

NEWS INFORMATION SOCIETY

CONVERGENCE

'CONVERGENCE' EUROPE'S NEXT BIG 'IS' CHALLENGE

JOIN THE OPEN DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF IT, TELECOM AND BROADCASTING. ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY STARTS HERE.

Once upon a time there was broadcasting, voice telephony and on-line computer services. These were distinctly different worlds, with separate technological platforms, regulatory and legislative constraints, different business and economic priorities and different ways of seeing the world.

Today the Information Society has changed all this. And one of the hottest new

topics on the minds of IT specialists, media corporations, user groups and the European Institutions today is the concept of 'convergence'.

Convergence is the exact opposite of this cosy division of separately-regulated services. In practical terms it means that you can access information services easily and cheaply via the Internet, your television set,

telephone, computer or a variety of consumer electronic devices.

This convergence of these technological worlds has been made possible by two phenomena – flexible digital transmission technology which allows all media to link easily and the recent deregulation of the European telecommunication market.

Telecom, media and IT companies are now set to offer services outside their traditional business sectors. What's more, they can easily serve customers anywhere in the world. For example, home sick German expats in Japan can tune into the ARD news and Catalans in Brussels listen to local radio feed.

How convergence is changing our world

Convergence will change the landscape of many traditional media and telecommunications businesses today. Here are some examples:

- Internet services delivered to TV sets via systems such as Web TV.



- E-mail and World Wide Web access via digital TV decoders and mobile telephones.
- Webcasting of radio and TV programming on the Internet.
- Using the internet for voice telephony.

Information will be more rapid and more accessible. But certainly a major concern for investors and businesses in these related industries is that many of today's services will be available tomorrow at a fraction of the cost. This will be a big advantage for users, but require a major 're-think' for industry, which has invested millions in infrastructure, technologies and work methods that may no longer be appropriate.

An issue that must be faced is that these developments may be leading to regulatory uncertainty which may inhibit investment.

Existing rules were designed for a national, analogue and mono-media environment, where traditional sectoral distinctions were clear and the platforms over which services were delivered were well defined. Now, however, the market is global and services increasingly cut across the different traditional sectors and may be provided over a variety of platforms.

Green paper to encourage debate

To examine how European citizens, businesses and the European Information Society can take advantage of the convergence of telecom, media and information technologies, the European Commission has published a Green Paper on the topic.

The purpose of this document, signed by European Commissioners Martin Bangemann (Industry) and Marcellino Oreja (Information, Culture and Audiovisual), is to encourage a widespread debate on the key aspects of this new development.

The Commissioners propose a five month debate – between December 1997 and April 1998, at which time a series of proposals will be made for the type of programmes the European Union should adopt to support the progress of convergence of convergence across Europe. The entire process will be completed and ready to move forward by the end of the year.

Key questions on convergence

To kick-off the debate, the Green Paper asks a list of questions which cover the human, business, cultural and societal aspects of convergence and the Information Society. Some of the key points are:

- Are the definitions in the telecommunications, media and IT sectors in national and/or European Union legislation adapted to the convergence process?
- Will the convergence phenomenon require adaptation of existing approaches or new approaches to be applied to issues of market entry and licensing; access to networks, customers (including conditional access systems), content; and pricing?
- In the light of convergence, what approach



THE INFORMATION SOCIETY FORUM

Past, present and future: a view from Chairman Claudio Carrelli

We are not approaching the Information Society - we already live in it.

The Information Society has long been approaching gradually and the question is no longer whether we want it, but how we want it to develop.

The Information Society Forum (ISF) has passed its second anniversary, but in the forward looking spirit of the Information Society, it would be more precise to say that the Forum has entered its third year. During the first year the Forum's work was primarily devoted to developing a 'vision' of the IS. The highly interdisciplinary expertise that this group brought together allowed us to tackle the complex aspects of the Information Society. Starting from this vision, the Forum began an intense interaction with the Commission's activities and ensured a strong presence in all the major IS events.

The future will be even more challenging, as the Forum has the firm intention of playing a more proactive role – not only within public debate and with all the major players – but also in the organisation and promotion of key Information Society-related events. A priority for the coming year is to considerably expand the Forum's membership. The dual purpose behind this is to involve the central and eastern European countries and to inject fresh blood and new ideas to stimulate the coming debates.

Our first annual report served as constructive input to support the activities of the European Commission, and its impact has significantly influenced the programme's current and foreseen actions. The Commission Services published a comprehensive report analysing all the Forum recommendations and highlighting corresponding actions which it thinks should be put in motion or furthered. However, this was only the first effect of the Forum growing 'voice'.

The second year has been characterised by much tighter interrelationship with the Services of the European Commission. The goal of this approach is to allow on-line interaction with the work in progress. Having progressed to this stage after just two years, the Forum has strengthened its fundamental role and it has since been able to broaden its target audience well beyond the EU Institutions.

1997 has also been a year of awareness-building for the IS Forum. Events have been organised in a number of European cities – including Barcelona, Brussels, Lisbon, Venice and Cologne. These events promoted and disseminated the benefits and results of the Forum's efforts. All of this meant that the Forum's 'voice' was considerably louder this year. Probably the most striking examples were the role played at the Bonn Ministerial Conference in July (where the Forum co-ordinated the users' declaration), and the input given for the Employment Summit in Luxembourg last December – known as the 'Barcelona Declaration'.

"Convergence" continued from page 1.

should be taken, to completing the transition from analogue to digital services, including the need for a timetable for analogue switch-off?

- What should be the objectives of standardisation in the light of convergence and what should be the relationship between regional and international standardisation?
- What additional action (if any) is required to ensure that the interests of consumers and of users are respected?
- What kinds of EU research and development projects should be launched in the context of convergence?
- Does the existence of different regulatory authorities responsible for different aspects of telecommunications, media and IT activities offer a workable structure for regulatory supervision in the light of convergence?
- Will convergence require a reassessment of regulatory responsibilities at a national, EU or international level, and, if so in which areas? What are your contributions to this debate? All views are welcome.

For more information and the complete text of this Green Paper, go to:
<http://www.ispo.cec.be/convergencegp/>
Electronic democracy starts here!

THE CONVERGENCE DEBATE SCHEDULE

- A five-month public consultation period (December 1997 to April 1998).
- A report on this public consultation to be prepared by June 1998.
- The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament are expected to adopt Resolutions on this matter in the second quarter of 1998.
- In response to these resolutions, the Commission could prepare a Convergence Action Plan by the end of 1998.
- The already-announced Telecommunications Review will be conducted in 1999. ■

"IS forum" continued from page 1.

The important questions on the table for the coming year will spread far beyond the Internet. The main debates will be focused on the closely linked issues of convergence and globalisation, and the complex and extremely delicate issue of sustainable development, with particular reference to the 'Model European'. The organisation and the promotion of an 'European Information Society day' will also be one of the major agenda items for 1998, together with other events to be held across Europe, that are organised by the different working groups. The Information Society day will be a special awareness event, with a goal to reach society as a whole rather than any specific group. The Forum will continue to play its role as an authoritative source of reflection, debate and advice, and will broaden its scope and visibility, interacting with all EU Institutions, national Governments, sectors and interest groups in order to support and represent the needs of citizens and society. ■

More information on the IS Forum at:
<http://www.ispo.cec.be/infoforum/isf.html>



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

CREATING A EURO-MEDITERRANEAN INFORMATION SOCIETY

Close links mean mutual stability

Since the 1960s the prosperity gap between the European Union and our neighbours in the North African and Mediterranean region has grown increasingly wider. At current growth rates, the countries in this region will see their population doubling, while the GDP per capita will increase only marginally. Instability in this region can only have negative effects on the European Union. Peace and stability in this region are of the greatest importance for Europe. The European Councils of Essen (December 1994) and of Cannes (June 1995) stressed the strategic importance of the Mediterranean region. The European Council of Cannes agreed to organise a Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference, which took place in Barcelona in November 1995, covering, among other chapters, the role of information and communication technology for the overall economic development of the region.

The partnership model envisaged in Barcelona was developed furthermore during the Italian presidency in 1996; during that period the Commission organised jointly with the Consorzio Nettuno, a Conference in Rome on the "Construction of the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society" (May 30-31 1996) and launched two studies on the State of Advanced Communications in the Mediterranean and on the State of the Internet in the region..

The Rome Conference underlined in its conclusions that the use of modern application of information and communication technology will play an essential role in the reduction of the current prosperity gap. The core of the Commission activities in this field is currently represented by the development of a co-ordinated strategy for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Information Society.

1998 will be an important year in the launching of co-operation initiatives on the Information Society and related issues between these two regions. The European Commission is organising a programme of thematic workshops across the Mediterranean Region this year. Venues include: Nicosia (EUROMED-NET98 - The Role of the Internet in the Mediterranean, March 4-7), Tunis (Workshop on Telemedicine, April 14-16), Cairo (Workshop on Multimedia Access to Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Heritage - new dates, April 27-29), Istanbul (Workshop on Information Society Strategies for the Euro-Mediterranean Region, June 98). ■

For information on the Commission's Mediterranean IS initiative, contact:
ispo@ispo.cec.be
or visit the available web sites:
for the Nicosia Event:
<http://www.euromednet.ucy.ac.cy>
for the Cairo event:
<http://www.cultureware.ritsec.com/eg/culture98>

EUROPEAN IS DAY

LET'S HAVE YOUR BRIGHTEST IDEAS

If you've ever thought of communicating the advantages of the Information Society to European citizens in a clear, simple way, and said 'I can do that'.... or even 'I can do better than that'. We'd like to hear from you. ISPO is looking for partners interested in developing a creative approach to explaining the European Information Society, on 'IS' Day, which will be held in late 1998. The goal is to reach citizens across the European Union and central and eastern Europe. The approach chosen should be based on multimedia, be held in several countries simultaneously, and be practical and entertaining. In a word, the IS Day event should show that the Information Society is exciting, practical and easy for everyone to participate.

If you or your company are interested in participating, please review the summary of criteria below and put your wildest ideas on paper.

The Goal

To organise a major IS awareness event with visibility and impact all over Europe, addressed to the citizens in general (rather than to specific professional or sectoral groups).

The Places

The main event should take place in a city in central and eastern Europe, but should be networked with replicated smaller events in many other major cities across Europe.

Contents

The programme and format of the event should be as original as possible, stimulating a broad interest and participation across the EU, and allowing for some interactive participation of citizens and politicians. The following 5 key components should be included in the preparation of the IS Day Europe '98 programme:

1. *Short films* illustrating the impact and existing possibilities that Information Society can bring to peoples' lives, which could be broadcasted during the IS Day.
2. *Strong involvement of TV companies* to provide simultaneous networked broadcast of the IS Day throughout Europe.
3. *Show combining music, multimedia, VR, etc.*, and addressed to a live and TV audience.
4. *Interactive exhibition targeted at special groups* (e.g. elderly, children at school) and illustrating how concrete IS applications can affect/improve peoples' lives.
5. *Involvement of politicians* - for preparation and participation in the event (examples of Electronic Democracy, Q&A time, videoconference, etc.). ■

You can submit your ideas to the ISPO secretariat - contact details on page 4



STANDARDISATION

CAN ICT REALLY CURE PROCUREMENT OF ITS 'PAPER PROBLEM'?

Trouble-free, paper-free and hassle-free public procurement procedures have long been the dream of institutions and tendering companies. This goal may be closer than many people think, now that the SPRITE programme is up and running.

While the programme's full name does not inspire a smoother administrative image (Support and guidance for the Procurement of Information and Telecommunication Systems and Services) SPRITE has launched nine projects in January that have encouraged cooperation between a broad segment of users, to help solve the paper-based procurement problem once and for all.

Participants in SPRITE include industry, user associations, administrations,

universities and research centres that are dealing with ICT procurement issues. Projects are grouped in three clusters. The first group compares procurement practices to determine and promote best practices for large, and medium and small companies and public administrations.

The second cluster focuses on the procuring telecom services with the aim to validate the European Open Telecommunications Systems Interconnection Profile model in different working environments and to expand its scope by including the most recent network-based tools. The correlation between the functionality and the user profiles described in the model and generic business processes will also be investigated. A project will specifically address the issues related to the procurement of ICTs accessible by the disabled.

The third group of projects aims to compile procurement guides for those interested in

acquiring more user friendly and market focused services.

The SPRITE initiative has also interested people and organisations outside the European Union, particularly in central and eastern Europe. Here many administrations and industrial players have expressed their wish to be associated with this action in to receive feedback on how they can align their procurement processes with the emerging EU best practice. Specific actions for awareness will be held later this year in the central and eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region. ■

Next stop: electronic public administrations ... we hope!

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G7 PILOT PROJECTS

MAKING SMES GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE

The G7 Pilot Project, A Global Marketplace for SMEs, has been created by the United States, Japan and the European Commission to ensure that smaller companies have a fighting chance to expand their business in the global Information Society. In addition to the three coordinating countries, project participants are the G7 countries, and other European countries (Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland) as well as the central and eastern

European countries), Korea, Mexico, the OECD and Singapore are now involved in the project. The Project's work is centred around three action lines: Building a Global Information Network for SMEs, documenting business requirements of SMEs, and establishing international testbeds and pilot projects. The work currently accomplished or underway in the project includes:

- **Business information directory.** A large network of business information on the Web has been gathered, with contributions from 13 countries and three international organisations (OECD, ICC, APEC).
- **Working groups.** International and national working groups are studying the many issues in electronic commerce for SMEs. This has encouraged policy definition in many countries and concrete proposals for solutions are being defined.
- **A G7 Label,** which has been given to international

testbeds or pilot projects that aim to raise the awareness of electronic commerce for SMEs, contribute to business information and try new solutions.

- **High interest levels** from business and international organisations to participate in this G7 Project and to present results. Involving more countries, in particular developing countries, is an key focus for the future. ■

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INFORMATION SOURCES

EUROPE ON-LINE

NINE WEB SITES FOR ALL YOUR LINKS TO THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

Millions of pages of practical information on the European Institutions are available at the click of a mouse ... on one of the following World Wide Web sites of the European Commission.

All electronic information about the European Institutions can be accessed through the Commission's EUROPA site. This site has literally millions of pages relating to every aspect of the European Union. All programmes are listed here, as it is the official Web site of all Directorate Generals. This is your starting point for all electronic links to the European Institutions.

<http://europa.eu.int>

EUROPARL is the European Parliament's Web server. Information ranging from recently published documents, to news, to a directory of members of parliament, and the latest topics under discussion can be accessed.

<http://www.europarl.eu.int>

The COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION has a multilingual Web server, providing general information on the activities and working methods of the Council. The site also offers a virtual tour of the European Institutions in Brussels.

<http://ue.eu.int>

The Committee of the Regions has set up a comprehensive Web site, including a press centre, a virtual tour of the European institutions, a library, a directory of members, an agenda and details of the sessions.

<http://www.coreu.int>

The CORDIS Web site is a complete information source on all research and development programmes run by the European Union. The CORDIS databases give rapid access to information ranging from a scientific news service and details on research project results to details on upcoming programmes, partner search, etc.

<http://www.cordis.lu>

I'M EUROPE is the Information Market web site. Here you'll find details on EU programmes and projects relating to the Information Industry, such as multimedia educational software, details of calls for tender, details of the telematics applications programme, and other related information.

<http://www.echo.lu>

"Europe on-line" continued on page 4.



ISPO CORNER

**HELPING UNIONS GET TO
GRIPS WITH THE FUTURE**

As the Information Society began to emerge, observers rapidly recognised that the media, entertainment and journalism professions would be changed forever. From the view of the trade unions supporting these industries, neither the people nor many of the traditional businesses in this sector are prepared to face these changes. The goal of MUSENET, a project funded by ISPO, aims to help trade unions and their members come to grips with this changing world, and use these new technologies with confidence.

- MUSENET is doing this by:
- Raising awareness among members on the changes the Information Society is bringing and how people can benefit from them.
 - Creation of training programmes that will prepare union members with the skills they need to survive.
 - Develop new bargaining priorities and cooperation with other unions in the converging media industry.

- Shape new trends in industrial relations by setting a basis for social dialogue on the new Information Society trends.

Some of the most recent MUSENET developments are:

- The pilot sessions to test the MUSENET training materials, commencing in March, 1998, with five British media sector trade unions.
- Plans to put the MUSENET library database on-line. The database provides abstracts of publications and reports concerning the Information Society published by trade unions, and details of background documents from a wide range of sources.
- Development of an on-line news service for trade unions, to up-date them on key Information Society developments. ■

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"Europe on-line" continued from page 3.

ISPO. Here you can access your electronic copy of IS News and check up on the daily developments in the Information Society. The main objectives of ISPO and this web site are: to track the developments in the Information Society in terms of news, EU legislation, policy papers etc.; to act as an information broker where companies can look for ideas and locate partners; to be a starting point for international cooperation actions; and to help industry and users contact the European Commission on all topics related to the Information Society. Several discussion lists have been launched (Topics: Information Society, Electronic Democracy, Electronic Commerce).

<http://www.ispo.cec.be>

EUDOR is the European Union document repository that contains all the official documents of the Commission. It is updated daily with the electronic version of every document as published by the Commission's Office of Official Publications.

<http://www.eudor.eu.int>

The CITIZENS FIRST site was created as part of a broader information initiative launched by the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The different subjects treated in this site will give you an idea of your rights as a national of a Member State of the European Union.

<http://citizens.eu.int> ■

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To receive back copies of the magazine (if still available), and any other enquiries, please write to: ISPO, BU 24 0/74, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels e-mail: ispo@ispo.cec.be

This newsletter and previous issues are also available on the web at: <http://www.ispo.cec.be/ispo/newsletter/index.html>

CALENDAR

European Telematics – Advancing the Information Society
Barcelona (E)
4-7 February 1998
European Commission
Telematics Applications Programme
Fax: +32 2 7213357
e-mail: conference@cscdc.be
<http://www.concord.cscdc.be/barcelona/announce.html>

Information Society Chances and changes for a region undergoing regeneration
Magdeburg (D)
26-28 February 1998
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<http://eprix.tsa.de/conference>

EUROMED-NET '98
Nicosia (Cyprus)
4-7 March 1998
University of Cyprus
Tel: +357 5 99722
Fax: +357 5 399494
<http://www.euromednet.ucy.ac.cy>

ESIS Conference
Brussels (B)
18-19 March 1998
European Commission ISPO
Fax: +32 2 299 41 80
e-mail: Androulla.Kaminara@ispo.cec.be
<http://www.ispo.cec.be/esis/ESISConference.html>

3rd TIDE Congress
Improving the quality of life for the European Citizen
European Commission DG XIII
Helsinki (FI)
22-24 April, 1998
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Multimedia Access to Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Heritage
Cairo (Egypt)
27-29 April, 1998
Regional Information Technology Institute
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e-mail: culture98@riti.risec.com.eg
<http://www.cultureware.ritsec.com.eg/culture98>

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