An international perspective for a global information society.

The global reach of information and communication technologies raises technical, political and business issues which can only be tackled internationally. By promoting ICT for 25 Member States, the European Union can support Europe's industry more effectively and help close the digital divide between rich and poor countries.

Few factors have contributed more to globalisation than the spectacular development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The global impact of ICTs calls for an international dialogue on how to handle future innovations, democracy issues and business opportunities.

The EU has already acquired considerable knowledge of tackling these kinds of questions on a cross-border basis, so the European experience offers a persuasive model for international cooperation.

EU international policy goals

The European approach to the information society is to:

- assist countries that wish to join the EU to comply with its internal rules;
- support Europe's ICT industry and economic growth via international agreements, promoting international research cooperation and allowing EU researchers to access the world's best knowledge, technology and skills;
- address global problems of the emerging information society and support its development in poor countries.

Regulation: promoting the EU approach

The EU regulatory model is mandatory for countries that wish to join the EU and has become an international reference for its flexibility and adaptability to technological innovation.

Promoting the EU regulatory model in third countries encourages external trade with them through an increased focus on interoperability of systems and common policy approaches.

International cooperative research

European researchers and industrialists need access to ICT knowledge and skills around the world, while developing and emerging economies need EU research support if they are to develop and benefit from the information society.

The EU's research framework programme is therefore supporting international research cooperation through shared research activities, the establish ment of high-speed research networks interconnected with the rest of the world, and through networks of IT-skilled specialists in third countries – an activity which also substantially contributes towards closing the digital divide.

Close monitoring of international research also furthers regulatory policy, allowing early detection of new technological trends which could affect regulatory issues.

Expanding Europe's ICT sector

The ICT sector is of enormous economic importance to Europe, so the EU actively pursues international commercial opportunities for the European industry through:

- multilateral trade agreements and international organisations such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the World Trade Organization (WTO);
- bilateral agreements with both developed and developing nations.

Closing the worldwide digital divide

ICTs can stimulate economic development in the world's poor regions, so the EU funds development projects with an information society dimension and cooperates with international programmes coordinated by inter-governmental or non-governmental agencies.

"The European experience offers a persuasive model for international cooperation"

Managing ICT technical issues globally

The Commission works for agreement on the many technological issues which require international coordination.

A good example is the global management of radio spectrum, which underpins all wireless communications. The Commission participates in the World Radio Conference (WRC), which works to harmonise and co-ordinate the use of radio spectrum worldwide and to support the development of best practices in radio spectrum management.

Region by region

Europe's neighbours

EU **candidate countries** concentrate on bringing their legislation and regulation in line with EU rules to facilitate integration into the EU single market.

Relations with **Russia** are concerned with market access and telecoms issues with a view to the future accession of Russia to the WTO. ICT issues are closely coordinated with the general Russia-EU relations to ensure policy coherence. In addition an EU-Russia dialogue on the information society under the umbrella of a common economic space has been agreed on by the Heads of State.

In neighbouring countries to the south (essentially **North Africa)**, the aim is to accelerate sustainable growth through aid to the modernisation of the most strategic information society sectors. Specific activities include the EUMEDIS programme (funding the development of the information society in the Mediterranean area) and monitoring Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA) projects, in the context of general EU development aid.

Emerging economies

EU initiatives for emerging economies support economic growth by promoting information society technologies and encouraging supportive regulatory policies based on the EU model. Programmes include Alliance for the Information Society in Latin America (@LIS) and EU-Asia IT&C.

China and India are particularly important, especially in matters of market access and transparency, regarding regulatory policy and technology standards. An EU-South East Asia Forum will be held in Singapore in June 2006 to promote cooperation.

Relations with **Latin America** are at an advanced stage. A work programme for digital inclusion is being implemented. It covers bi-regional dialogues on policy, regulatory and standardisation issues, the interconnection of research networks and research and development (R&D) cooperation.

Developed economies

EU relations with the **US and Japan** in the information society field cover issues like trade, regulatory and policy developments and research cooperation.

The annual **EU-US Information Society Dialogue** is an important framework for regular contact at the highest level with the United States, providing:

- information exchange on, inter alia, regulatory and policy developments, third country markets and international fora (see below);

- an early warning mechanism on policy or regulatory divergence, helping to avoid or overcome potential disputes.

Exchanges cover a wide range of topics, such as policies to encourage broadband deployment and use, new spectrum management policies, the regulatory treatment of new services (e.g. Internet services), the fight against unsolicited electronic mail (spam) and the role of public procurement in removing the barriers faced by disabled or older people in accessing the information society.

International organisations

The **World Summit on the Information Society** (WSIS), launched by the United Nations in 2001, aims to lay the foundations for an inclusive global information society. The first phase of WSIS (Geneva, December 2003) adopted a Declaration of Principles embracing the idea of universal, accessible, equitable and affordable ICT infrastructures and services as a key goal of all stakeholders. Furthermore, it points to related subjects such as intellectual property rights, cultural diversity and freedom of the media. A Plan of Action outlines concrete steps to achieve the goals.

The Summit held its second phase in Tunis in November 2005, and focussed on finding solutions for the unsettled issues from the first phase, Internet governance and financial mechanisms for bridging the digital divide; and solutions for the implementation of the commitments undertaken in Geneva, and the follow-up for the Summit process. The final documents adopted by the Tunis Summit summarise the view of UN Member States on these matters and decide on more detailed actions to be undertaken until 2015. (Tunis agenda for the Information society)

The Commission also participates in the information society related activities of the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** and the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, and also cooperates with the **World Bank**.

Further Information

- **Europe's Information Society: International Dimension:** http://europa.eu.int/information_society/regwor/world/index_en.htm

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