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Context

1 Introduction

The first Prepcom, held in July 2002, adopted the Prepcom rules of procedure, participation and accreditation, and launched the preparatory process which includes the private sector and the civil society.

The debates in Prepcom I and in the Informal Consultative Meeting, organised in Geneva in September 2002, showed that the Summit should focus on the global policy issues of the Information Society and on the challenges of ICTs and development (“the digital divide”), notably in relation to the goals and objectives set out in the UN Millenium Declaration .

The list of the principles and themes for the Summit, discussed at the Informal Consultative Meeting in September 2002, includes the following key words, addressing what the EU considers to be the main issues: infrastructures (enabling environment, investment, affordability and sustainability), access to information and technologies, capacity building, governance, promotion of cultural diversity and local content, information network security, information security, importance of the participation of all stakeholders, promotion of applications and follow up.

Two regional preparatory conferences have already been held, in Bamako for Africa, 28-30 May 2002, and in Bucharest for the Pan-European countries from 7-9 November 2002. Three others will be organised, in Tokyo for Asia 13-15 January 2003, in Santo Domingo for Latin American and Caribbean countries 29-31 January 2003 and possibly Cairo for Arabic countries in June 2003. In the overall preparatory work for the Summit, contributions by the UN ICT Task Force, and UN organisations, such as ITU, WHO and UNESCO, are welcome.

The EU considers that with the Prepcom II, the preparatory process should progress on themes and content, and develop the first draft for a WSIS Political Declaration and a Plan of Action. The aim of this text is to provide a positive contribution to the process.

2 What the Summit should achieve

The Summit will be held in two phases, December 2003 in Geneva and 2005 in Tunis, and should be seen as a milestone in international cooperation to put the potential of knowledge and technology at the service of development for all. From the EU perspective, the development of the Information

Society is an inter-related process covering a broad variety of aspects, hence the requirement for a comprehensive approach with the clear aim to undertake a long-term effort in its implementation, with a horizon of possibly 10 to 15 years. It should build on sustainable e-Strategies and anticipate the future development of the Information Society in its various dimensions to ensure its contribution to sustainable development. The strategic approach taken needs to ensure that determination of goals and objectives, the implementation plans, the co-operative frameworks and the integration of the approach in macro-economic policies are undertaken all in parallel. The Summit will offer an opportunity to:

a) Develop and adopt a political declaration to:

- **Agree on a vision** which could constitute a sound basis for an appropriate framework at global level.
- **Deliver a political message** that evolving e-Strategies leading to an inclusive, sustainable enabling environment are vital to participation in the global economy and that developing countries should be encouraged to design and implement these strategies consistent with their goals and resources;
- **Formulate key principles** which can serve as a basis for policies to be adopted at national or regional levels, and to constitute the basis for agreement on main issues for governance of the global Information Society;
- **Identify priorities leading to concrete and tangible goals allowing the harnessing of the ICT potential** for development, particularly in the field of poverty alleviation, and the supporting of the achievement of the UN millennium development goals.

b) Develop and adopt a Plan of Action:

- Based on the priorities identified, focus on a **limited number of issues** in order to reach the **critical mass** in the actions to be launched;
- Increase the **priority** given to ICTs in existing policies ;
- Trigger new ways of partnership and **co-operation between stakeholders** based on reciprocal commitments;
- Include a implementation guidelines and a **follow-up mechanism** providing for reporting on progress made at the WSIS 2005 Session.

The EU considers that the structure of the Bucharest Declaration - preamble, principles, strategies, priorities for action - could constitute the outline of the final declaration for the Summit itself, completed by a Plan of Action.

EU considerations in relation to the Political Declaration

3 Vision of the Information Society

A preamble to the political declaration could be used to express the shared vision of the Information Society developed among all participants in the Summit and notably to take into consideration relevant ethic values.

The EU fully supports the key elements identified in the Bucharest Declaration as a key condition for the success of the Information Society and in particular:

- The **Information Society** “*offers great potential in promoting sustainable development, democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance*”, as well as for the development of capacity building and for stimulating economic growth;
- The need to “*fully exploit all the new opportunities provided by ICTs and of their combination with traditional media*” to fight poverty and gender inequalities and to achieve the Development goals set out by the UN Millennium Declaration;
- The “*right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers*”; more generally, cyberspace should emerge as an area of freedom, privacy, human security and justice in which information networks ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information transmitted through them;
- The “*active contribution of all stakeholders*” - Governments, regional and international organisations as well as the private sector and the civil society - in the efforts to bring the full benefits of the Information Society to all.

4 Principles

Taking as a basis the proposition of themes provisionally agreed upon in the Informal Consultative Meeting in September 2002, the Bamako Declaration and the Bucharest Declaration and its own experience, the EU would table the following principles:

Securing access to information and knowledge

As stressed in the Bucharest Declaration, *individuals and organisations should benefit from access to information, knowledge and ideas*. Notably, information in the public domain should be of high quality, easily accessible for all, including the disabled. Multilingual and affordable information can powerfully contribute to developing and sustaining democracy, and to economic development. The role of mass media is recognised as an important means of fostering public information, societal development and social cohesion.

Widespread access to information and knowledge at affordable cost for citizens should be promoted also through a broader use of open source software with a focus on the eventual use and further development of the UNESCO software CDS/ISIS; along the same line use of a multiplatform approach and use of open platforms, and interoperability increase the freedom of choice. To ensure re-usability of multilingual information and interoperability of data structures, terminological principles and tools as well as harmonization and standardization efforts in the field of terminology and other language resources are of utmost importance.

Promoting universal access at affordable cost

Universal access to basic services at affordable costs can be substantially improved by the development of electronic communications networks and services. Increasing competition and choice for communications services must go hand in hand with the creation of an appropriate regulatory framework and the build-out of necessary infrastructures. The concept of universal access/service should evolve to reflect advances and opportunities offered in technology, existing infrastructures, market development and changes in user demand. Universal service obligations are compliant with WTO rules, provided they are administrated in a transparent and competitively neutral manner.

Promoting linguistic and cultural diversity

An inclusive Information Society founded on the preservation and promotion of diversity of cultural expression fosters mutual understanding and respect of diversity. ICTs and media as a whole can and should stimulate linguistic and cultural diversity, including through the facilitation of exchange of local content. They can also enhance the capacity of governments to develop active policies to that end. In this respect, production and exchange of appropriate local content available in the user's mother tongue is of vital importance. In this context, the EU welcomes the adoption of the declaration by UNESCO on cultural diversity in November 2001.

Developing human capacity

The key factor to enable progress towards the Information Society is people, from specialists (engineers, scientists, regulators) to basic end users. This requires an ambitious and innovative approach in capacity building, taking advantage of the technology to train trainers and ensure better delivery of education in schools, at the workplace; at home and elsewhere. Specific efforts have to be considered in primary and secondary education and for those who are not part of existing educational structures, as well as in giving equal opportunities to women. The use of ICTs to develop human capacity could contribute to more efficient education services, at the same time reaching broader target groups.

Setting up an enabling environment, including legal, regulatory and policy frameworks

Availability of telecommunications infrastructures and affordable pricing for telecommunications services and ICT equipment are prerequisites for accessing and using ICTs for all. An trustworthy, transparent, and non-discriminatory legal and regulatory

framework for electronic communications¹, including the conditions under which consumers have access to services, is a necessary condition for the mobilisation of private sector investment and the development of effective communication infrastructures and services, which in turn are the basis for a competitive economy.

Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

The objective is to make cyberspace an “area of freedom, security and justice”. The security of networks has emerged as one of the critical issues for the continued growth of electronic commerce and the use of the new technologies more generally. This is particularly relevant in relation to consumer perceptions where there is a real fear concerning the loss of privacy as well as in relation to the fight against illegal and harmful content and the protection of minors. Therefore greater efforts have to be made to achieve greater reliability of systems and the applications which store and transmit data.

At the same time, security has become a key issue for the growth of economic commerce. Within a global culture of cybersecurity it is important to strike the right balance between measures to enhance security and the need to ensure the protection of data and privacy as well as to avoid the creation of new barriers to trade. Due attention should be given to the principle of technological neutrality.

5 Strategies

Governments, private sector and civil society all have a role in the evolution towards the Information Society. Governments in particular have a role in setting and implementing comprehensive, evolving and sustainable e-Strategies, going beyond technology and infrastructure, and contemplating the impact of ICTs in the various parts of the society.

e-Strategies should include various aspects and opportunities:

- Establishing regulatory frameworks, creating an appropriate environment for the inclusive and economically viable development of the ICT sector, and providing the whole economy with efficient communications and information services;
- Renewing the public action models, ease the interaction with civil society and re-engineering social services; encouraging interaction among stakeholders to develop innovative and creative approaches towards a more efficient operation of the labour markets. These approaches should aim, inter alia, towards the reduction of unemployment, development of new skills for the unemployed and improved preparation of new entrants to face changing market conditions;
- Shaping actively the transformation and preparing the future generation for the Information Society;

¹ The term “electronic communications networks and services” as used in the new EU regulatory framework to indicate the broad variety of networks which can transport information.

- Ensuring a full ownership of all stakeholders in the elaboration of e-Strategies, strengthening the dialogue between governments, civil society and the private sector.

The role of the private sector and civil society is well reflected in the ongoing dialogue with governments. The Bucharest conference showed that there is presently a shift in the perception of the private sector and civil society:

- Business defines itself not only as a market player but sees its role in a wider political and social context, i.e. helping countries to develop ICTs and overcome the digital divide. Their expectations from governments go beyond the mere setting up of appropriate regulatory frameworks and include practical partnerships for innovative applications, as is being done under several, e.g. e-Government, initiatives.
- NGOs see progress in the use of a common language by the governmental bodies. They intend to strengthen the value aspect in the triangle of regulation, markets and values. More generally, civil society involvement is vital in the take-up and social acceptance of the Information Society.
- Multilateral organisations have a key role in providing guidance, facilitating exchange of experience and best practices, offering technical assistance in the design of e-Strategies and, in some cases, complementing the role of governments and other actors.

Against this background, new ways of partnership and collaboration should be explored. These could take the form of agreements between stakeholders and lead to commitments in several fields as illustrated in section 7 below. Strategies should include timeframes, indicators and mechanisms for monitoring performance based not only on quantitative but also qualitative criteria.

6 Priorities for action

Development of a knowledge-based economy is an important means to reach sustainable development. Mobilising the potential of ICTs could also be instrumental to achieve the Development goals of the UN Millennium Declaration by 2015. ICTs are considered to be a tool for achieving economic and social goals, and not an end in themselves. This is already fully acknowledged in EU policies. Another important aspect is to make ICTs equally available to men and women, and to the benefit of disadvantaged groups (elderly, disabled, youth, indigenous people, etc.).

The EU considers that priorities for action should be focused around four priorities: e-Inclusion, e-Government, e-Learning and e-Business. This will allow for a balanced approach to address both the digital divide and other key issues for the development of the Information Society.

In addition, appropriate policies, frameworks and rules, at global, national and regional levels, are precondition to these actions. This includes notably e-Strategies, regulatory frameworks, creating an enabling environment for the development of information infrastructures. Furthermore, security, privacy protection, and general governance of the sector are indispensable in order to build people's confidence in the Information Society.

e-Inclusion

e-Inclusion represents a major challenge in the ongoing transformation related to the information revolution. The potential benefits of the Information Society for citizens and companies are undoubted. At the same time, there is a possible threat of a widening gap between info-rich and info-poor, a concept known as the digital divide. This divide reflects and exacerbates existing inequalities, not only between countries but also within each country.

e-Inclusion encompasses actions aiming at a greater cohesion in the Information Society context, including access and participation for all, gender issues, the use of ICTs in daily life and work and e-Health. The goal is to diminish existing disparities. The contribution of ICTs to the health-related Development goals of the UN Millennium Declaration, i.e. to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health, is of utmost importance.

In a development context, e-Inclusion could contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, by maximising the benefits of economic growth and development, as formulated in the Development goals as set out in the UN Millennium Declaration. Another aspect is the promotion of gender equality. Affordable and universal access requires basic infrastructure and improved connectivity at international level. A main issue is to provide equal opportunities for women, allowing societies to benefit from the enormous potential of women in underdeveloped countries. In this context, enabling access to communications, be it telephone, TV, radio, etc., should be a first step in a process to make ICTs accessible to all. Governments should promote the involvement of different stakeholders in the development of multilingual, affordable applications that improve the overall quality of life, particularly in key areas such as education and health, both globally and at the local community level. Promotion of cultural diversity and identity, including the creation of varied information content and the digitalisation of the educational, scientific and cultural heritage, is an important priority in the development of the Information Society. Research on the social and cultural impact of ICTs should be continued.

e-Government

e-Government should concentrate on more efficient delivery of public services, better management of financial, human and public resources and goods at all levels of government, in particular at local level, under conditions of sustainability, participation, interoperability, increased effectiveness and transparency.

The underlying goal is to meet the challenges of modern governance: efficiency, i.e. to enable public administration to reach a higher productivity, equality, i.e. to serve all citizens without discrimination, while being responsive to individuals' needs, and active citizen participation through the use of ICTs. Citizens and businesses must be at the centre of attention in the design of on-line services that can be easily accessible to all.

e-Learning

e-Learning complements the traditional methods and offers wider delivery of education. e-Learning, as the development of skills to access knowledge, addresses numerous issues, such as local content, linguistic and cultural diversity and intellectual property rights. Access to knowledge is one of the foremost issues for bridging the digital divide. The contribution of e-Learning to achieving universal primary education world-wide lies in better delivery of education as such, but also better training of teachers. E-Learning can also offer improved

conditions for life-long learning, encompassing people that are outside the “normal” education process, and for improving professional skills. As suggested in section 8 below, connecting schools to the Internet is among the priorities.

e-Business

The use of ICTs represents, particularly for SMEs, a source of major productivity gains and for reduction of transaction costs. Governments should adopt a twofold approach: setting the rules and using e-Business in their interaction with the business community.

The private sector should mobilise existing organisations to raise awareness and to ensure training on the specific issues related to a wide use of e-Business among its actors. Use of digital technologies can enhance the role of enterprises in promoting entrepreneurship, the accumulation of knowledge, the upgrading of skills, and thereby increasing productivity, incomes and jobs and promoting qualitative improvement of working life.

EU considerations in relation to the Action Plan

7 Use ICTs for Development and Trigger new ways of co-operation

Based on the above priorities, the Plan of Action will constitute a common reference and framework for implementation for all stakeholders, to be promoted in a decentralised way, under the lead of a multitude of stakeholders. ICTs have great potential as a tool to meet development policy objectives; such as the achievement of the Development goals set out in the UN Millennium Declaration.

The Summit should trigger new ways of co-operation between stakeholders, initial ideas being to:

- (1) Foster the **scale-up of locally successful ICT-related projects** dealing with priority applications like health and education programmes, building on existing experience in order to 1) facilitate the extension of the project, 2) support limited replications in pilot projects, and 3) prepare the roll out of broader programmes based on the success of the pilot projects.
- (2) Develop **innovative partnerships between the public and private sectors**. This could include the commitment of the private sector to provide ICT goods and services at preferential conditions for specific categories of users, notably non-profit organisations directly involved in poverty alleviation.
- (3) Focus part of the **R&D programmes on the low purchasing power markets**, including research on appropriate technologies and innovative marketing and distribution mechanisms. The main aim is to reorient part of the R&D efforts and to offer developing countries the possibility to participate. Projects should be based on local experience and knowledge but also benefit from capacities of multinational companies. For instance, R&D programmes could offer to devote a certain percentage of its programmes for such purpose.

- (4) Promote the establishment, by developing countries, of appropriate regulatory and policy frameworks including in particular areas affecting consumers, which would facilitate their integration into the international ICT market through increased foreign direct investment by the private sector.
- (5) Encourage **entrepreneurship** as another important goal. For this, it is necessary to establish certain basic structures, e.g. conducive regulatory frameworks and access to market information for businesses. Private sector support plays an important role in this.
- (6) Develop a monitoring and **benchmarking exercise** through indicators to evaluate progress towards well identified goals. Indicators and periodic reports may also provide a basis for benchmarking, peer reviews and contribute to the dissemination of best practices.
- (7) **Encourage the Cybervolunteer** programmes, notably in relation to NGOs, activities regarding basic ICT training to marginalized groups, or in relation to specific ICT applications for development (e.g. to compile an epidemiological or pharmaceuticals data base). Such a mechanism would be extended to on-line volunteers, offering the support of specialists in a variety of fields, on-line or on the web.
- (8) Foster a cumulative knowledge process by **systematic networking** between the grassroots initiatives and **creation of web-sites**, in order to facilitate exchange of information and experience, dissemination of good practices and to benefit from synergies and peering effects on a large scale.
- (9) Create a **free-software-based computer programme deposit** and, to the extent technologically useful, consider **computer re-use** initiatives, in order to introduce Information Society services at low cost.

8 Implementing the Priorities

The following elements may be considered when designing the Plan of Action: a limited number of (clear, precise and easily-measurable) objectives, a methodology to monitor and assess the results, financial and/or political back-up tools.

The EU is still in the process of discussing areas for action based on the proposed priorities. Nevertheless, at this preliminary stage, some ideas on areas for actions can already be indicated, based on the proposed priorities. The Plan of Action should result from a broad and open consultative process, to be held before and during Prepcom II, and to which the EU will contribute further.

e-Inclusion

Information has a key role in strategies oriented towards empowering people with a special emphasis in this regard on the equal participation of women and men in the Information Society, recognising the vital contribution of women to development, for example in micro-enterprises and family health schemes, the introduction of new job models on the Internet, and policies to reconcile professional and family life.

Governments should stimulate e-Health applications and services which are presently revolutionising the developments not only in diagnosis, treatment, surveillance and rehabilitation of patients, but also on the side of the more collective aspects of health care and disease prevention such as research, clinical trials, epidemiology and health education.

Specific attention should be given to services and applications in education, e.g. global strategies, life-long learning and distance learning.

As far as infrastructure and access are concerned, pilot projects could be created in order to connect developing countries to global high-speed networks and set up technologies adapted to local conditions.

Public Internet Access points should be installed locally, e.g. in town councils, hospitals, schools, post-offices, libraries, etc., thereby offering collective access and, in some cases, ICT training.

In the field of telecommunications, several successful projects of telecentres have demonstrated significant contribution for job creation and for basic communications services to the whole population. Micro-finance also could help individuals to set up small businesses of their own.

The Information Society vision should not be limited to the opportunity for Internet access through a personal computer. An open multiple platform approach to the Information Society should offer a multitude of possibilities for access.

e-Inclusion will be reached not only by specific new projects, but also by using ICTs in traditional sectors and programmes. Thus, as far as possible, each development project must be complemented by an ICT dimension.

e-Government

Each country should consider designing its national e-Strategy by 2005, defining its priorities in the matter and establishing targets to be met in the various fields of interest to it (e.g. legislation, on-line public services, education, health, e-Commerce, etc). A particular role is played by the offices of the heads of government, which are invited to make on-line information available to the public using a web-site or similar medium, by 2005. Furthermore, it is advisable to consider a single entry point for all the Administration's ministries and electronic services, as well as the creation of an electronic environment for the interchange of experiences in local applications between municipalities and cities.

Each country should also consider going beyond the simple transfer on-line of traditional government and administrative procedures, in order to fully exploit the opportunities provided by new technologies to reform and modernise public administration's processes and functions as well as to advance the relationship between Governments and citizens, giving the latter an increased role. Global, regional and bilateral initiatives aimed at assisting countries in designing and implementing their national e-Strategies are of utmost importance and should be sustained.

A global e-Confidence support initiative to assist countries in addressing privacy protection, security of networks and data, illegal and harmful content and protection of minors, could be envisaged.

e-Learning

Connecting schools to internet : It is essential to provide schools with a connection to the Internet (or some other platform giving access to network services) for educational purposes and to ensure that at least one teacher per centre received basic training in ICT tools. Quantitative objectives may be considered in this field and reviewed at the Tunis Summit.

More ambitious objectives could also be considered, like the development of primary educational centres, training of the majority of teachers, training module in compulsory primary and secondary education.

Courses for the workforce, including for the unemployed should be given public support and should include a common ICT training module.

It could be opportune to consider to launch an appropriate general public training campaign on ICT tools in each country, with priority attention for the most vulnerable parts of the society, measured against the specific needs and opportunities in each country.

e-Business

Governments should set up an enabling environment to promote and favour the use of ICTs by the business community, notably SME's as part of the implementation of e-Strategies. Furthermore, governments at national and local levels should introduce electronic ways of working in the interaction with the private sector, for instance in the field of e-Procurement and front-end public services for businesses (social contribution, corporate taxes, etc.). In this context, special attention has to be paid to security issues in order to build confidence and trust into electronic transactions.

A programme for awareness raising and training could be launched, utilising the local chambers of commerce, other professional organisations in co-operation with local authorities, to prepare the business sector to take advantage of Internet possibilities and electronic transactions.

Conclusion

The main objective of the Summit is to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, are available to all.

In this context, the Geneva Summit should focus on setting the agenda as regards the global policy issues raised by the Information Society as well as the contribution of ICTs to development. It should also identify priorities for action and adopt a Plan of Action.

The Political Declaration and the Action Plan to be endorsed at the Geneva Summit will provide for commitments from all stakeholders and a framework for action. The implementation should be carried out in a decentralised way, gathering different groups in consortia working on the achievement of a common, well defined goal. The necessary impetus should come from a multitude of stakeholders, and coherence and synergies with other initiatives should be ensured by networking.

Short term follow-up should concern a first set of initiatives, including the launch of e-Strategies and a limited number of initiatives, as illustrated above.

The 2005 Tunis Summit should take stock of the progress made, assess the process itself and review the initiatives launched at the Geneva Summit, paving the way for a medium and long-term follow-up, taking into account the impact of what has been achieved so far and of the global situation of the Information Society, including the specific problems of the Least Developed Countries.

With this contribution, the EU manifests its support to the Summit and intends to provide the preparatory process with a contribution, building on its own experience and on the dialogue on Information Society with its partners.
