Information society: e-economy, impact on companies

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PURPOSE : Economic analysis and policy implications of the impact of the e-economy. CONTENT : This communication reviews the impact of the e-Economy on European enterprises in the light of recent market developments. It builds on the work achieved in the areas of telecoms liberalisation and legislative action in favour of a clear framework for e-business. The correction of excessive stock market valuations and the consolidation phase taking place within the ICT sector have eliminated most of the exaggeration that has clouded the debate in the past. Statistical evidence has allowed the emergence of a broad consensus that ICT is increasing the rate of growth of productivity. This communication contributes further detailed analysis confirming the appropriateness of the strategy that the EU has been following. It suggests targeted activities, improving action already under way to foster the take up of ICT, to integrate it with converging production technologies, to increase the availability of the necessary skills, to exploit further the opportunities of the internal market, to encourage innovation and to support research. It also highlights the need to make sure that public administrations not only exploit ICT effectively themselves but also become catalysts or its wider use. The communication looks in details at six areas. 1) On fostering the full participation by SMEs in the e-Economy, suggestions include the following: -foster open standards and certification procedures -reinforce the security of networks and of information -encourage public administrations to be at the leading edge of on-line service delivery and provide incentives for SMEs to access such services, particularly in key areas such as e-procurement, e-tax, and social security compliance, online business registration, online compliance with employment legislation, licensing regulations and patent registration. 2) On the need for skills in the e-Economy, there is a need for reinforcing the dialogue with all stakeholders and fostering public private partnerships to accelerate the development of focused skills programmes and e-learning solutions. 3) In order to maximise the opportunities offered by the internal market, suggestions include: -reviewing existing product legislation, particularly certification requirements and procedures to ensure that they are neutral as between different means of product and service delivery -analyzing the impact for e-business on different distribution channels, and in particular potential conflict between legislation in different Member States. 4) The need to promote openness and competition involves, amongst other things, the development of codes of conduct in the B2B and B2C area, notably to guarantee access in e-marketplaces. 5) The promotion of e-research means, inter alia, the need to support multidisciplinary research activities and to stimulate the management of change in the organisation of neteprrises within the e-economy through research and demonstration activities. 6) To increase efficiency in government-business relationships, there is a need to foster the online availability and exchange of information at all levels, and to promote interoperability, both in terms of infrastructure like electronic signatures, as well as interms of service standards.