Proposal for a Council Decision adopting a Multiannual Community programme to stimulate the development and use of European digital content on the global networks and to promote linguistic diversity in the Information Society

(2000/C 337 E/04)

(Text with EEA relevance)

COM(2000) 323 final — 2000/0128(CNS)

(Submitted by the Commission on 24 May 2000)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 157(3) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Whereas:

(1) The evolution towards an Information Society will influence the life of almost every citizen in the European Union.

(2) Digital content plays a predominant role in this evolution, substantially contributing to economic growth and employment, and enhancing the professional, social and cultural development of the citizens of Europe.

(3) The structures and business environment of the content industries are changing fast.

(4) There are numerous barriers to the full development of the European content industries and markets.

(5) The Bonn ministerial declaration, issued at the conference of 6-8 July 1997 on the role of global networks for the Information Society, devotes special interest to the Internet commercial developments, thus forming the basis for the continuing discussions on Internet content, management issues and electronic commerce.

(6) On 8 December 1999 the Commission adopted the *e*Europe initiative (¹) which was subsequently welcomed by Member States at the Helsinki European Council of 10 and 11 December 1999.

(7) On 23 and 24 March 2000 the European Council in Lisbon specifically recognised the role of the content industries in creating added value by exploiting and networking European cultural diversity.

(8) Community actions undertaken concerning the content of information should respect the Union's multilingual and multicultural character and encourage initiatives that facilitate access to digital information in the languages of present and candidate countries.

(9) The interim evaluations of the INFO 2000 programme established by Council Decision 96/339/EC (²) and the Multilingual Information Society Initiative (MLIS) established by Council Decision 96/664/EC (³) call for a vigorous follow-up of the actions in the area of digital content and linguistic and cultural diversity.

(10) Measures should be taken encouraging participation of SMEs in Information Society developments.

(11) The different rates of development on the provision and use of information services in the present Member States and in the candidate countries deserve special consideration, having regard to the internal cohesion of the Community and the risks associated with a two-tier Information Society.

(12) The Commission has published in January 1999 a Green Paper on Public Sector Information in the Information Society (⁴), launching a European debate on this topic.

(13) In accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty, the objectives of the proposed actions cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States due to the transnational character of the issues at stake and can, therefore, by reason of the European scope and effects of the actions be better achieved by the Community. This Decision confines itself to the minimum required in order to achieve those objectives and does not go beyond what is necessary for that purpose.

(14) Any content policy action should be complementary to other ongoing Community initiatives, and be performed in synergy with actions under the fifth Framework Programme for Research and Development, the Framework Programme for Culture, the Media programmes, with Community education actions, SME actions, and with the Structural Funds.

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(¹) COM(1999) 687.

(²) OJ L 129, 30.5.1996, p. 24.
(³) OJ L 306, 28.11.1996, p. 40.
(⁴) COM(1998) 585.

(15) Complementarity and synergy with related Community initiatives and programmes should be ensured by the Commission through appropriate coordination mechanisms.

(16) Progress of this programme should be continuously and systematically monitored with a view to adapting it, where appropriate, to developments in the digital content market. In due course there should be an independent assessment of the progress of the programme so as to provide the background information needed in order to determine the objectives for subsequent content policy actions. At the end of this programme, there should be a final assessment of the results obtained compared with the objectives set out in this Decision.

(17) It may be appropriate to engage in international cooperation activities with international organisations and third countries for the purpose of implementing this programme.

(18) It is necessary to fix the duration of the programme.

(19) In accordance with Article 2 of Council Decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission ([1]), measures for the implementation of this Decision should be adopted by use of the advisory procedure provided for in Article 3 of Decision 1999/468/EC,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

A multiannual programme 'European Digital Content for the Global Networks' (hereinafter referred to as 'the programme') is hereby adopted.

The programme has the following objectives:

(a) creating favourable conditions for the commercialisation, distribution and use of European digital content on the global networks, thus stimulating economic activity and enhancing employment prospects;

(b) stimulating the use of Europe's content potential, and in particular public sector information;

(c) promoting multilingualism in digital content on the global networks and increasing the export opportunities of European content firms and in particular SMEs through linguistic customisation;

(d) contributing to the professional, social and cultural development of the citizens of the Union and facilitating the economic and social integration of citizens in the candidate countries in the Information Society.

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([1]) OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23.

Article 2

In order to attain the objectives referred to in Article 1, the following actions shall be undertaken under the guidance of the Commission, in accordance with the action lines set out in Annex I and the means for implementing the programme set out in Annex III:

(a) stimulating the exploitation of public sector information;

(b) enhancing linguistic and cultural customisation;

(c) supporting market enablers;

(d) support actions.

Article 3

The programme shall cover a period of five years from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2005.

The annual appropriations shall be authorised by the budgetary authority within the limits of the financial perspective.

An indicative breakdown of expenditure is given in Annex II.

Article 4

1.   The Commission shall be responsible for the implementation of the programme and its coordination with other Community programmes. The Commission will draw up a bi-annual work programme every two years on the basis of this Decision.

2.   The Commission shall act in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 5(2) for the purposes of the following:

(a) adoption of the work programme;

(b) determination of the criteria and content of calls for proposals;

(c) assessment of the projects proposed under calls for proposals for Community funding with an estimated amount of Community contribution that is equal to, or more than EUR 1 000 000;

(d) any departure from the rules set out in Annex III;

(e) acceptance of participation in any project by legal entities from third countries and international organisations other than those mentioned in Article 7(1) and (2).

3.   Where the amount of the projects referred to in paragraph 2(c) is less than EUR 1 000 000, the Commission shall merely inform the committee established by Article 5(1) of the projects and of the outcome of their assessment.

The Commission shall regularly inform the committee of progress with the implementation of the programme as a whole.

Article 5

1. The Commission shall be assisted by a committee composed of representatives of the Member States and chaired by the representative of the Commission.

2. Where reference is made to this paragraph, the advisory procedure laid down in Article 3 of Decision 1999/468/EC shall apply, in compliance with Article 7 thereof.

Article 6

1. In order to ensure that Community aid is used efficiently, the Commission shall ensure that actions under this Decision are subject to effective prior appraisal, monitoring and subsequent evaluation.

2. During implementation of projects and after their completion the Commission shall evaluate the manner in which they have been carried out and the impact of their implementation in order to assess whether the original objectives have been achieved.

3. The selected beneficiaries shall submit an annual report to the Commission.

4. After three years and at the end of the programme, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions an evaluation report on the results obtained in implementing the action lines referred to in Article

2. The Commission may present, on the basis of those results, proposals for adjusting the orientation of the programme.

Article 7

1. Participation in the programme may be opened to legal entities established in EFTA States which are members of the European Economic Area (EEA) in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement on the EEA.

2. The programme shall be open to participation of candidate countries on the following basis:

(a) those from central and eastern Europe (CEECs), in accordance with the conditions established in the Europe Agreements, in their additional protocols, and in the decisions of the respective Association Councils;

(b) Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, in accordance with bilateral agreements to be concluded.

3. Participation may be opened, in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 5(2), without financial support by the Community from the programme, to legal entities established in other third countries and to international organisations, where such participation contributes effectively to the implementation of the programme and taking into account the principle of mutual benefit.

Article 8

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

ANNEX I

ACTION LINES

The action lines are a means to implement a European approach to the development of the digital content industries. They will contribute to the strategic objectives of the *European Digital Content on the Global Networks* programme, that have been defined as follows:

— creating favourable conditions for the commercialisation, distribution and use of European digital content on the global networks, thus stimulating economic activity and enhancing employment prospects;

— stimulating the use of Europe's content potential, and in particular public sector information;

— promoting multilingualism in digital content on the global networks and increasing the export opportunities of European content firms and in particular SMEs through linguistic customisation;

— contributing to the professional, social and cultural development of the citizens of the EU and facilitating the economic and social integration of citizens in the candidate countries in the Information Society.

The different action lines of the new programme are strongly intertwined: e.g. linguistic aspects are essential for the cross-border exploitation of public sector information, facilitating access to capital for Internet start-ups is fundamental for the language industries, etc.

1. **Stimulating the exploitation of public sector information**

The Green Paper on Public Sector Information in the Information Society, published in January 1999, triggered a discussion at European level on the issues of access to and exploitation of public sector information. This discussion has contributed to the awareness in this field among public and private parties and may be an important basis for improving the exploitation conditions in Europe. At the same time, experiments of public/private partnerships, started under the INFO 2000 programme, should be accelerated and expanded. Participation of EU applicant countries in the initiatives of this action line will facilitate future integration. A better management of information (e.g. land registers) in these countries is of vital importance for creating a transparent legal framework as well as the functioning of the internal market after accession.

Within this action line the use of language technology applications will be promoted among the administrations of Member States and the EU institutions.

Experiments in concrete projects

The public sector collects and produces vast amounts of information, much of which is of interest to individuals and businesses, and which can be the raw material for value-added information services produced by the content industries. There are, however, many barriers for the transformation of this enormous potential into saleable products and services. Demonstration projects that can be used as examples of good practices and that will allow to identify practical problems in public/private partnerships, will help to redress this situation. These projects will serve as catalysts to further developments in this field.

Preliminary actions have started under the INFO 2000 programme, that supported a limited number of pilot and demonstration projects. Given the huge potential of this domain, experiments with public-private partnerships, aimed at the exploitation of public sector information with a European interest will continue.

There will be room within this action line for projects forging links between the content industries and public sector bodies in the candidate countries, increasing the availability of viable information for business and citizens.

Establishment of European digital data collections

The pilot-projects as described above usually cover a limited geographical area within Europe. Nevertheless the absence of complete datasets at European level constitute one of the barriers to the exploitation of the content potential. Therefore, in addition to the experimental projects, the establishment of European data collections will be stimulated, through financial support to work on pan-European metadata for public sector information and through projects covering a significant number EU Member States. Interest and commitment of private parties will be decisive for selecting the type of data and the areas to be covered.

High level group

Without prejudice to the final decision that the Commission will take on the follow-up to the Green paper on public sector information, it is foreseen that a high level group on public sector information is established, consisting of Member States representatives, actors from the information industries, consumers organisations and other representatives of citizens interests. It will not only give guidance to the different initiatives in this field (follow-on to the Green Paper on public sector information in the Information Society, COM(1998) 585), but can also be an important platform for the detection and dissemination of best practices.

2. **Enhancing linguistic and cultural customisation**

Adequate support for multilingual and cross-cultural information access and exchange is a key enabler for the development of a European mass market for information products and services. The merely technological aspects of this process are well covered within the fifth Framework Programme. RTD activities, however, do not address the fundamental issue of turning technological advances into enhanced business capabilities and market penetration. The programme will sustain actions aiming at the establishment of closer collaborations between the European content and language industries, thus overcoming the linguistic fragmentation of European markets and enhancing the global competitiveness of both sectors. These actions constitute a natural follow-up to the actions carried out under the precursor MLIS programme, adapted to the needs of an increasingly digital and networked environment. Special attention will be given to SMEs and start-ups, and to less widely spoken EU languages and the languages of potential new Member States.

Fostering new partnerships and the adoption of multi-language strategies

This sub-line addresses the development of cost effective multi-language solutions and processes, by promoting new forms of partnership between the digital content and the language industries. Private and public-sector content providers and distributors will be stimulated to make their products and services available in a broader range of languages, throughout the design, authoring and publishing chain. IT vendors and telecom operators will be encouraged to provide new tools and digital delivery channels enabling multilingual information access and provision. The providers of language services and utilities will be encouraged to adapt their offerings to meet the needs of an expanding customer base in the content industries.

Strengthening the linguistic infrastructure

The availability of an adequate linguistic infrastructure is an absolute prerequisite for the timely and cost effective creation and exploitation of multilingual content. It is the structural basis for any sustained internationalisation and localisation effort, especially for less widely spoken languages where market forces often prove insufficient. Strengthening the linguistic infrastructure implies establishing an open framework comprising standardised and inter-operable multilingual resources encompassing e.g. electronic lexicons, corpora, translation memories and terminology collections. These resources will be pooled together to yield widely accessible repositories which can then be exploited by content providers and distributors, and by suppliers of language services.

The work in this field builds on the results of FP III and FP IV for RTD, that provided the expertise and the technological tools needed.

3. **Supporting market enablers**

The dynamics in the content market and the resulting uncertainties for market-players may lead to inertia and underinvestment. Support to access the available forms of investment capital, and a means to trade rights online for multimedia production will speed up new initiatives and investments. The actions below are designed to contribute to create the basic conditions.

Bridging the funding gap

Limitations in accessing capital for European Internet start-ups hold back the market opportunities in digital content. This has a negative impact on economic growth and employment. Actions encouraging the flow of capital towards Internet start-ups will be undertaken. The goal is to bring out the full potential of European digital content in terms of creativity, exploitation of the European cultural heritage, business models, e-commerce, research results, innovative applications, mobile multimedia, etc. Actions will complement other Community programmes as well as national initiatives in accordance with the subsidiarity principle.

It is proposed to redress the mismatch between existing financial resources and the use the content sector makes of them. The EC will act to provide a bridge between companies in the digital content area and potential investors. The actions will build on expertise present in business universities and training centres, as well as deployment of distance learning facilities, organising seminars, conferences and fora to encourage the exchange of information and best practice.

Rights trading

Rights trading is the basis for creating products mixing text, images and sound. The effectiveness and efficiency of the multimedia rights clearance have a strong and direct impact on the functioning of the content industries. The integration and interoperation of distributed specialised clearance services at European level was stimulated under INFO 2000 through feasibility studies, prototype, standards and pilot system development. Further investment is needed to arrive at a unified European rights clearance approach. The focus of future actions will be on extending rights clearance pilots and on specific support measures. Pilot projects will have to cover the candidate countries, less advanced sectors and specific public sector applications.

4. **Support Actions**

The programme execution will be supported by actions aiming at the dissemination of the results (e.g. publications, world wide web sites, conferences showcasing projects) as well as strategic operations (e.g. studies and fora) bringing together different parts of the content and languages markets.

A vision of future developments shared by both private and public parties will reduce uncertainties and speed up concrete initiatives and investments. Continuous interaction between market players and public parties will be of increasing importance as a key mechanism to foster the evolution of the vision-building process. The observation of developments in the market in close contact with the industry actors in the content and language industries will constitute the information basis needed to update the vision-building process, allowing a continuous benchmarking with third countries. Basic data on the sector will be collected. The regular and consistent observation of the converging content and languages market is presently fragmented. Industry led data collection, co-financed by the EU and covering the converging content industries should be established. In the ICT domain this practice is well established through the publication of the annual EITO report.

ANNEX II

INDICATIVE BREAKDOWN OF EXPENDITURE

1.	Stimulating the exploitation of public sector information	48 %-52 %
2.	Enhancing linguistic and cultural customisation	38 %-42 %
3.	Supporting market enablers	5 %-9 %
4.	Support Actions	3 %-4 %
	Total	100 %

ANNEX III

THE MEANS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME

1. The Commission will implement the programme in accordance with the technical content specified in Annex I.

2. The programme will be executed through indirect actions and wherever possible on a shared-cost basis.

3. The selection of shared-cost projects will normally be based on the calls for proposals procedure published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. The content of the calls for proposals will be defined in close consultation with the relevant experts and according to the procedures referred to in Article 5 of the Decision. The main criterion for supporting projects through calls for proposals will be their potential contribution to achieving the objectives of the programme.

4. Applications for Community support should provide, where appropriate, a financial plan listing all the components of the funding of the projects, including the financial support requested from the Community, and any other requests for or grants of support from other sources.

5. The Commission may also implement other more flexible funding schemes than the call for proposals in order to provide incentives for the creation of partnerships, in particular involving SMEs and organisations in less favoured regions, or for other exploratory activities in different segments of the multimedia content market. These schemes might be operated on a permanent basis.

6. The detailed arrangements for the procedures referred to under point 6 will be implemented after consultation of the committee referred to in Article 4 of this Decision, following the rules of Article 5 of this Decision, in accordance with the Financial Regulations. They will be published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

7. Projects fully financed by the Commission within the framework of study and services contracts will be implemented through calls for tenders in accordance with the financial provisions in force. Transparency will be achieved by publishing the work programme and circulating it to interested bodies.

8. For the implementation of the programme the Commission will also undertake preparatory, accompanying and support activities designed to achieve the general objectives of the programme and the specific aims of each action line. This includes activities such as: studies and consultancy in support of the programme; preliminary actions in preparation of future activities; measures aimed at facilitating participation in the programme as well as facilitating access to the results produced under the programme; publications and activities for the dissemination, promotion and exploitation of results: brochures, electronic publications (CD-ROMs, DVD, web presence, etc.), participation at exhibitions, preparation of press related material, etc.; analysis of possible socio-economic consequences associated with the programme; and support activities such as spreading the use of digital content standards, and encouraging skills development at European level.

9. All projects receiving financial support under the programme will be required to display an acknowledgement of the support received on the products.