BITKOM Position Paper

Key Issues for the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)

The German Association for Information Technology, Telecommunications and New Media (BITKOM) represents 1,300 companies, some 700 of which are direct members. These members have a combined turnover of more than 120 billion Euros and employ around 700,000 men and women. These include producers of terminals and infrastructure systems as well as suppliers of software, services, new media and content. About 550 of our members are smaller and medium-sized businesses. BITKOM aims to achieve the best possible framework of legal conditions in Germany, to modernize the education system and to develop the information society.

BITKOM welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the preparations for the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are the basic enablers for the information society, they promote economic growth in all parts of he world and contribute to progress and the alleviation of poverty. The majority of innovations and implementations come from the ICT industry sector. In the current situation of economic stagnation and political uncertainty, the ICT industry needs three main forms of support: Confidence in the economic and technological potential of ICTs has to be restored, new markets and innovations have to be developed, and the dynamic of the economoy to create employment and wealth must be stimulated.

In order to achieve these goals, and in order to make WSIS a success for further building the information society, presentations and discussions at the WSIS should be limited to a number of key policy issues or priority themes. In this context, BITKOM endorses the respective recommendations stated in the Bucharest report of the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI) for creating an attractive environment for investments in the information society. Furthermore, BITKOM endorses the principles agreed upon by the member states of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at the Pan-European Conference on the Information Society (Bucharest, 7-9 November 2002).

Most important among these principles are universal access to information and knowledge at affordable cost, the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity in the information society and the development of human capacities by means of

education and training in ICT skills. An enabling environment (including legal, regulatory and policy frameworks) and a high level of confidence and security in the use of ICTs have to be set up in order to maximise the economic and social benefit from ICT technologies. An international policy dialogue on Information Society at global, regional and sub-regional levels will promote the exchange of experience and the transfer of know-how where capacity gaps have to be bridged.

BITKOM recommends the following policy issues as key elements of a strategy to further develop the Information Society on a global scale. As private sector experience and public programmes in many industrial countries have made considerable progress, WSIS could serve as a platform for promoting their advantages and exchanging best practice:

- **E-Government, E-Health, and E-Learning**. Public sector content and services enhance the efficiency, transparency and accountability of governments. They also are the instruments for citizens to take the benefits from the implementation of ICTs in the public sector. Governments should foster the creation of content and services that specifically preserve and disseminate local culture, language and heritage.

- **Transfer of know-how for building a regulatory framework.** The liberalization process of the last decades in the telecommunication sector has brought rich experience in how to design a well-balanced regulatory framework. This know-how, especially within the European Union with the directly comparable solutions in the different member-states, should be made available to other countries which still have to liberalize their telecommunication markets. By that, a faster evolution to a competitive, growth-oriented market could be achieved, thus promoting the overall economic development in those countries.

- **Harmful Internet Content.** The fight against illegal and harmful Internet content is an important task for the world community. The principle goal must be to expel these contents from the networks by prosecuting their originators, not only to block access to them. International co-operation in fighting illegal content has to be established, whenever this proves feasible. However, the existing cultural differences in judging content as illegal resp. harmful or not could hinder this co-operation. Some of these differences have to be accepted as a consequence of the sudden virtual proximity in a networked world of formerly distant communities with differing cultural values. Some help may arise from promoting self-regulation initiatives on national and international level which is often more effective than regulatory action taken by the single country.

- **Intellectual Property Rights.** The production and exchange of digital content, especially local content, is a key element in the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity. Digital content represents at the same time one of the most important economic goods of the future. Intellectual property rights are needed to secure creativity and richness in the production of digital content. The creation of a legal surrounding which guarantees an adequate legal protection of intellectual property rights and balances the interests of all stakeholders – such as the needs of the users of information - will therefore be an important task for governments.

- **Security of Networks and Information Systems.** As information infrastructures become more and more important for economic growth and the development of new technologies, their security is a critical issue for states, citizens and business throughout the world. Networks and information systems must be sufficiently reliable and capable of preventing, detecting and responding to security threats. Governments have a crucual role in enhancing information security, but the corresponding measures must be balanced against the need to ensure data protection and privacy. The best way to ensure a sound balance is the development of a culture of cyber-security. Governments should promote awareness of security risks and seek to strengthen international co-operation among states and the private sector.

These policy issues contribute to goal of bridging the gap between industrial and developing countries as they are building blocks of the Information Society. A prerequisite is the broad dissemination and sharing of knowledge and a participation of all relevant stakeholders from governments, the private sector and civil society. The stakeholders should provide the necessary conditions to guarantee all members of society equal access to information and knowledge and to enable them to be participants and decision-makers in all aspects related to ICT policies and frameworks. Global, regional and sub-regional initiatives from all stakeholder groups must build upon previous and current government initiatives as well as from the contribution of the private sector and civil society.