emerge as a result of harmonisation of the national legal and regulatory frameworks and trans-border agreements. As experienced in the EU, these integrated markets entail new perspectives for investment, emergence of major economic players and improved conditions for consumes notably through more effective competition.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on inputs from the Commission, co-ordinated in the Council, and submitted by the EU Presidency, the European Union has already started to contribute in a major way to the discussions in the initial preparatory process of the Summit. It is now important to ensure that the EU can continue to play a constructive role in the process and negotiate its position on the basis of political guidelines provided by the Council and the European Parliament.

The key principles which the EU should pursue as well as the overall priorities and objectives and a number of concrete suggestions for implementation are set out in this Communication. During the preparatory process, the focus should be on the following priorities:

Building the Information Society prerequisites: to adopt a core of principles based on fundamental human rights – to produce an enabling environment and capacity building investing first in people – to pave the way for an Information Society reflecting our values and principles as well as its appropriate governance.

Developing the right tools: to devise and implement e-Strategies, including appropriate regulatory frameworks - to allow broad mobilisation of all stakeholders – to develop key applications, in particular for e-Government, e-Learning, e-Health and e-Business.

> ***Seizing the benefit of the Information Society for countries and individuals***: to reinforce Human rights and the rule of the law, notably the freedom of expression, and the right to communicate and to access information and knowledge – to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals - to strengthen the exercise of democracy and favour good governance and to benefit from better public services – to participate in the major flows of economic, scientific and cultural exchange – to use ICTs for social development and economic growth.

Because of the broad and moving agenda for the Summit, specific points have not been fully addressed. However, whenever EU policies and/or a Community competencies are concerned, EU positions already agreed will be advanced and defended in the course of the negotiation process, e.g. in the field of electronic commerce, data protection, illegal and harmful content, IPR, protection of minors, combating computer-related crime, exploitation of public sector information, competition rules, etc. Along the same lines, EU positions in other forums, notably the Council of Europe and the OECD, will be used to further the process.

The Council and the European Parliament are asked to approve these positions.

Following the Summit in Geneva in 2003, the Commission intends to submit a further Communication, which will report on the results of the Summit and the preparatory process for the second phase leading up to the Summit in Tunis in November 2005, and include proposals for the EU position and approach for that Summit.