COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 24.6.2005
COM(2005) 260 final

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

Final evaluation of the implementation of the multiannual Community programme (1998-2002) to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe (PROMISE)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Communication is drawn up in accordance with article 8, 4 of the PROMISE Council Decision. This stated that at the end of the programme, "the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions an evaluation report on the best results obtained in implementing the actions referred to in implementing the actions of the programme"[1].

An external evaluation report was commissioned from EIM Business Policy and Research under the guidance of a steering committee appointed by the Commission. The final report of the evaluation was published in February 2004 and presented to the management committee of the successor to PROMISE in July 2004.[2]

The general aim of this final evaluation was:

(1)   To examine the performance of the PROMISE Programme with reference to the programme objectives.

(2)   To assess the impact of the programme for the European Information Society.

(3)   To provide recommendations for the successor of the PROMISE programme.

2. BACKGROUND

The "Multi-annual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe" (PROMISE) was adopted by Council on 30 March 1998. The programme covered a 5 year period from January 1998 to December 2002 with a total budget of €25 million. It was set up to promote a coherent approach to the information society which would promote benefits such as: a) more efficient, more transparent and more responsive public services, b) more efficient management and more competitive companies with better access to services, customers and suppliers, c) more opportunities for Europe's telecommunications operators d) new opportunities for regions to express their identities while minimising geographical drawbacks.

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[1]   98/253/EC: Council Decision of 30 March 1998 adopting a multiannual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe (Information Society), OJ L 107, 7.4.1998, p. 10.

[2]   http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/evaluation/docs/highlights/promise/-promise_final_report.pdf

In June 2000, the European Council adopted a new approach to the Information Society in the form of the eEurope 2002 Action Plan. The PROMISE programme was reoriented to support the new strategy, and also in response to the findings of the mid term evaluation of the Programme, which had been presented to the Commission in January 2000.[3] In particular, PROMISE was adapted to the needs of the open method of coordination (OMC) proposed in the Action Plan, which called for a greater emphasis on benchmarking.

3. OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The objectives of the programme were implemented in the following phases:

3.1. Phase One (1998/1999)

In phase one the programme followed closely the objectives as formulated in the legal basis:

- **Awareness raising** of the public and understanding of the potential of the Information Society. This included activities such as the European Information Society Day, support to the Information Society Forum and promotion of the IS through the media. The Information Society Project Office (ISPO) provided a web service and helpdesk, as well as brochures, newsletters, leaflets. In addition, subventions were provided for continuation of awards, seminars and conferences.

- **Optimising Socio-economic benefits of the Information Society** in Europe; this focused on studies to analyse ongoing activities in the Member-States, and on dissemination of good-practices via work-shops. Surveys were carried out for the European Survey of Information Society projects (ESIS), opinion surveys were undertaken by Eurobarometer and studies were launched to support the IS Forum.

- **Enhancing Europe's role and visibility within the global dimension of the IS**. Activities focused on focused on the support of dialogue aiming to facilitate exchange of views, and experiences mainly with the Acceding countries and countries of the Mediterranean Sea (i.e. the EUMEDIS initiative in the context of the MEDA programme).

3.2. Transition (2000)

In 2000, the eEurope 2002 Action plan was introduced with three main objectives:

- Cheaper faster and secure Internet

- Investing in people and skills

- Stimulate the use of Internet.

PROMISE was identified as a means to support the eEurope Action Plan, and in 2000 its activities were refocused and some were curtailed. **Awareness raising** was primarily targeted on to promotion of the IS via the website. **Optimising socio-economic benefits** was re-orientated towards studies and support to the IS Forum. That is, the ESIS activity continued

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[3]   COM(2001) 350 final

but was focused onto what became the eEurope+ 2003 Action Plan and EUMEDIS.[4] The Eurobarometer surveys focused on collecting comparable statistics to support the implementation of the eEurope Action Plan. The **Global Dimension** continued with a separate budget but only to complete a legacy of work.

3.3. Phase Two (2001-2002)

In phase two a new set of objectives were mapped onto the old objectives. The new mapping was directly in line with the needs of the eEurope Action Plan:

- **Benchmarking** involved surveys of a set of 23 indicators endorsed by the Council for the monitoring of the eEurope 2002 Action Plan and qualitative studies to monitor new developments in the IS. The benchmarking results were published regularly on the web and provided timely comparative data on progress in key areas such as Internet penetration for the general population, workforce and education, security of networks, health, government services.

- The **identification and dissemination of good practices** was focused on a limited number of high visibility actions. The programme co-financed conferences organised by different EU Presidencies to promote public dialogue on good practices in the Information Society.

- *e*Europe portal - the ISPO activity had already been refocused onto a web-based service, this was now consolidated into the eEurope web portal.

- **Information Society Forum** continued but as a virtual forum with a new mandate to support the optimisation of eEurope.

3.4. Evaluation of results in meeting the programme objectives[5]

The mid-term evaluation of PROMISE, covering the first phase to 2000, found "clear examples of the effectiveness of the Programme", but concluded that its initial scope was too wide and that a clear link to the Commission's IS strategy should be sought.[6] A rationalised management approach and clear quantitative targets were recommended.

The refocusing of PROMISE in line with the eEurope Action Plan, which took place over the course of 2000, responded to the evaluation. In particular, the emphasis on support to the benchmarking activities to provide information on concrete progress reflected the recommendation for more quantitative targets.

This refocusing was evaluated positively. The benchmarking activity provided for the first time quantitative indicators of the progress of Europe towards the IS that were comprehensive and up-to-date. Of the 23 indicators agreed with Member States, 19 were measured at least

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[4]   Euro-Mediterranean Information Society Initiative
http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/eumedis/englishversion/i_welcome_en.html

[5]   A full list of the recommendations of the final evaluation is provided in Table 1together with the Commission's responses.

[6]   COM(2001) 350 final 'Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the multiannual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe (PROMISE)'

once and 13 were measured twice or more. The benchmarking exercise was evaluated to have delivered real value for eEurope.

The identification and dissemination of best practices was designed as a form of qualitative benchmarking. Policy makers would compare and exchange experiences and thus build up better knowledge on how to design better policies. This objective was pursued through strategic studies, workshops of stakeholders at national level and the co-funding of conferences on e-government and e-health under the Belgian, Italian and Greek presidencies.

The information services objective was met by focusing the broader ISPO concept on mainly web-based information and renaming it the eEurope portal. The eEurope portal was one of the most highly visited sites on the IS web pages over the period 2000 to 2002. Finally, the IS Forum continued to work on a much reduced basis and in practice did not contribute to the eEurope Action Plan. This decision reflected the difficulty of managing a body of 128 members with six working groups was heavy to manage and difficult to keep fresh.

As regards budget expenditure, despite difficulties on spending during the first two years of implementation (1998 and 1999), considerable progress was made after 2000. Nevertheless the consultants responsible for the final evaluation considered that "multi-annual planning of activities" could improve the quality of the management of the programme.

On management, in PROMISE the role of the programme committee was limited. Different activities linked to programme implementation (definition of benchmarking indicators, definition of priorities in areas of activities) were discussed with the with government experts such as statisticians and council working groups, and the programme committee informed about the results. The evaluation sought a clear role for the Management Committee.

Overall, the external evaluation of PROMISE found that most of the formal objectives were met, adding value at EU level to other initiatives, measuring needs and monitoring of awareness, promoting the exchange of good practices and removing obstacles to involvement on the side of disadvantaged groups, peripheral areas, SMEs and third countries. As noted above, the objectives for the programme were ambitious and in certain areas - such as enhancing the visibility of real projects, preparation of demonstrators, stimulating the interest of industry and inventorising international initiatives – less was achieved.

4.   IMPACT OF PROMISE ON THE EUROPEAN IS.

The benchmarking of eEurope, by providing a set of indicators not available before, is considered to have had real added value. In addition, it has provided orientations for the measurements of the IS used by national level statistical institutes and in the OECD. As regards influencing policy, the benchmarks are considered to have raised the visibility of the IS and caused policy makers to reflect on their relative performance. In addition, benchmarking has drawn policy attention to areas such as e-government and e-health. Critics of the benchmarking results, however, have pointed out that some of the data were not robust and that the indicators alone cannot explain why take-up of the IS is not more rapid or more effective.

The promotion of best practices was considered to be effective where it contributed to high profile events such as Presidency conferences. These events mobilised policy agendas through high level participation and direct recognition of successful initiatives through award

schemes. Workshops helped to form communities of practice around certain issues and stimulated further debate amongst stakeholders. The evaluation pointed towards a need for a more systematic relationship with existing networks and to an engagement with grassroots actors at regional level.

With the replacement of ISPO by the eEurope portal, the resources allocated to this activity of PROMISE were reduced. The eEurope portal was heavily used. The evaluation pointed out, however, that the primary usage was by officials (at EU, national and regional levels), journalists and researchers. It recommended that an easier to use portal is needed to make the information accessible to smaller firms and the wider public.

The IS Forum was seen as having made useful contributions during its early phase. By the second half of PROMISE, however, its relevance was less clear and the level of creativity lower. This decline was in part due to an unclear and open ended relationship with the Commission. Working Groups were set up without specific mandates and timescale and the expected contribution of the IS Forum to the policy making process was not defined. The evaluation pointed to the need to bring the IS Forum formally to an end and to make sure that future bodies such as the eEurope Advisory Group have a clear role in the policy process.

5. LESSONS FROM PROMISE ADOPTED IN MODINIS

The successor to PROMISE was adopted on 17 November 2003. This programme "Monitoring of the eEurope 2005 action plan, dissemination of good practices and the improvement of network and information security (MODINIS)" will run from 2003 to 2005.

The MODINIS programme follows closely the same philosophy as the second half of PROMISE. It supports the eEurope 2005 Action Plan which was launched by the Seville European Council in June 2002. MODINIS focuses on four objectives, which can be summarised as;

(1) Monitoring performance of and within the Members-States and comparing it with the best in the world by using official statistic data;

(2) Supporting efforts made by Member States in the framework of eEurope at national, regional or local level, by analysis of eEurope good practices and developing mechanisms of exchange of experiences;

(3) Providing the eEurope steering group with the necessary information for it to be able to assess the appropriate strategic direction of the eEurope 2005 action plan

(4) Preparing for the establishment of the future structure at European level for network and information security issues.

The first objective continues the benchmarking activities that were launched under the eEurope 2002 Action Plan. A new Council Resolution was adopted to cover this aspect of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan.[7] This resolution defined a set of 15 policy indicators and 22 supplementary benchmarking indicators and the data collection methodology to be used. In response to concerns expressed by Member States as well as in the evaluation about the

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[7]   OJ C 48, 28.2.2003

quality of the benchmarking data, a large share of the statistics are being collected by national statistical institutes under auspices of Eurostat. MODINIS will also be used to fill gaps were official data is not available through launching ad hoc surveys.

In addition, MODINIS funds will be used to address the issue of the value of the indicators in guiding policy. A balance is being sought between the simple supply-side indicators that have provided the concrete measures of progress of Europe towards the IS and more qualitative information that provides insight into patterns of use and the impact of information and communication technologies.

The second objective continues the good practice exchanges launched under PROMISE. The main lesson drawn from the evaluation of PROMISE was to make an explicit strategic connection between the eEurope goals and the actions supported by MODINIS. Thus, contributions to high visibility conferences are intended to continue where they have a strategic value. MODINIS is also being used to procure studies which are related to stated policy goals (primarily e-government, e-health and security). Meetings of high level groups and workshops are likewise being supported in relation to specific policy targets. In addition, specific actions are being launched to implement 'good practice frameworks' in the fields of e-business, e-government and e-health.

The third objective of MODINIS envisages the creation of a **Steering Group** (now established as the eEurope Advisory Group). The Decision of the Council and the European Parliament on the MODINIS programme has allowed the Commission to establish an eEurope Advisory Group, chaired by the Commission and open to participation from all stakeholders (Members States, accession countries, consumer groups, and private sector, etc.). According to the Decision, the role of this Group is to assist the Commission by:

- Providing a strategic overview of ongoing e-initiatives across sectors and exchange information on progress made and on obstacles encountered;

- Offering a forum for strategic discussions and for the exchange of experiences;

- Monitoring progress of the implementation of the *e*Europe 2005 Action Plan and give input and advice on possible improvements;

- Permitting early participation of candidate countries;

- Disseminating information about *e*Europe.

The Advisory Group has two sections. The first section is made up of one senior representative per participating country, and the second section is made up of 40 experts drawn from a range of backgrounds (industry, consumer groups, social partners and other interest groups). The Group operates through working groups that have a specific mandate and a limited duration. The plenary meetings are chaired by the Director General of DG Information Society. Through these mechanisms, the lessons of the IS Forum have been integrated into the working methods of eEurope.

A further aspect of the third objective is to improve the eEurope web portal to make it more accessible for wider public consultation of data and communications related to eEurope. This is being addressed through a complete reconstruction of the web site, using an external consultant, which will start during 2004 and will be completed in the first half of 2005.

Finally, the fourth objective provides during 2003 and 2004 for preparatory support to the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA), which formally came into being on the 15 March 2004.[8] These actions aim at improving network and information security as defined in the Commission communication "Network and Information Security; Proposal for a European Policy Approach"[9].

The PROMISE evaluation raised management concerns related to the efficiency of budget use, and relations with the management committee. With MODINIS, budget expenditure remains a challenge. The MODINIS programme was adopted at the end of 2003 and only became operational in April 2004. In effect, the programme was half way through before the first actions could be launched. Continuous effort is being applied on the part of the Commission to recover the situation, but given the short programming period this delay will continue to affect the achievement of the primary goal, to support the implementation of eEurope 2005 Action Plan. Concerning the management committee, the relationship between the eEurope Action Plan and MODINIS is now much clearer. The eEurope Advisory Group provides a forum for debate on overall strategic vision while the MMC provides guidance to the Commission on the implementation of specific support and coordination actions, including the activities of the eEurope Advisory Group. This link gives a very clear role to the MMC which was lacking in the past.

As regards communication, previous evaluations recommended more streamlined communication with the MMC. To this end MODINIS will use electronic communications to interact with the members of the Management Committee and as far as possible with members of the eEurope Advisory Group. A Circa database has been created in order to foster dialogue between the members of the Management Group and the Commission.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the evaluation supports the Commission's re-orientation of the programme in line with the eEurope 2002 Action Plan.

It notes that the programme had clear strengths and in addition that the refocus gave it unique value-added. Despite some criticisms related to the methodology followed, which are now being addressed through a much greater use of National Statistical Institutes, the benchmarking exercise was considered particularly useful.

The evaluation also acknowledges that the co-financing of conferences on e-government and e-health was a success with significant impact in terms of follow-up actions by national policy-makers. However, it recommends that greater efforts be made to support exchange of good practices and dissemination in a more integrated way. This recommendation is now being implemented through increased emphasis on the strategic aims of the studies that are financed, and specific attention to the development of good practice frameworks in e-government, e-business and e-health.

The evaluation recognises that the Information Society Forum was a "successful initiative in the first years" of the implementation of the programme. It made important contributions in the area of social aspects and the demand-side of ICT for consumers and citizens. The work of

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[8]   http://www.enisa.eu.int
[9]   COM(2001) 298

the eEurope Advisory Group under MODINIS can be seen as a continuation and an improvement of the role played by the IS Forum.

Finally, the recommendations on the management of the MODINIS in the light of the PROMISE experience have been followed through with a clear role for the management committee in the implementation of the eEurope strategy.

Table 1: List of Recommendations from the Evaluation and Commission responses

Recommendation	Commission response
Greater efforts should be made to support the exchange of best practices at regional level	The budget of MODINIS remains relatively small so that its impact at regional level can only be limited to a demonstration effect.
The balance should be shifted towards dissemination and exchange of best practices in the MODINIS work programmes	The Decision on MODINIS provides an indicative budget allocation. Within this, contributions to high visibility conferences are being continued. High level groups and workshops are supported in relation to specific policy targets. 'Good practice frameworks' in the fields of e-business, e-government and e-health are supported.
In order to support the exchange of best practice at the regional level, co-ordination and co-operation with DG Regio should be improved	Co-ordination with DG Regio is assured through interservice arrangements where they are appropriate to the implementation of the eEurope Action Plan notably in e-government and digital divide.
Public dissemination through websites should be redesigned to better meet the needs of SMEs	The website is undergoing a major redesign to improve its usability
The ISF needs to be formally closed; the Members should be thanked for their work and informed about new arrangements under the MODINIS programme	The Commission considers it inappropriate to close the ISF formally after such a long time of inactivity. Many members will be difficult to contact as they will have changed function. Such an exercise undertaken properly would be an inefficient use of public funds.
The eEurope Steering Group should have a clear mandate to address certain topics for a certain period of time. This mandate should be regularly reviewed and renewed	The eEurope Steering group directly engages MS administrations and is goal orientated. The Group provides technical support and strategic advice to the Commission in the implementation of the Action Plan. It operates through working groups that have a specific mandate and a limited duration.
The Commission should fully engage the Management Committee in the preparation and adoption of the Modinis work programmes	The Management Committee is consulted at the early stages of the preparation of the annual work programmes, and its favourable opinion is needed in order to adopt the work programme.
Budget utilisation should be further improved by multi-annual planning and timely initiation of public procurement actions, where needed	Budget expenditure remains a challenge. The MODINIS programme was adopted only at the end of 2003 and became operational in April 2004. Given the short programming period this delay will continue to affect the achievement of the primary goals.
The Commission should ensure an effective transfer of knowledge about programme implantation as staff are replaced and a clear allocation of responsibilities between Units for programme and budget utilisation	An active formal and informal interservice consultation procedure takes place in the preparation of the annual work programme. All budget allocations are subject to formal sub-delegations under the financial regulations. Continuity is provided for by sharing responsibility for the Programme between a number of staff.
The work programme for MODINIS should have a clear strategic plan, but should also leave flexibility to adapt to political, technological and economic opportunities as they arise. The Commission should develop clear performance indicators for measuring the contribution of the programme's activities to the programme's objectives.	The decision to link the eEurope Action Plan, the eEurope Advisory Group and MODINIS guarantees that the Programme will maintain political relevance. The MODINIS annual work programme has recently been revised in the light of the mid-term review and update of eEurope 2005 Action Plan in order to maintain its relevance. Benchmarking activities, which form a large part of the MODINIS programme, provide a quantitative measure of performance, whilst qualitative indicators will be requested in the final evaluation.