Information society, eEurope: Commission initiative for European Council in Lisbon, 23-24 March 2000

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PURPOSE : A Commission Initiative on 'Europe · An Information Society' for the Special European Council of Lisbon on 23 and 24 March 2000. CONTENT : The changes wrought by the Information Society are the most significant since the Industrial Revolution, and will have far-reaching effects on all aspects of people's lives. Managing the transformation represents the central social and economic challenge of the Union. Experience from the United States shows that new technologies drive growth and create jobs, yet Europe is not exploiting this potential, since its progress into the digital age is slow. This initiative aims to accelerate the process. Europe has a leading role in mobile communications and digital TV, yet the uptake on the Internet has been relatively slow. Consumers need to acquire skills that will enable them to use the Internet successfully. Europe must overcome the handicaps that are impeding the rapid uptake of digital technologies. These handicaps include the lack of a sufficiently entrepreneurial, service-orientated culture, and an insufficiently pro-active public secor. The initiative builds on the current policy framework, concentrating on ten priority actions, with specific targets and deadlines: - European youth into the digital age. Digital literacy must be a basic competence for all young Europeans. The main targets are that all schools should have access to multimedia resources by 2001. By 2002, all teachers should be skilled in the use of these resources. - Cheaper Internet access. Since the liberalisation of the market for telecommunications infrastructures and services on 1 January 1998, there are signs of falling prices and increased consumer choices. Much remains to be done. Whilst legislative changes based on the 1999 Communications Review will be forthcoming, the Council and Parliament are invited to accelerate the process. Member States are asked to meet certain targets, the main one being that by the end of 2000, incumbents should offer unbundled local loops under non-discriminatory terms and conditions in order to allow all operators to provide innovative services. - Accelerating e-commerce. This trading activity is already worth 17 billion Euro in the Union and is expected to reach 340 billion by 2003. SMEs must take advantage of e-commerce, so that they can benefit from the whole European market. This needs a reliable Internal Market legal framework. Among the targets posited for the end of 2000, is the need to ensure that remaining e-commerce directives are in place. - Fast Internet for researchers and students. The possibilities of interactive networking can be exploited to develop a whole new approach to learning, but online collaboration is not established practice in Europe, where the levels of connectedness vary greatly. The main target is that by the end of 2001, at least one university and one scientific research faculty per country should have a campus network capable of supporting multimedia communications. - Smart cards for secure electronic access. Huge markets willopen up if Europe can lead the development in smart cards, whether individual, multifunctional or embedded in different devices. By the end of 2000, there should exist an inter-sector agreement on common specifications for a generalised smart card infrastructure. - Risk capital for high-tech SMEs. The availability of finance at an early stage is vital if an idea is to commercially successful and create jobs and wealth. Europe lags behind the United States since there remain too many barriers discouraging risk taking. Targets are geared towards the removal of these barriers and innovative means of raising capital - E-Participation for the disabled. The market potential for products and services for disabled people has not been exploited. One of the proposed targets is the development of a European curriculum module in Design-for-All. - Healthcare online. The challenges are to improve quality and accessibility whilst constraining overall costs. There needs to be widespread deployment of fully integrated and interoperable systems. Targets include the setting up of pan European medical on-line libraries, and the opportunity of all citizens for access to a health smart card. - Intelligent transport. Digital technologies encourage safer transport and enhance the quality of public transport in large cities. The targets set out suggest specific uses for these technologies. - Government online. The aim is to make public information more easily accessible by extending and simplifying Internet access.

Government services will be closer to citizens and it will create jobs in value·added service providers. One of the targets specifies that Member States and the Commission should ensure that citizens have a two-way electronic access to basic interactions, such as tax forms and funding applications.