

An International Perspective for a Global Information Society

The global reach of Information and Communication Technologies raises many issues which can only be tackled internationally. By speaking for 25 Member States, the EU can more effectively support Europe's own ICT industry 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 international dialogue on many issues, both technical and political.

The European Union already has considerable experience of tackling these issues on a cross-border basis, so the European experience offers a persuasive model for international cooperation.

Goals of EU International Policy

The EU promotes the European approach to the Information Society 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 posed by an emerging Information Society and support its development in poorer 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 to third countries encourages external trade with them through an improved 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 fostering international research through shared research activities, the establishment of a high speed research network 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 between countries.

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

“The European experience offers a persuasive role model for more extensive international cooperation”

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 international trade agreements and organisations**, such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the World Trade Organization (WTO);
- **pursuing market access bilaterally** with many developed and developing nations.

Closing the worldwide digital divide

ICTs can stimulate economic development in the world's poorer 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.

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) to harmonise and co-ordinate the use of radio spectrum worldwide and to support the development of best practises in radio spectrum management.

The Commission also strives for 'upstream global consensus' on interoperability and technology standardisation to avoid difficulties 'downstream' in interconnecting global systems.

Region by Region

Europe's Neighbours

For EU **candidate countries**, efforts concentrate on the approximation of legislation and regulation to facilitate integration into the EU Single Market.

Relations with **Russia** are concerned with market distortions and telecoms issues at the WTO, especially restrictions on foreign ownership. ICT issues are closely coordinated with general EU relations with Russia to ensure policy coherence.

In neighbouring countries to the south (essentially **North Africa**), the aim is to accelerate sustainable growth through aiding 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. As a country emerging towards full participation in international markets, China presents particular additional challenges, so an active bilateral dialogue is pursued.

The Information Society dialogue with **Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)** will gain a new dimension following the recognition by Heads of State and Government at the LAC-EU Summit (Guadalajara, Mexico, May 2004) of the potential of ICTs to foster social cohesion, which is the current focus of this bilateral relationship.

Developed Economies

EU relations with the **US and Japan** in the field of the information society cover issues such as trade, regulation, standards 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.

Ongoing exchanges cover a wide range of topics, such as policies to foster broadband deployment and use, new spectrum management policies, the regulatory treatment of new services (e.g. IP enabled 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

Launched in 2002 by the United Nations, the purpose of the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** is to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. WSIS promotes specific electronic strategies in areas such as commerce, health, governance, education and literacy, sustainable development and environmental protection.

WSIS Phase I (Geneva, 10-12 December 2003) adopted a Political Declaration and a Plan of Action. Both documents reflect principles close to the EU approach of an information society for all, promoting a society respecting international human rights provisions and in particular the freedom of expression. In addition, two task forces have been created, in which the EU actively participates:

- the **Working Group on Internet Governance** is examining the mix of non-governmental private organisations that currently run the Internet, and will decide what issues should be the concern of state intervention and policy;
- the **Task Force on Financing** is reviewing the lack of financing and the adequacy of existing mechanisms in meeting the challenges of ICT for development.

WSIS Phase II (Tunis, November 2005) will decide on more detailed actions to be undertaken between 2005 and 2015.

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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