



# Political will and dedication, Political decision on

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Society Technology Research Programme (IST)

growth and employment, and there is an EU-wide consensus that ICT plays a key role in this respect.

We have, therefore, come up with a new and comprehensive strategy for the information society for the next five years – the "i2010" initiative. i2010, for the first time, provides a comprehensive approach that covers the entire economic sector and the whole value chain affected by digital convergence. Also, instead of a detailed action plan like eEurope, which quickly becomes obsolete, this time we opted for a broad and flexible strategy with three major objectives. It is going to be easier to up-date and fine-tune this strategy in response to new challenges.

*At the conception of e-Europe, competitive forces like India and China were not as prominent as they are today. Will the strategy evolve further to cater for a European approach to the challenges /opportunities that the growing IT-literate population there can provide?*

Competition with these countries has already been addressed in the i2010 initiative and indeed much earlier. Europe needs higher ICT research investment

to reach the Barcelona target of 3% of GDP on R&D not least to face international competition with countries such as China or India.

At the World Summit on Information Society, I advocated the importance of a global and inclusive information society. I reject therefore a purely defensive stance in the face of competition. The growing IT-literate population in emerging economies is offering exciting new prospects for the European IT and content industry, as has already happened in the mobile sector (GSM).

Obviously these new markets cannot just be seen as a simple extension of the European market; the EU is preparing to involve itself in research, industrial and cultural partnerships, notably through the international co-operation section of the Information Society Technology Research Programme (IST). A good example of this is the way in which we are promoting the Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB) standard with key partners worldwide.

Such cooperation is possible only to a limited extent under the Sixth Framework Programme for research and this is why

I have proposed to strengthen significantly the IST activities with emerging economies under the Seventh Framework Programme for 2007 - 2013.

*Some say that the i2010 set rather ambitious targets – others say that not succeeding in meeting these targets will further widen the innovation gap with the other side of the Atlantic. What is your view?*

My answer is an emphatic "yes" to both questions. It is true that we have set ourselves ambitious targets for the next



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five years. And indeed, failing to meet them will further widen the innovation gap with the other side of the Atlantic. The EU invests much less on research than the US: Europe spends 80 € per head; the US spends 350 € per head. The EU-US innovation gap has not narrowed in recent years. The latest European Innovation Scoreboard shows that the US and Japan are still far ahead of the EU25. Investment in ICT is an important component of this gap, so as I have said – and I cannot stress it enough – Europe needs higher ICT research investment.

ICT use is driving the next wave of innovation, putting technology at the service of people and businesses. Europe must and certainly is capable of reversing the trend and of remaining a key player

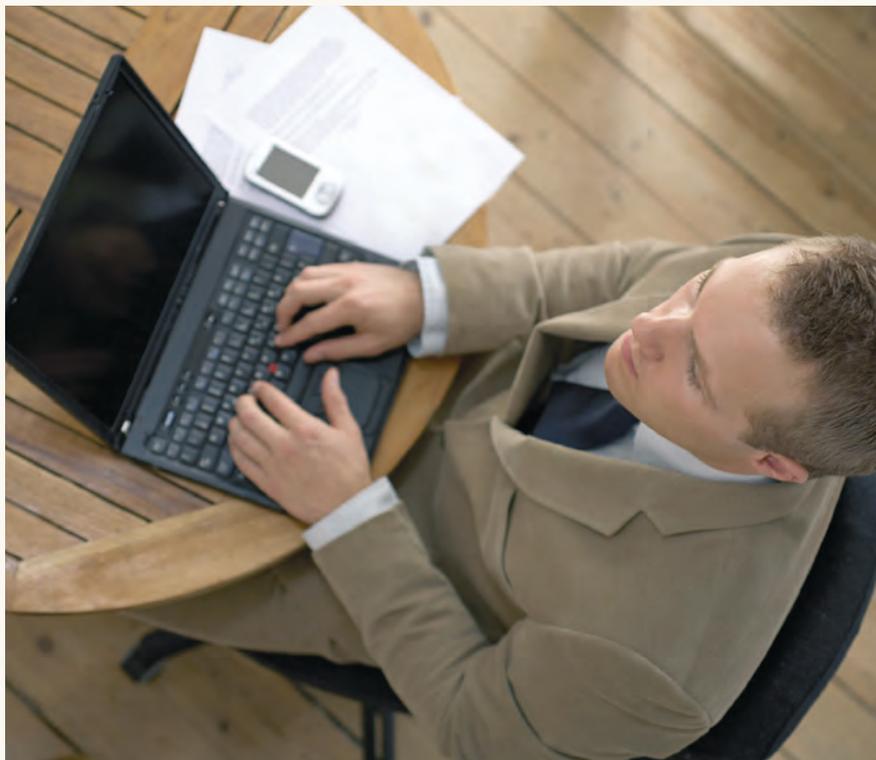
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in strategic technologies. If we do not seize the initiative, others will. This is why we need to do our utmost to meet the objectives set out in i2010, to ensure that the benefits of future promising developments come to Europe and do not pass us by.

*What do you consider to be the critical success factors for achieving the i2010 goals?*

I believe that the growth of broadband and the convergence of networks, services and devices are paving the way for a new phase of growth and innovation. It has, therefore, become critical to seize the opportunities offered by convergence for the benefit of all citizens and of the EU economy as a whole. This is first of all a task for industry. For policy, the challenge is to ensure that a modern, flexible and open regulatory environment is in place that does not stifle, but instead encourages innovation, investment and competition. This is what i2010 aims to do.

The first critical success factor will, therefore, be the establishment of a single European information space, which is the first of the three pillars of i2010. My policy priority here is to use all instruments at my disposal to ensure a modern, market-oriented regulatory framework for the converging digital economy and to stimulate the availability of online content. This implies two major tasks, one of which is the modernisation of the EU rules on audiovisual content, for which I have already made a proposal that was adopted by the Commission



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in December. We now have to see the proposal through the legislative process. The other key task is the review of the regulatory framework for electronic communications. The Commission is currently conducting a broad analysis and consultation on whether or not our current regulatory framework is functioning well and whether any change is needed to enhance its contribution to innovation and investment.

The second critical success factor will be to ensure a higher and more efficient effort in R&D in the EU, which is the objective of the second pillar of i2010. We now need an agreement on the EU Financial Perspectives for 2007-13. That

should open the way for a serious increase of the support for ICT research in the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7) and for actions to promote ICT take-up and use in the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP). The European Council in December said that research spending in 2013 should be 75% more than in 2006. This is an encouraging sign. It will be my job to turn this into effective support for collaborative ICT research, in which there is a strong private sector contribution.

The third critical success factor will be to ensure that the benefits from the digital economy and services are available to all. The information society will be

sustainable only if it ensures inclusion and broad e-participation. Tackling all forms of the digital divide is a key concern of the third pillar of i2010. My aim here is to promote the use of ICT to bring improvements in areas such as healthcare, education, life-long learning and government services – in other words, to improve people’s quality of life via better public services and social inclusion.

*How can countries that are falling behind the i2010 goals catch up with the more progressive ones?*

Political will and dedication is crucial for catching up. As in other areas of economy, catching up is easier than paving the way. In that sense the less developed countries have an advantage of being able to learn both from the mistakes and from the successes of the more advanced ones.

The right policy framework and bold actions may spur the development of Information Society. For instance, implementing programmes in the area of eGovernment will produce positive spillovers in other parts of the economy and society,



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such as increased ICT use by households or the development of eBusiness.

Regional policy is one of the ways in which the EU supports the efforts of less developed countries. Information Society is one of its key priorities. To give you some practical examples, with the aid of the structural funds, companies or local authorities can upgrade their equipment, improve their infrastructure or train their workforce – all of which will contribute to catching up.

The countries which are lagging behind also have the opportunity to participate in the Community research programmes within the Framework Programme. Even with the same financial input, less developed countries can benefit more from such programmes than the more developed countries.

Another feature of i2010 involves dialogue with stakeholders and the Member States, whereby exchange of best practice can provide additional impetus for learning and catching up.

*Greece has a low PC and Internet penetration in the critical groups (i.e.*

*consumers and SMBs). What would you suggest that Greece should do in order to achieve substantial improvement in the founding parameters that constitute the i2010 strategy?*

Indeed, Greece's rate of broadband penetration is the lowest in Europe. In terms of population covered by DSL (broadband), Greece is also trailing behind: while several EU Member States have 100% coverage and the average for EU15 is 88%, Greece stands at less than 10% of population with access to broadband. Furthermore, only 22% of Greek households have access to the Internet at home, while the EU average is 48%. Meanwhile, Greece has the highest prices and one of the lowest levels of competition in this field.

Slow ICT diffusion, along with low investment in R&D and education, are some of the factors which the Commission has identified as the reasons for Greece's weak economic performance. For instance, in terms of the share of ICT expenditures as a % of GDP, Greece is at rank 20 of the EU25. Yet we all know that ICT investment is vital for productivity growth. This is why I cannot stress this enough that Greece – and indeed the EU in general – must see more ICT investment and public R&D expenditure.

Greece needs to catch up for example in terms of getting the benefits of eGovernment to its people and businesses. Today, 30% of Greek government services are fully on-line against the EU15 average of 46%. Bringing public services on-line allows significant savings in terms of time and administrative costs. I would therefore urge you to take concrete actions towards an open and online government in areas such as inclusion, efficiency and cutting red-tape, moving to e-procurement and adopting electronic



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IDs. Next year, as part of i2010, we will launch an Action Plan on eGovernment to help Member States with their efforts.

The Member States' main vehicle of implementing i2010 is their National Reform Plans, which define national strategies for achieving the Lisbon goals. The Greek National Reform Plan considers the promotion of the knowledge-based society an important priority. Measures to achieve that objective are, however, quite vague. Greece has to act decisively and constructively if it wants the business opportunities and the enhanced performance that integrated web services, based on broadband, can give to both small and large enterprises. **S**

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