Electronic commerce, a European initiative

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OBJECTIVE: to encourage vigorous growth of electronic commerce in Europe. SUBSTANCE: this document proposes a whole range of measures in the field of electronic commerce, a field of great importance for European competitiveness in the world markets. These specific measures should be implemented in the wider context of the initiatives of the Information Society and would, in particular, be integrated into the Rolling Action Plan for the Information Society (COS0464). The Commission's political objective was to implement immediately a consistent framework of technological, regulatory and support actions by the year 2000. The key elements of the document were the following: (1) to promote the technology and infrastructure needed to put in place structures which would provide efficient access systems for users. This objective would require a fully competitive telecommunications market and the refocusing of R&D efforts so that Europe's high level of scientific and technological capability could be translated more successfully into marketable products and services. It would also require a broad consensus on standards and on the interoperability of electronic market systems; (2) to capitalize on the single market by ensuring a consistent regulatory framework for electronic commerce in European and in wider global markets. This framework should boost the confidence of businesses and consumers in secure technologies (such as digital signatures, digital certificates and electronic payment mechanisms) so that they make use of electronic commerce by dismantling remaining legal barriers and preventing the creation of new obstacles; (3) to foster a favourable business environment for electronic commerce by promoting adequate skills, and by making consumers and industry aware of the opportunities it offered. This would be realized through training, information and demonstration projects, and by exploiting synergies between government and industries; (4) to work towards a global consensus from a common European position to ensure effective participation in current international cooperation and negotiation. Europe should defend its own strengths and interests within international groups and fora.