Information society: European multimedia content industry, INFO 2000 multi-annual programme

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The Communication is based on an evaluation report presented to the European Commission in July 2000 assessing projects funded under the INFO 2000 programme. A successor to INFO 2000, known as eContent, is proposed. The objectives of eContent are based on the findings of the evaluation report. INFO 2000 was set up in 1996 based on Council Decision 96/339/EC. It was to run for four years (1996-2000) with a remit to raise awareness of, and to encourage the use of, multi-media contents in the emerging information society. Its target audiences are European industry, SME's and citizens. The objectives of the Council decision are to: - create favourable conditions for the development of the European multimedia content industry; - stimulate demand for, and use of, multimedia content; - contribute to the professional, social and cultural development of citizens; and lastly - to promote the exchange of knowledge between users and suppliers. Within the context of these objectives a budget of EUR 65 million was allocated to INFO 2000 and the following four action lines set up: - stimulating demand and raising awareness; - exploiting public sector information; - triggering Europe's multimedia potential; - support actions. These action lines formed the basis for project funding. An evaluation of INFO 2000 projects was undertaken by an independant company over a six month period (Jan 2000-July 2000). Overall the conclusion of the report were positive. For example, projects funded by INFO 2000 helped raise awareness of multimedia content amongst SME's at a time when the European Union was lagging seriously behind the United States. Further, projects encouraging liaisons between private and public sector organisations proved both stimulating and informative to participants. The evaluators did note however that cutting the original budget from EUR 100 million to EUR 65 million minimised the impact of various projects. It was further noted that the lack of harmonisation and standardisation in multimedia content across the EU effectively hinders the exploitation of its use. Whilst the Commission Communication accepts the latter conclusion it also notes that it is not within the remit of eContent to set standardisation issues but that it will in future try to facilitate standardisation projects.