EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999 *2004*

Session document

24 January 2003

REPORT

on the Commission Communication entitled "eEurope 2005: An information society for all - An Action Plan to be presented in view of the Seville European Council, 21/22 June 2002"

(2002/2242 (INI))

Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy

Rapporteur: Reino Paasilinna

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CONTENTS

PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 29 May 2002, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication entitled eEurope 2005: An information society for all. An Action Plan to be presen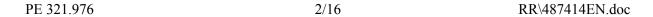ted in view of the Seville European Council, 21/22 June 2002 (COM(2002) 263 – C5-0526/2002) which was then forwarded to the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy for information.

At the sitting of 21 November 2002 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report on this subject, pursuant to Rules 47(2) and 163 of the Rules of Procedure, and that the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy and the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport had been asked for their opinions.

The Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy appointed Reino Paasilinna rapporteur at its meeting of 9 July 2002.
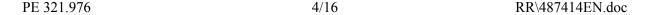
The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 8 October 2002, 12 November 2002, 25 November 2002 and 23 January 2003.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by 25 votes to 9.

The following were present for the vote: Carlos Westendorp y Cabeza, chairman; Reino Paasilinna, rapporteur; Sir Robert Atkins, Luis Berenguer Fuster, Mogens N.J. Camre (for Seán Ó Neachtain pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Marco Cappato, Gérard Caudron, Giles Bryan Chichester, Concepció Ferrer, Norbert Glante, Cristina Gutiérrez Cortines, Michel Hansenne, Hans Karlsson, Bashir Khanbhai, Erika Mann, Marjo Matikainen-Kallström, Eryl Margaret McNally, Angelika Niebler, Paolo Pastorelli, Elly Plooij-van Gorsel, Samuli Pohjamo (for Colette Flesch), John Purvis, Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl, Bernhard Rapkay (for Harlem Désir), Imelda Mary Read, Mechtild Rothe, Christian Foldberg Rovsing, Paul Rübig, Konrad K. Schwaiger, Esko Olavi Seppänen, Claude Turmes, W.G. van Velzen, Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca and Dominique Vlasto.

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy and the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport decided on 27 November 2002 and 10 September 2002 not to deliver an opinion.

The report was tabled on 24 January 2003.

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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

European Parliament resolution on the Commission Communication entitled "eEurope 2005: An information society for all - An Action Plan to be presented in view of the Seville European Council, 21/22 June 2002" (2002/2242(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled *e*Europe 2005: An information society for all - An Action Plan to be presented in view of the Seville European Council, 21/22 June 2002 (COM(2002) 263[1] - C5-0526/2002),

– having regard to the European strategy proposed at the Nice European Council on 7-10 December 2000 for eliminating social exclusion and all types of discrimination,

– having regard to the conclusions on the European Council of 15 and 16 March 2002 in Barcelona,

– having regard to the conclusions of the European Council of 21 and 22 June 2002 in Seville,

– having regard to its resolution of 16 March 2000 on "*e*Europe - An information society for all - Communication on a Commission initiative for the special European Council of Lisbon, 23 and 24 March 2000" (COM(1999) 687)[2] ,

– having regard to its resolution of 15 May 2001 on the Communications from the Commission entitled "eLearning - Designing tomorrow's education" (COM(2000) 318) and "The *e*Learning Action Plan - Designing tomorrow's education" (COM(2001) 172)[3],

– having regard to its recommendation of 6 September 2001 for a Strategy for Creating a Safer Information Society by Improving the Security of Information Infrastructures and Combating Computer-related Crime,[4]

– having regard to its resolution of 13 June 2002 on the Commission communication entitled "*e*Europe 2002: Accessibility of Public Web Sites and their Content" (COM(2001) 529)[5],

– having regard to its resolution of 22 October 1998 on the Commission communication entitled "Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors, and the implications for Regulation - Towards an

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[1] Not yet published in OJ.
[2] OJ C 377, 29.12.2000, p. 380.
[3] OJ C 34 E, 7.2.2002, p. 153
[4] OJ C 72. 21.3.2002, p. 323.
[5] Not yet published in OJ. P5-TA (2002) 0325

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information society approach" (COM(97)623)[1],

–   having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2000/31/EC of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ('Directive on electronic commerce')[2],

–   having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2001/29/EC of 22 May 2001 on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society[3],

–   having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2002/21/EC of 7 March 2002 on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive)[4],

–   having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2002/22/EC of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive)[5],

–   having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2002/58/EC of 12 July 2002 concerning the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector (Directive on privacy and electronic communications)[6],

–   having regard to the Commission communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Helping SMEs to "Go Digital" (COM(2001) 136)[7],

–   having regard to the Commission communication to the Stockholm summit entitled "*e*Europe 2002: Impact and Priorities" (COM(2001) 140[8],

–   having regard to the Commission communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled "Network and Information Security: Proposal for A European Policy Approach" (COM(2001) 298)[9],

–   having regard to the Commission communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled "*e*Europe 2002: creating an EU framework for the exploitation of public sector information" (COM(2001) 607)[10],

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[1] OJ C 341, 9.11.1998, p. 136.
[2] OJ L 178, 17.7.2000, p.1.
[3] OJ L 167, 22.6.2001, p. 10.
[4] OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 33.
[5] OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 51.
[6] OJ L 201, 31.7.2002, p. 37.
[7] Not yet published in OJ.
[8] Not yet published in OJ.
[9] Not yet published in OJ.
[10] Not yet published in OJ.

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– having regard to the Commission communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled "*e*Europe Benchmarking Report - *e*Europe 2002" (COM(2002)62)[1] ,

– having regard to Rules 47(2) and 163 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (A5-0013/2003),

A. whereas the *e*Europe Action Plan forms part of the Lisbon strategy seeking to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic information economy in the world and to improve its employment and social cohesion by 2010,

B. whereas at the European Council of Barcelona in March 2002 the Commission was urged to draw up a comprehensive eEurope 2005 Action Plan, whose priorities would be "the widespread availability and use of broadband networks throughout the Union by 2005 and the development of Internet protocol IPv6" and "security of networks and information, *e*Government, *e*Learning, *e*Health and *e*Business"[2],

C. whereas important conceptual measures, such as eLearning or eGovernment fall within the remit of the Member States,

D. whereas, at the European Council of Seville in June 2002, all institutions were called upon to ensure that *e*Europe "will be fully implemented by the end of 2005" and the Commission was invited "to present in good time for the spring European Council in 2004 a mid-term review to evaluate progress and, if necessary, make proposals to adapt the Action Plan"[3];

E. whereas there exist at Member State level initiatives corresponding to eEurope 2005 which can be included in efforts to create an information society for all,

F. whereas the new Action Plan is the continuation of the *e*Europe 2002 Action Plan, adopted at the Feira European Council in June 2000,

G. whereas the Member States play a key role in implementing the eEurope 2005 Action Plan,

H. whereas the success of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan largely depends on a timely, balanced and market-driven implementation of the new regulatory framework that should foster investment, innovation, employment and sustainable competition,

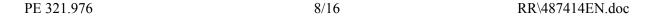I. whereas facility-based infrastructure competition will stimulate innovation and lead to sustainable competition,

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[1] Not yet published in OJ.
[2] Barcelona European Council, Presidency Conclusions, paragraph 40.
(http://ue.eu.int/en/info/eurocouncil/index.htm).
[3] Seville European Council, Presidency Conclusions, paragraph 54.
(http://ue.eu.int/en/info/eurocouncil/index.htm).

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J.   whereas the information society is a central factor influencing modern development, a major employer in the European Union and a factor which unifies Europe as a whole in a new way, whose development will bring with it significant economic, political, social and cultural opportunities,

K.   whereas the successful implementation of the eEurope Action Plan, especially the introduction of broadband technologies, requires substantial innovation and investment efforts by telecommunications undertakings and for this stable and investment-friendly framework conditions are necessary,

L.   whereas in the information society, cross-border meetings and contacts between people have become considerably easier both at individual level and in business with social institutions,

M.   whereas investor confidence in the telecommunications sector has shrunk because of the auctioning of frequencies, financial difficulties and because of market and regulatory uncertainty,

N.   whereas in some Member States thinly inhabited areas and remote communities are at risk of being partly left outside *e*Europe 2005, especially disabled and elderly people in those areas, because business considers the creation of broadband links to be commercially viable only under certain circumstances,

O.   whereas an information society for all can further develop in particular through the targeted promotion of online health services which are able to cover all EU citizens,

P.   whereas, although digitalisation and networking offer a wide variety of development opportunities, they have also led to a worldwide gulf between the prosperous industrialised countries and the developing countries,

Q.   whereas, in view of the huge difference in numbers between female students (20%) and male students (80%) within IT training educational systems, in the EU Member States a majority of Internet users are men, and whereas this gender divide is particularly marked both in rural and less-favoured areas in the EU and in the developing countries, where only a very small minority of women have an opportunity to use the Internet,

R.   whereas in most Member States women are under-represented in research and management in undertakings and administrations in the IT field,

S.   whereas a particular problem, as well as an opportunity, is presented by small and medium-sized businesses, of which there are over 19 million in the EU, which are not always able to exploit all the opportunities of information technology or to invest adequately in the training of their workers,

T.   whereas the use of IT technologies in everyday economic and administrative life has restructured job descriptions,

U.   whereas those groups which are in a weaker position in society, such as those with little education, the unemployed, the disabled and the elderly, and specifically the women

within these groups, are at risk of becoming the victims of double discrimination by being left outside the information society,

V. whereas an excessive degree of monoculturalism prevails on the Internet owing to the dominant position of English; whereas European cultures are not sufficiently promoted on the Internet, which hinders the production of high-quality digital content,

W. whereas the information network environment has also become a political implement, the effective use of which makes it considerably easier for social actors, such as national organisations to keep in touch, and creates opportunities for influence,

1. Notes with satisfaction the Commission's e-Europe 2005 Action Plan, the objective of which is to increase private sector investments and create jobs, improve productivity, modernise public services and give everyone the opportunity to participate in the worldwide information society;

2. Notes that the success of eEurope 2005 largely depends on a regulatory framework that should foster investment, innovation, employment and sustainable competition; stresses that in this respect, the implementation of the new regulatory framework in Member States is crucial; insists, therefore, that the implementation of the new regulatory framework should be strictly monitored and lead to a reduction of sector-specific regulation and initiate the transition to general competition law;

3. Calls on the Commission to submit as soon as possible a roadmap indicating the specific objectives which should be attained in the context of eEurope at the end of 2003;

4. Calls on the Commission to establish a scoreboard for Member States' interim achievements in the field of eGovernment, eLearning and eHealth, which is important as a further incentive to Member States to achieve the ultimate objectives of the eEurope 2005 action plan;

5. Stresses that guaranteeing broadband connections at an affordable price, which is an essential prerequisite for a competitive and dynamic economy, requires decisive action from the Member State Governments in accordance with the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council, with the emphasis on the principles of technology neutrality and free competition;

6. Stresses that the Member States should seek to promote not only the adoption of digital television, without marginalising analogue television users and by addressing accessibility for disabled users, but also a move to the third generation of mobile communications and deployment of complementary broadband infrastructures such as S-DSL (satellite DSL) and cable; recalls that this requires the Member States to implement the package of regulations in the telecommunications sector without delay in a harmonised way which promotes an equal playing field and sets the objectives of encouraging investment in infrastructure and promoting innovation;

7. Stresses the need to ensure, as soon as possible, that all citizens, undertakings and administrations have access to the public electronic services of all the administrations in

the EU via a secure access system, to be safeguarded by using European authentication standards;

8.   Urges the Commission to launch speedily a debate on the third generation of mobile communications, and closely co-operate with the Member States to eliminate technical and administrative obstacles which are affecting the sector and to standardise the relevant procedures; urges the Member States to adopt a flexible approach to the purchase and management of frequencies in accordance with competition law in cases where frequencies have already been auctioned and in particular to the third generation mobile communications to investigate possibilities for dividing the costs entailed in creating the necessary infrastructure in a new way; notes that there is a need to stimulate demand in the sector, and guarantee security of investments;

9.   Welcomes the European public services portal which was recently launched[1]; urges all Member States to participate actively in the creation of the portal in order that the public may have access to public services via the Internet in all Member States;

10. Stresses that, in order for such phenomena as new generation mobile communications, broadband Internet and digital television to achieve successful penetration throughout the European Union, it is necessary not only to roll out or upgrade networks but also, at the same time, for new applications and also content services to become available, and draws attention, in particular, to the mutually linked nature of these two components;

11. Welcomes the Commission's initiative in the field of open platforms in digital television and 3G, and calls on the Commission to follow up the open platforms initiative without delay and prepare specific measures to encourage the use of open platforms so as to ensure that consumers are not compelled to restrict themselves to the services offered by a single service-provider and that consumers' freedom of choice in the field of broadband services and applications is safeguarded, which is necessary for the full development of broadband and new generation mobile communications;

12. Calls on the Member State governments to devise means whereby citizens can develop routines of using the new telecommunications can be developed more quickly, and more user-friendly and fully accessible services created;

13. Urges the EU Member States to offer their citizens sufficient free Internet time to enable them to acquaint themselves with the services offered by eGovernment and carry out their civil activities as part of a network, which may help to increase the participation of girls and women; urges them to ensure that services are clearly described on the Internet and freely available to citizens without obstacles; urges the Commission to research possibilities of developing voice-driving services for user groups with special needs; urges the Commission, the Member States and national authorities to develop an action plan to actively promote the uptake of this and other technical solutions for people with hearing and visual impairments with manfacturers as an integral part of the design under the design-for-all concept;

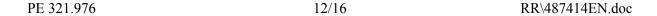14. Calls on the governments of the Member States to ensure that men and women from the

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[1] http://europa.eu.int/public-services.eu

European Union's rural areas (which account for 80% of Community territory) have adequate access to the Internet and the same access conditions as in the rest of the territory; points out that the development of many rural areas depends on the opportunities available to undertakings in the rural world to be able to compete on an equal footing with regard to the new information and communication technologies;

15. Calls on the Commission and the Council to present strategies for the integration of women in research and management in undertakings and administrations in IT fields;

16. Notes with satisfaction that the vast majority of schools in the EU currently have network-connected computers designed for teaching purposes; urges the Member States to ensure that all EU educational establishments have access to sufficient broadband connections for the purposes of eLearning and to take an active part in eliminating the gulf that exists between boys and girls in IT educational and training systems from the first years of school; stresses in particular the importance of lifelong learning and re-training in a rapidly developing digital technology environment; considers that education should particularly take account of girls' needs and be designed to increase their participation;

17. Calls on the Commission to investigate the possibilities of developing adult education aimed at managing the information and communications technology required in the information society, as well as a joint European diploma to measure these skills, when moving to the next stages of the new technology;

18. Urges the Member States to develop electronic public administration services in health care and other fields, taking account of user-friendliness and security aspects; calls on the Member States furthermore to take advantage in a targeted manner of the special importance of eHealth to spread online services consistently so as to cover all population groups, for example by making available online programmes for the prevention of diseases;

19. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop the European health card which, according to the Barcelona European Council, will replace the various documents for medical and pharmaceutical care in another Member State and to promote, on a voluntary basis, measures to ensure swift and easy access to data relating to a person's state of health and insurance, by reducing the obstacles to mobility within the Union;

20. Considers that the incorporation in the European health card, naturally subject to the consent of the person concerned, of data and medical information which may be used in the other Member States will advance the creation of a European health area and facilitate professional and geographical mobility;

21. Calls on the Member States to give particular support to SMEs in "going digital" and to encourage them to offer their workers the training needed to make use of new information and communications technologies;

22. Urges the Member States to investigate opportunities for establishing national funds to help marginalised groups and socially excluded citizens, especially including people

with disabilities, elderly people and women from rural areas and/or the most remote regions who are socially excluded to become integrated into the information society;

23.   Urges the Member States to investigate how the development of innovative broadband services can be promoted through tax concessions or demand simulated through public initiatives such as eGovernment, eHealth and eLearning on a case by case basis;

24.   Urges the Commission to promote the development of specific operating systems and software which aid the development of the information and communications sector in Europe; urges the Member States to support state-of-the-art encrypting and data security projects and to develop associated software;

25.   Urges the Commission to promote the development of European operating systems and software both of which should fully take into account the needs of vulnerable groups including disabled and elderly users, thereby aiding the development of the information and communications sector in Europe; urges the Member States to support confidentiality and data security projects and to develop programmes in this connection;

26.   Urges the Commission to explore how the use of ICT could help to increase information and participation to the democratic processes in Europe, in particular on the occasion of the European parliamentary elections in 2004;

27.   Welcomes the fact that the Commission has already established a cybersecurity task force, with the task of acting as a body to coordinate projects and policies relating to data security in the Community;

28.   Calls on the Member States to make the Cyber Security Task Force operational as soon as possible and at all events to respect the target date stated in the action plan (mid-2003) and, without fail, give the task force sufficient power to enable the ever more acute problem of security to be tackled effectively and without delay;

29.   Calls on the Council, at the information society summit to be held in Geneva in December 2003, to send a clear message concerning the EU's determination to achieve a leading role as the world's most competitive and dynamic, equality-based, knowledge economy;

30.   Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. Background

At the Barcelona European Council in March 2002 the Commission was called on to draw up an Action Plan for *e*Europe 2005, whose priorities would be "the widespread availability and use of broadband networks throughout the Union by 2005 and the development of Internet protocol IPv6" and "security of networks and information, *e*Government, *e*Learning, *e*Health and *e*Business". This Action Plan, which is the continuation of the *e*Europe 2002 Action Plan adopted at the Feira European Council in June 2000, forms part of the Lisbon strategy whereby the European Union seeks to create the most competitive and dynamic information economy in the world and to improve its employment and social cohesion by 2010.

The conclusions of the European Council of Seville in June 2002, called for *e*Europe to "be fully implemented by the end of 2005" and the Commission was invited "to present in good time for the spring European Council in 2004 a mid-term review to evaluate progress and, if necessary, make proposals to adapt the Action Plan".

The objective of the *e*Europe 2005 Action Plan is to create favourable conditions for private sector investments and job creation, improve productivity, modernise public services and give everyone the opportunity to participate in the worldwide information society, doing everything possible to avoid excluding marginal groups from the information society too. *e*Europe 2005 seeks to promote secure services, applications and content, based on wide availability of broadband connections.
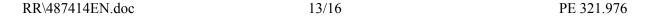
2. The objectives

*e*Government

The Member States must guarantee universally available interactive public services making use of broadband networks and multichannel distribution by the end of 2004. All citizens must have a public and easily accessible Internet contact point in their home community, preferably with a broadband connection, so that there are no obstacles to their becoming acquainted with the public services on offer. In planning network services, particular account must be taken of the needs of disadvantaged groups in society, such as the disabled. In addition, security of public service data must be further developed, e.g. by means of smartcards and electronic signatures.

*e*Learning

The Barcelona European Council set as an objective that each school in all the Member States should have one network computer per 15 pupils for teaching purposes by the end of 2003. *e*Europe also sought to guarantee that all schools would be connected to the Internet during the course of 2001. These objectives have already almost been achieved (in March 2002 there was an average of 1 network computer for 17 pupils in schools in the EU and 93% of schools had an Internet connection) .[1] All schools and higher education establishments, and other institutions central to the *e*Learning environment such as museums, should have a broadband

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[1] Eurobarometer, March 2002.

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Internet connection by the end of 2005.

When the Commission was launching its *e*Learning initiative, new teaching methods in the knowledge society were promoted by supporting the teaching of information and communications technologies. By the end of 2003 the Member States should have launched retraining activities which offer the adult population the central skills of a knowledge society with a view to improving employment and quality of life.

*e*Healthcare

Healthcare professionals are using the Internet increasingly often to contact their patients. Highly advanced instruments and computer applications are becoming more widely available, and the importance of digital technology in healthcare management is growing. Citizens are increasingly obtaining health information through the Internet, and for this reason there is a high demand for the healthcare information offered on the network.

By the end of 2005 the Member States should develop data networks in the healthcare area between hospitals, laboratories and homes, where necessary using broadband connections. By the same date citizens should be offered network services in the health field such as remote consultations, patient information in electronic form, and the possibility of applying for sickness benefits through the network. It should also be possible to write prescriptions in electronic form. Quality criteria must be set for these services, which will increase citizens' confidence in the safety and reliability of services.
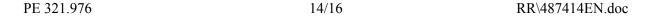
*e*Business

In a dynamic e-business environment, business transactions take place electronically and business processes are on offer which are adapted to the information society and make use of the possibilities of digital technology. In recent years an attempt has been made in the EU to create an internal market in information society services by means of a bundle of directives in this area (the directives on e-business, electronic signatures, copyright and related rights, and consumer protection in distance contracts). The Commission is trying to breathe some life into e-business which is growing much more slowly than expected, by going through the relevant legislation in cooperation with the Member States and eliminating those factors which prevent firms from engaging in e-business. For the time being, consumer purchases over the network are also hampered by the relatively highly delivery costs. By developing inter-network arbitration, an attempt is being made to increase consumer confidence in e-purchasing.

SMEs in particular often experience major difficulties in attempting to "go digital". There are currently some 19 million SMEs in Europe, which do not often have the capacity or the opportunity to invest adequately in digital technology, or in particular to offer their employees the necessary training in the use of information and communications technologies.

Broadband connections and multichannel distribution

According to the most recent Eurobarometer questionnaires (June 2002), an average of 40% of EU households have an Internet connection. This signifies a clear increase over the situation at the time of the Lisbon European Council, but on the other hand the spread of the

Internet is slowing down, with growth at only 4% since June 2001. The level of Internet use among the population is a whole, however, is higher than its distribution in homes (almost 50% in November 2001). It is clear from these figures that the EU still lags behind the USA in terms of the spread of the internet.

The objectives of the Barcelona European Council included wide dissemination of broadband networks and the development of the IPV 6 protocol which will make possible the next generation of the Internet. The Member States ought to prioritise the creation of broadband infrastructure and promote opportunities for using the Internet by multichannel distribution through digital television and the third generation of mobile communications. This calls for a definition of 'broadband' according to uniform criteria. Investments should also be supported for the establishment of broadband connections in thinly populated and remote areas. In building up infrastructures one possibility would be to have broadband installation work carried out by contractors who would in turn hire out the network to operators. This would be more beneficial to firms and would create competition among them at the level of packaged services.

Data security

The European Union has implemented a comprehensive strategy on network data security, which was adopted in a Council resolution of December 2001 and in the Commission proposal for a framework decision on attacks against information systems[1]. In this resolution the Council called on the Commission to set up a working party on data network security. This working party should be set up as soon as possible, given the threats and security risks to computer and data traffic networks which have clearly increased over the last few years.

The adoption of electronic signatures as an authentication procedure has been very slow, despite the adoption of a directive on this subject.[2] On the other hand, the adoption of smartcards has grown thanks to favourable market opinions.

3. Good practice and benchmarking

The e-Europe 2005 Action Plan seeks to simplify and exploit good practices and increase their value still further as models which can be used in seeking to achieve the objectives of e-Europe. In cooperation with the states holding the Presidency, the Commission is arranging campaigns for the dissemination of good practice. In November 2001 a conference on e-government was held which concluded with the adoption of a common statement by the EU Member States, the EFTA countries and the ministers of the candidate countries, in which they reiterated their commitment to develop e-government as part of the Lisbon strategy and the Action Plan for e-Europe. The results achieved will also be notified through research and user networks acting as support networks.

At the Lisbon European Council it was decided that progress towards an information economy would be monitored by the "open key coordination procedure". This procedure compares national results by means of benchmarking. The Council reiterated the 23 indicators decided on in November 2000 with the Member States as part of the e-Europe 2002 Action

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[1] COM(2002)173, 19 April 2002.
[2] Directive 1999/93/EU.

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Plan. The ultimate objective of this benchmarking was to create a policy in this area. The Commission would publish in February 2002 a report on e-Europe benchmarking[1], and it proposes to publish by the beginning of 2003 an evaluation of the e-Europe 2002 Action Plan.

4. Conclusions

By the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan the private sector is invited to cooperate with the Commission and the Member States to achieve the objectives of e-Europe. Generally speaking the Action Plan creates a framework for a co-ordinated European policy on information society issues. In the conclusions of the Seville European Council it was announced that the plan would promote significantly EU efforts towards a competitive economy based on information. If successful the plan will have a significant influence on growth, productivity, employment and social cohesion in Europe.

Your rapporteur regards the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan as a particularly important and logical continuation of e-Europe 2002 with a view to exploiting the reforms and results achieved. The objectives of the Feira European Council, namely cheaper, faster and more secure Internet connections, investments in people and people's know how, and encouraging Internet use, are still important objectives, towards which determined efforts are needed. The main priorities for the next stage of e-Europe are widespread broadband connections, multichannel communications, data network security and public services offered to citizens on the Internet, learning which exploits data and communications technology and a dynamic e-business environment. Your rapporteur considers that in order to achieve these objectives aid must be given to SMEs to "go digital" and to ensure that their workers have sufficient data and communications technology know-how. Services must be developed based on the new technologies of the information society in order to create new business opportunities, and the adoption of the third generation of mobile communications must be promoted as a central element of multichannel communications. Your rapporteur also favours of the creation of national funds seeking to eliminate the exclusion of marginal groups from the information society and overcome the digital and social divide which has arisen.

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[1] COM(2002) 62, 5 February 2002.

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