

THE FUTURE OF THE **e**EUROPE 2002 ACTION PLAN

UNICE Message

in view of the informal Council meeting in Vitoria – 21-23 February 2002

The Vitoria informal Council will take stock of achievements to date and measures to be undertaken in the future regarding the eEurope 2002 Action Plan.

In view of the Lisbon objective of making the EU “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*” by 2010, UNICE strongly supports the eEurope initiative. We would like to voice European industry’s support for continuation of the eEurope initiative beyond 2002 and highlight some of the issues that Member States must address.

UNICE welcomes the European Commission’s latest eEurope Benchmarking Report¹ as an essential exercise in evaluation of the eEurope initiative and for determining future strategy. While much progress has been made, UNICE believes that a lot remains to be done and the future strategy for the Information Society needs to be redefined: ***cheap, fast and secure hternet access for all is not yet a reality in Europe.***

While **Internet penetration** in the EU has increased substantially, it is still lagging behind the US, in particular in several Member States. For coherent European competitiveness, it is essential that Member States seek to increase Internet penetration.

The take-up of electronic commerce is disappointing. One of the key elements for stakeholders in e-commerce is **legal clarity and security**: the e-Commerce Directive that was due to be transposed by 17 January 2002, seeks to attain such certainty. UNICE regrets the wide disparity in the state of progress of transposition: a significant number Member States are still at very early stages in the process and others have yet to present any official draft law. UNICE calls on Member States to transpose rigorously the eCommerce Directive without delay and to ensure that future regulatory initiatives do not undermine the “country of origin principle”.

Security is a key ingredient for confidence in the on-line world. The information society can clearly benefit from the eradication of threats to business investment and assets. The ever-increasing vulnerability of networks needs to be addressed. In this context, UNICE welcomes initiatives aiming at the creation of a safer information

¹ COM (2002)62 final, 5 February 2002

society by improving the security of information infrastructures and combating computer-related crime. Nevertheless, we call on regulators taking such initiatives to refrain from doing so at the expense of industry and/or at the expense of fundamental rights such as the right to privacy.

Regarding the **telecommunications infrastructure**, the backbone of the Information Society, European industry calls on Member States to promote effective competition and a level playing-field.

In this context, the effective implementation of the recently agreed "Telecom Package" is essential and Member States should demonstrate their commitment to this major step towards further strengthening competition in telecommunications which is of benefit to all.

UNICE is of the view that quantitative targets for getting Europe on-line must be followed by focused qualitative targets: Member States must demonstrate their commitment to making Broadband available and to stimulating demand throughout the European Union by 2005 in a competitive environment.

The take-up and roll-out of **Broadband** in Europe is essential for European industry's competitiveness. To that effect European industry calls on Member States to promote measures such as:

- Measures to stimulate demand, including eGovernment initiatives and services;
- Allowing for competition between broadband access platforms while refraining from technology-specific regulations;
- Effective implementation of the local loop unbundling Regulation to increase competition among ADSL providers;
- Adopting actions plans to promote the roll-out of Broadband;
- Ensuring that non-urban areas have access to Broadband;

Steps must be taken so that Europe can maintain its lead in **mobile communications**. Mobile Broadband (UMTS) should not suffer from the lack of harmonisation of the allocation of frequencies which, at present, varies dangerously between Member States.

Lastly, eEurope cannot be a success if **full participation by SMEs in the e-Economy** is not achieved. To a greater extent than larger enterprises, SMEs need incentives to embrace the Information Society which Member States can create through, for example, fiscal measures, providing effective time and cost-saving eGovernment services, etc.

UNICE believes that the eEurope initiative should benefit from fresh political impetus and that any future eEurope Action plan should be more focused on quantitative targets for effective usage and availability of the Internet.