Information and communication technologies ICT and developing countries

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The committee adopted the report by Lone DYBKJAER (ELDR, DK) on information and communication technologies (ICT) in the developing countries. The report pointed out that, by the end of 2001, 700 million people were expected to be on-line but at the same time more than 2 billion people would never have made a telephone call. The committee believed the ICT revolution (telephones, computers, hardware, software) was likely to widen the gap between rich and poor countries as well as between different social groups in the latter unless measures were taken to bring the developing countries into the process. The report said that the use of new information technology in the developing countries could have a major impact on the fight against poverty in areas such as education, health, environment, rural development and tourism. ICT could also be an effective tool in empowering people and boosting their ability to develop and participate in democracy, create good governance and strengthen human rights. The committee therefore called for ICT access and improvement to be one of the targeted sectors eligible for support under the new private sector support programme in the EDF. It also stressed that the Commission needed to have sufficient numbers of qualified staff and should therefore create an e-development unit in the Europe Aid cooperation office. Lastly the report called for the references to "transport" as a priority in the Commission's development policy documents to be replaced in certain areas with "communication, transport and sustainable energy".