



**“An information society for all”**

## eEurope, an information society for all

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The information society is a key driver of growth and employment: it is becoming a major contributor to Europe's economic and social development. In December 1999, the European Commission launched a new political initiative, eEurope, to speed Europe's transition to the knowledge-based economy and synchronise the pace of development in the individual Member States of the European Union (EU). Approved by the European Council in June 2000, the eEurope 2002 Action Plan has three main objectives:

- to ensure that Europe exploits the potential of the Internet and digital technologies in full, in order to promote competitiveness and long-term, sustainable growth;
- to give every individual, home and school, every business and administration access to the Internet and the new digital technologies;
- to ensure that the Internet and the new technologies promote social integration, in particular of the weakest members of society.

The eEurope initiative is largely based on existing policies at both European and national level, which it aims to build on and integrate. The action plan therefore identifies common objectives, linked to specific measures that will be carried out by 2002. The benchmarking of progress achieved at national level will ensure effective monitoring.

The action taken comes under three headings:

### **A CHEAPER, FASTER AND MORE SECURE INTERNET**

#### **\* *Cheaper Internet access.***

This objective hinges on introducing more competition into local communications. Although telecommunications in the EU were liberalised in 1998, resulting in much lower tariffs for international and long-distance communications, the incumbent telecom operators still have a virtual monopoly in the local network. To enter the local communications market, new entrants basically have to duplicate the traditional telephone network, which involves a disproportionately high level of investment. The eEurope initiative therefore proposed enabling new entrants to use the incumbent operator's local network on equitable terms - the technical term is "unbundling of the local loop". This measure has been effective since 1 January 2001. The competition generated in this way will lead to a reduction in prices for Internet access. It will also stimulate the fast Internet market, where DSL technology offers high speeds on the traditional telephone network and flat-rate tariffs for unlimited use.

#### **\* *Internet access for researchers and students.***

In order to increase the level of Internet use by researchers and students in general, the Information Society Technologies programme (IST) is funding the Géant project to the tune of 80 million euros. The main aim of this project is to increase the transmission capacity of the trans-European communications infrastructure linking national research centres.

#### **\* *More secure electronic access.***

Lower prices on their own will not be enough to fuel the growth of the Internet and e-commerce, as it is also vital to improve the security of networks and privacy on the Internet. Appropriate technologies do exist. A legal framework conducive to the development of these technologies must therefore be set up so that Internet users everywhere can rely on their protection. From the summer of 2001, Member States will have provision for mutual recognition of electronic signatures, which will protect the integrity of electronic data and authenticate their originator. Trade in encryption products

(which guarantee the confidentiality of electronic data) is now free between EU countries and facilitated with its principal trading partners. The use of smart cards, in particular for access to networks, health services, on-line payments, pay-TV, etc. also needs to be promoted. For this purpose, common standards and specifications will have to be produced at the European level.

## **INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND SKILLS**

### ***\* Living and working in the information Society.***

The Internet and digital technologies are permeating all areas of human activity. Each and every one of us will therefore have to become "digitally literate" in order to benefit fully

for electronic health tools (health cards, information networks) and encourages the development of technological tools for disease prevention and treatment;

- *transport*: digital technologies can be used to develop "intelligent" transport systems for land, sea, river or air transport, such as road or air traffic management systems, real-time road traffic data or satellite tracking of vehicles and ships (Galileo system). A great deal is at stake, in terms of safety and comfort, pollution control and cut-backs in the use of oil products.

**\* *Producing European digital content for the Internet.***

Europeans must be able to find quality content in their own language on the Internet, both to preserve and promote cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and for commercial reasons. Multimedia content is becoming an increasingly important economic and employment factor. The eContent programme adopted in the framework of eEurope will above all aim to promote the use of public sector data, develop multilingual content and stimulate the digital content market.

**For additional information:** <http://europa.eu.int/eeurope/>