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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION  
TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,  
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND  
THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the multiannual Community  
programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe  
(PROMISE)**

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**1. BACKGROUND**

The multiannual programme to stimulate the development of the Information Society in Europe (PROMISE<sup>1</sup>) was adopted in March 1998<sup>2</sup> as part of the European Information Society (IS) policy initiated by the report *Europe and the global information society - Recommendations to the European Council in Corfu*<sup>3</sup>.

The programme had been conceived to complete the European Information Society policy and to complement the policy areas on telecommunication, IS related research and the early policy initiatives concerning the Internet.

In accordance with article 8 of the PROMISE Council Decision the programme was subject to an intermediate evaluation, which was undertaken by a panel of independent experts. The experts were selected from a list established on the basis of a call for tenders. The panel consisted of five experts with a broad view of the information society and a wide range of experience. The composition of the panel assured a wide geographic coverage and representation of both user and business views.

The final report<sup>4</sup> of the expert panel was submitted to the Commission in January 2000.

The evaluation report has been submitted to the committee of representatives of the member states established in accordance with article 5 of the PROMISE Council Decision in order to assist the Commission in the implementation of the programme. The committee has examined the report and discussed the conclusions and recommendations intensively. The Commission's responses to the main recommendations of the evaluation panel are largely based on the results of the discussions with the PROMISE committee.

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<sup>1</sup> PROMISE – PROMotion of the Information Society in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> A multiannual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe; Council Decision 98/253/EC of 30 March 1998 (OJ L 107, 7.4.1998, p. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Report prepared by the High Level Group on the Information Society chaired by M. Bangemann; Brussels, 26 May 1994.

<sup>4</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/programmes/evaluation/pdf/reportpromise\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/programmes/evaluation/pdf/reportpromise_en.pdf).

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND MAIN RESULTS

The PROMISE programme has three main objectives:

- Increasing public awareness and understanding of the potential impact of the Information Society throughout Europe.
- Optimizing the socio-economic benefits of the Information Society in Europe.
- Enhancing Europe's role and visibility within the global dimension of the Information society.

A detailed description and an appraisal of the main achievements of the programme is presented in the external expert's evaluation report (particularly chapter 3.4. to 3.7.), the most important of them can be summarised as follows.

Awareness-raising activities were focussing on information services (Newsletter, Help desk, Website), surveys and studies (in particular via Eurobarometer), targeted actions towards opinion leaders in the media (television, press) and special target groups (in particular SMEs and local administrations/cities).

The objective "Optimising the socio-economic benefits" was mainly addressed by pilot take-up projects for SMEs, by studies and surveys on ongoing IS activities in the Member states, by preparatory activities for best practice dissemination and by the support provided to the Information Society Forum. The latter issued several reports and declarations dealing in particular with social, cultural and economic aspects of the information society and provided key recommendations on how to cope with the arising challenges.

The objective "Enhancing Europe's role in the global dimension" was mainly addressed by the stimulation and support of dialogues with a view to facilitate networking, exchange of views, knowledge and experience and in order to create further political dynamics for information society purposes. The main outcomes are the ongoing active dialogue with the Central and Eastern European countries with a view to their taking up the objectives of the eEurope initiative and the launch of the EUMEDIS initiative in the frame of the overall MEDA programme.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL

### 3.1. Strategic Observations and Main Conclusions

In its overall appraisal the evaluation panel states that *there are clear examples of effectiveness of the programme*, in particular, the web activities, information and data gathering as well as the targeted initiative to develop and spread good practices amongst SMEs.

The panel recognises also some *areas which have potential* and underlines specifically the Information Society Forum. The panel states further that there was clear progress towards *a more strategic approach* in the execution of the programme through *focussing on multipliers and leverages*.

The Council Decision setting up the PROMISE programme as such is called *enthusiastic and all encompassing, a cover-all response...*, which the panel *could only applaud*.

On the other hand the panel observed that *the scope of the Council Decision is simply too wide and the stated objectives cannot be achieved with such amounts of money. Moreover, the Council Decision failed to anticipate the pace of change in the Information Society*.

The panel states further that *PROMISE lacked clear links to the Commission's Information Society policy objectives and that the work-programmes were too disperse and clearly lacking focus*.

The main recommendation of the panel to cope with these weaknesses is *to set up a strategic focus, by giving PROMISE specific policy directions to reflect policy priorities. PROMISE should have quantifiable goals and concentrate on proven strengths, in particular by facilitating networking and by providing access to information*.

### **3.2. Specific Recommendations**

There are quite a number of specific recommendations of the expert panel dealing with management and implementation aspects as well as with each type of PROMISE activities (awareness raising, optimising socio-economic benefits of IS and the global dimension).

The Commission shares to a large extent the views expressed and the basic analysis, which lead to the panel's detailed and very valuable recommendations.

However, most of the specific recommendations concern activities, which have been discontinued in the meantime. Others deal with organisational aspects, which have lost relevance since the Information Society Directorate General was re-organised on 1.12.2000.

Under these circumstances it does not appear very useful to discuss individual specific recommendations of the panel.

## **4. THE COMMISSION'S RESPONSE:**

Focus on eEurope implementation support – Rationalized Management

The panel's recommendations have led to a serious reflection on the future of PROMISE. Taking account of parallel developments in the Community's Information Society policy, the Commission has decided to re-focus the activities of PROMISE in support of the eEurope policy initiative and to rationalize the PROMISE management.

## *The eEurope initiative*

In 1999 the Commission proposed to the Helsinki<sup>5</sup> European Council to accelerate the transition to the information society in Europe. A new policy initiative was launched, *eEurope*, with the general objective to accelerate the development of “An Information Society for All”. The Lisbon<sup>6</sup> and Feira<sup>7</sup> European Councils endorsed the initiative and, at the latter an ambitious *eEurope* 2002 Action Plan was agreed, which set targets for the European Institutions, the Member States and the private sector for 2002 at the latest.

New tasks were entrusted to the Commission in the framework of the so-called open method of co-ordination, in particular concerning monitoring, benchmarking and reporting on the implementation of the *eEurope* 2002 Action Plan and on progress made towards its overall objectives.

The *eEurope* 2002 Action Plan proposes a series of targets, which need to be met in order to ensure that Europe benefits from the 'new economy' as extensively and quickly as possible.

The core objective of *eEurope* monitoring will be to measure progress in the access to and use of the Internet in Europe. This exercise will enable Member States to compare their progress and enable remedial action to be taken in those regions, which are performing below average. It will identify good and best practice, which will provide insight into the key characteristics of successful policy.

In addition to providing information on concrete progress towards the targets in the action plan, *eEurope* benchmarking will require information on progress on key indicators of the development of the new economy. As far as possible, existing data will be exploited available from sources such as Eurostat and OECD.

However, the speed and novelty of many of the developments in the new economy mean that much relevant information is not yet available from standard sources. In addition, many existing data are only available on national level or for a limited number of states and is not regularly updated.

### *Focus on eEurope implementation support: Monitoring and Benchmarking*

PROMISE will help to fill these gaps through specific surveys, using the same mechanisms as the Eurobarometer survey ‘Monitoring the Information Society in Europe’. The scope of these surveys will be adapted to the specific needs of *eEurope* benchmarking exercise.

Focussed surveys on particular aspects or groups and in-depth studies on qualitative issues (best practice) will also be undertaken in the areas covered by the *eEurope* 2002 Action Plan.

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<sup>5</sup> Helsinki European Council, 10-11 December 1999; Presidency Conclusions.

<sup>6</sup> Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000; Presidency Conclusions.

<sup>7</sup> Santa Maria da Feira European Council, 19-20 June 2000; Presidency Conclusions.

In terms of the objectives set up by article 1 of the 1998 Council decision, the Commission will concentrate its efforts on actions towards “*Optimizing the socio-economic benefits of IS in Europe*”.

Serving this generic PROMISE objective the focused objectives in the context of eEurope implementation support will be:

- to enable the monitoring and benchmarking of the developing information society, in particular the implementation of the eEurope 2002 Action Plan.
- to facilitate the identification and deployment of good practices related to priority areas of the eEurope 2002 Action Plan.

To achieve these objectives the Commission intends to focus the execution of the PROMISE programme on several types of measures related to art 2 of the 1998 Council decision, like:

- “the monitoring of people’s awareness of and familiarisation with the Information Society services and applications, in particular through the fostering of regular surveys and the integration of national surveys into a European picture” (art 2(a) (4));
- “the contribution, on the bases of identified best programmes and practices, to the European wide take-up of successful examples in Information Society policies, projects and services” (art 2(b) (4));
- “the promotion of exchange of expertise and experiences between ongoing studies and activities at European and national level” (art 2(b) (5)).

#### *Other Activities*

PROMISE will continue with successfully developed information services and tools, in particular by the further development of the ISPO Website and its integration to an Information Society Web Portal under the banner of eEurope. This will include the integration of more interactivity.

The Information Society FORUM was created on the base of the 1994 Action Plan “Europe’s Way to the Information Society”. It has delivered several reports containing key recommendations, in particular on societal aspects of the IS challenges. The IS FORUM was recognised by the evaluation panel for its results delivered and judged to be high in potential.

#### *Rationalised Management*

The responsibility for the management of PROMISE has since the pilot and preparatory phase of 1996/97 rested with the Information Society Activity Center (ISAC).

Following the results of the intermediate evaluation by the independent experts and the results of a strategic resource allocation review the Commission has discontinued certain promotion activities which had been run and undertaken so far under PROMISE and managed by ISAC. The re-focussed PROMISE activities have been subject to a substantial rationalisation of management structures within the Information Society Directorate General.

In particular activities in the field of IS Monitoring will be integrated into overall eEurope management. The different Web-sites will be consolidated into a new IS related thematic Web Portal under the banner of eEurope and managed under the responsibility of a single entity.

Overall, the human resources available for the management of PROMISE activities were reduced substantially, in line with the results of the Commission's strategic human resource allocation review.

The rationalisation and restructuring of the PROMISE management has addressed as a generic measure a series of conclusions and recommendations of the panel in the area of management structures.

### *Budget*

Article 4 (2) of the Council Decision establishes 25 Mio Euro as reference amount for the whole programme period 1998 to 2002. The budget available in 2001 is 5 Mio Euro.

With regard to the three categories of action of the programme decision, the budgetary means will be concentrated on the category 2 'Optimising the socio-economic benefits of the Information Society'. However, some of the actions will have a character serving both the objective 'Optimising the socio-economic benefits' and 'Awareness raising'. These actions shall be accounted proportionally to both categories of actions.

The third objective of the PROMISE programme, i.e. 'Enhancing Europe's role and visibility within the global dimension of the information society' will be served indirectly. No new specific actions are envisaged under this category.

The Council Decision on the PROMISE programme sets up a maximum share for both awareness raising and enhancing visibility, but establishes a minimum share for activities serving the objective 'Optimising the socio-economic benefits'. The planned focus on the latter will allow to meet these allocation criteria.