Living and working in the information society: people first. Green Paper

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The Committes agrees with many of the green paper's points. However, it regrets to note the following: Too little attention is focused on daily life, an area where ICTs exercise a powerful attraction, offering the prospect of huge markets and therefore jobs. The Committee has already called for studies to evaluate the investment needed to set up and operate information highways and new services, and to assess the effect on employment. It would be logical to ensure that the discussion encompasses the impact of ICTs as a means to an end, with all the advantages and risks they entail, in an attempt to neutralize those risks or minimize their effects in advance. Following the Dublin colloquium, the Commission began consulting the organizations with which it is in regular contact. The Committee would be most interested in seeing the results of the consultation. It hopes that provision has been made for some feedback to the bodies and individuals who have answered the Commission's call. A European employment observatory, constantly covering the positive and negative effects of ICTs, would help greatly in taking predictive decisions. ICTs are accused of encouraging business relocations. On the other hand, they also contribute to the renovation of national or European problem areas and to safeguard or create jobs. ICTs have made teleworking possible: this is the ideal solution for some, but can have the undesirable effect of creating or aggravating a feeling of isolation. Hence the importance of objective information and case-by-case advice. ICTs have also enabled new forms of home shopping to be developed. This poses problems for certain types of customer, who must be protected against unfair practices and hasty decisions. SMEs do not have the resources available to large companies to make use of certain types of ICTs. The ESC has two wishes: firstly, that in relation to ICTs, SMEs receive assistance in terms of advice, training and equipment and secondly, that consideration be given to the possibility of establishing forms of partnership between them and experienced businesses. The Committee has always advocated appropriate, up-to-date training at the earliest stage. It shares the green paper's concerns and endorses its proposals. ICTs must be built into curricula at every stage of education as a tool. The Committee highlights the importance of analysing companies' and people's needs. The ESC would recall its earlier positions and comments, particularly: its opinion on the revamping of the directive on television without frontiers (particularly paragraphs 2.2, 3.16 et seq.); its opinion on the Media II programme. In an opinion on the Communication from the Commission "Europe's way to the information society: An action plan", adopted in 1995, the Committee considered that "the Commission's proposed timetable for the liberalization of (telecommunications(infrastructure cannot reasonably be introduced without having first clearly defined the concept of universal service - including the reasons for it, the stakes involved, the safeguard mechanisms that go with it, its development, and the financial arrangements". The Committee notes that the content of the universal service is only now being specified and that the funding, apart from that for a hesitantly-defined universal service, will not be provided by operators. The Committee endorses the green paper's concluding argument on the need to strengthen all expressions of pluralism at all levels.