Development and application of new information technologies in the next decade

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Adopting the report by Mrs Elly PLOOIJ-VAN GORSEL (ELDR, NL) on the new information and communications technologies (ICT), the European Parliament called for improved harmonization of Member States' national policies in this area within the framework of the Community decision-making process. The European Parliament wished to see a real single ICT market, especially at regulatory level (standards, patents etc.), so that ICT products and services would be operationally compatible throughout the European Union. It recommended a series of measures to achieve this, including: - defining Community standards to protect coded data in financial transactions and private life; - studying the new potential for hacking as the result of the development of ICT; - developing a widely-accessible distribution infrastructure for ICT-linked applications and services; - taking account of the potential of various ICT segments (electronic sales, teaching, environment, health); - developing a policy which aims to stimulate the formation of networks; - developing projects which provide for ICT to be used in less-favoured regions via the Structural Funds; - implementing a Community ICT policy geared both to large enterprises and SMEs; - developing ICT applications and services which aim to promote the European cultural, artistic, historic and linguistic heritage. With regard to the European Commission's proposal to allocate 28% of the total financial framework for the fifth R&D framework programme to the information society, the European Parliament pointed out that it would comment on the merits of this proposal at a later date. Given the lack of any systematic link of cause and effect between research efforts and economic results, it also wished for Community R&D programmes to carry out a better cost-benefit study in order to achieve programmes with more practical potential. Europe should also pay greater attention to speech synthesis and language technologies in order to convert its multilingualism into a competitive advantage. More specifically, Parliament called for global consultation on the disruptions expected in the new millennium (computer recognition of dates in the year 2000) and for a solution to be found to this problem. Elsewhere, the European Parliament called on the public sectors in the Member States at local, regional, national and European level to make increased used of ICT, including in teaching and within the public administrations and their departments, in order to promote the use of these technologies. Finally, Parliament considered that ICT should be addressed first and foremost to citizens (including older people, for whom special efforts were needed) and called on the European Commission to intensify its efforts to ensure that citizens were sufficiently aware of the advantages of using ICT in their daily life.