31. Considers that the Commission should appraise the extent to which national minorities have been able to benefit from the right of establishment set out in the existing Association Agreements and should act on the results of that appraisal;

32. Urges Member States and the applicant countries to promote acceptance of differences and tolerance through their educational systems; takes the view that, in some cases, this may require the revision and adaptation of the contents of textbooks which could incite racism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism or any other form of intolerance or discrimination;

33. Calls for radical reinforcement of coordination of national, multinational and European action programmes for Roma minorities, giving a high priority to education, health care and the representation of Roma in public life and including campaigns to support NGOs and combat prejudice; requests the Commission to consider regrouping the different EU programmes for Roma in one comprehensive programme in the interests of effectiveness and transparency; calls on the Commission to present proposals in 2000 for such an approach based on a joint framework devised by the EU and the candidate countries in question, with objectives and timetables;

34. Considers that respect for religious freedom, religious monuments and establishments and religious tolerance are of special importance in combating racism and related phenomena;

35. Calls on the candidate countries as well as the Member States to sign, ratify and implement not only the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination but also the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families;

36. Calls for an information policy on the existence of religious minorities in the CEECs, and proper legislative solutions to be aimed at protecting their rights;

37. Calls on the Commission to submit a comparative analytical table for all the candidate countries covering the subjects referred to in this resolution, using identical criteria for comparison;

38. Calls for constant political and social vigilance towards, and more severe penalties for, the unremitting expressions of anti-Semitism in a number of candidate countries, not least in the light of fairly widespread latent anti-Semitic feelings and thoughts;

39. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey.

19. Information society

A5-0067/2000


The European Parliament,

− having regard to the Commission Communication (COM(1999) 687 – C5-0063/2000),

− having regard to European Parliament and Council Decision 1999/1719/EC on a series of guidelines, including the identification of projects of common interest, for trans-European networks of the electronic Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA) (1),


having regard to its resolution of 17 July 1998 (6) on the Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions: Ensuring security and trust in electronic communications — Towards a European framework for digital signatures and encryption (COM(1997) 503 — C4-0648/1997),


having regard to its resolution of 15 January 1998 (6) on the Commission communication on 'Cohesion and information society' (COM(1997) 7 — C4-0044/1997),


having regard to European Parliament and Council Decision 1336/97/EC on a series of guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks (10),

having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 96/9/EC on the legal protection of databases (11),

having regard to the Commission communication on the follow-up to the consultation process relating to the Green paper on 'Pluralism and media concentration in the internal market — An assessment of the need for Community action' (COM(1994) 353),

having regard to the 1st (1996) and 2nd (1997) Annual Reports of the Information Society Forum,

(2) OJ C 98, 9.4.1999, p. 60.
(3) OJ C 279, 1.10.1999, p. 389.
(9) OJ C 150, 28.5.1999, p.171.
having regard to the opinion of the Information Society Forum on the Green Paper of the Commission on Public Sector Information in the Information Society,

having regard to the final report (1997) of the High Level Expert Group on the social and societal aspects of the Information Society ‘A European Information Society for all’, stressing the need for a social embeddedness of information technology,

having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,

having regard to the report of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A5-0067/2000),

A. whereas political commitment is essential in order to attain the objectives laid down by the Commission aimed at promoting an Information Society for all,

B. whereas fast growth of electronic communication services promises major benefits for consumers, governments, business and the European economy,

C. whereas, while Member States have set up various schemes and policies to foster the development of the Information Society, co-operation amongst them and with the Union is a major factor for success to implement any measure aiming to develop the Information Society in Europe,

D. whereas each sector, such as technological research, enterprises (including the creative content industry) and public authorities, has to act and cooperate in order to make the Information Society a common good for all citizens and society as a whole,

E. whereas benchmarking in Member States has to be taken into consideration to improve the overall European record in this field,

F. whereas cheap and fast access to the Internet should be part of an evolutionary universal service provision; whereas with this, in view the necessary telecommunications infrastructures, must be developed, taking into account the need to provide universal, non-discriminatory access to local networks,

G. whereas the fast development of third-generation mobile communication services will give the EU a leading role globally in new information products and services,

H. whereas the explosive development of e-commerce and SMEs’ probable lack of know-how and venture capital, the projected turnover of business through the development of e-commerce and the slow decision-making process in the EU should be taken into consideration,

I. whereas the growth potential of the Internet has a major impact on Europe’s economy and whereas it should therefore be comprehensively taken into account in the economic policy of the European Union,

J. whereas the new information technologies create a social and economic area which is fundamentally transnational in character and whereas economic, education, social and employment policy must take account of this,

K. whereas only 1 % on average of national health budgets is devoted to information technologies,

L. whereas a great difference exists among Member States as far as the information technology capabilities of their administrations and the use of the Internet is concerned,
M. whereas the Fifth framework programme for research includes important measures to develop a user-friendly Information Society and new networks between universities,

N. whereas efforts must be taken to develop appropriate standards, common generic applications and compatible data bases and services when needed to realise the full potential of the Information Society across national borders,

O. whereas the development of electronic commerce offers great prospects for European consumers, but only if it is as safe and reliable as transactions conducted on traditional markets,

P. whereas all citizens should be able to take full advantage of the development of the Information Society, particularly taking into account the special needs of disabled citizens, and the opportunities that new technologies offer,

Q. whereas equal attention should be paid to the needs of all citizens outside the world of work, in particular those who have been excluded from it prematurely,

R. whereas marginal categories of citizens, disadvantaged groups and poor people should have access to the Information Society, so that they can be reintegrated in the society and the labour market and that an information underclass is not created,

S. whereas one out of four new jobs have been created in the field of Information Society activities during the 1990s,

T. whereas a clear, stable and predictable legal framework based on well-proven internal market principles is an essential condition for the development of the Information Society and e-commerce in Europe;

1. Welcomes the Commission’s e-Europe initiative which contains objectives and a timetable for optimal development of the Information Society in Europe, and expects the Commission to draw up detailed plans for achieving these objectives and to establish clear priorities while defining the tasks of the EU and of the individual Member States; the following initiatives should be tackled in the context of e-Europe as a matter of priority:

   - modern, multimedia, high-performance infrastructure must be created to permit the supply of, and demand for, high-quality communications services from telephone via PC and television and other receiver devices;

   - the European Union must create the appropriate legal certainty in e-commerce business and the legal framework for consumers;

   - a broad-based skills offensive should be launched (‘Europe’s youth into the digital age’), in particular to counteract the skills shortage in Europe; Parliament expects the Commission to draw up specific proposals such as educating pupils for pupils or class trips to IT training establishments; however, since there is no EU competence such proposals must be formulated in a non-binding way since educational policy is, in the final analysis, the responsibility of the Member States;

   - the e-Europe initiative should be accompanied by a broad-based, Europe-wide advertising and information campaign to inform the people of Europe of the use of modern information and communications technologies and, in particular, to illustrate the great potential for e-commerce;

   - specific projects are needed to turn Europe into an Information Society; adequate appropriations for this will need to be included in the EU’s budget over the next few years; only in this way can the European Union make clear its political resolve to implement the initiative consistently;
2. Regrets that the Commission's communication does not define detailed measures to be taken on both the EU and national level in order to reach these objectives;

3. Regrets that important aspects such as sustainability, social cohesion and employment are given no special focus;

4. Hopes that the action plans proposed by the Commission identify and define the measures that should be taken, on the one hand, at regional or national level and, on the other hand, at EU level, taking into account the rapid development in the sector itself;

5. Regrets very much that the Commission's communication, which itself contains a significant section on accessibility for people with disabilities, was not in fact accessible to blind and partially sighted people, being available only in PDF format on the Commission web site and stresses that the current Commission proposal for a directive on copyright and related rights in the Information Society would result in the imposition of technical blocks on information on the Internet, which would prevent legal 'copying' such as the transposition of information into an alternative format, and will severely hinder the participation of visually impaired people in the Information Society,

6. Stresses that the guidelines concerning the regional and Cohesion funds must be re-examined to ensure that full advantage is taken of these resources in order to make less developed and remote areas more competitive as regards the Information Society,

7. Urges the Commission to submit all areas of EU policy to an audit; the objective is to ensure that full account is taken of the changes in all areas of life as a result of information technology and the new media;

8. Stresses that developing the European Information Society can only be supported effectively if Europe has a sound knowledge and innovation structure, a broad and well-developed body of users and advanced information and communications technology;

9. Stresses that a large proportion of all innovation within the Information Society is achieved, firstly, by the ICT sector and, secondly, by ICT firms in close cooperation with various chains and sectors (transport, monetary transactions, etc.); regrets that the need for this cooperation is not given due prominence in the eEurope initiative; in particular, support should be given to clusters of SMEs;

10. Notes that approximately 80% of e-commerce is currently business-to-business. Further development of e-commerce between businesses and consumers requires the creation of a critical consumer mass. How this is to be done is not obvious from the eEurope initiative;

11. Urges the Commission to analyse the risks and opportunities that the Information society development could create on the job market, therefore to come up with plans for small business expansion and stimulation of innovation and to take initiatives to make sure that job creation in all sectors is fostered by the use of information technologies;

12. Calls on the Commission to examine the socio-economic aspects of the initiative in a broad context, with particular reference to the approaches and questions contained in the Fifth framework research programme;

13. Calls on the Council to express a political commitment to eliminating the gap between the US and the EU as regards the Information Society and e-commerce and asks the Commission to foresee measures to reduce this gap;

14. Asks the Commission and the Council to investigate, together with Parliament, new ways of speeding up the legislative work, and to adopt new approaches to what should be regulated in directives and what should be regulated through powers delegated to the Commission;
15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States not to undermine flexibility and stifle the growth of e-business by excessive regulation;

16. Calls on the Council to adopt the e-commerce directive promptly and urges Member States to transpose it into national law rapidly so that European businesses and particularly SMEs are encouraged to invest in e-commerce in the Union by benefiting from the legal certainty of the ‘one-stop shop’ offered by this single market initiative;

17. Asks the Commission to analyse the reasons why the US is ahead of the EU in Internet and e-commerce use, and to include both areas in its action framework and in the benchmarked criteria;

18. Asks the Council and the Commission to take steps at the political and legislative level to confirm Europe’s lead vis-à-vis the US in mobile communication and the provision of information society services over mobile networks and to accelerate the take up of third-generation wireless technology;

19. Points out that legislative measures must not threaten investment in the mobile communication sector, while also taking into account the need to secure sound competition in this sector;

20. Calls on Member States to define a common approach to achieve a trans-European Information Society and foster cooperation among them and with the EU in this field;

21. Calls on the Council and the Member States to take all measures necessary to extend judicial and police cooperation to include the Information Society, so as to guarantee the security of transactions and the confidentiality of data;

22. Considers that the development of secure identification systems, systems to preserve the confidentiality of messages and methods to prevent changes in them are paramount to develop a digitalised, competitive and mobile e-Europe — they will be a very important part of the infrastructure of such a Europe; takes note of the competitive advantage that Europe has as to smart cards and other secure identification systems;

23. Asks the Commission to define the role of national and European financing in eEurope initiatives, and to clarify which lines are foreseen in the 2000 budget to finance the measures related to its communication objectives, and in particular for the IST programme;

24. Notes that much more attention must be paid to questions related to protecting the privacy of citizens;

25. Calls on the Member States to commit themselves to a benchmarking of their initiatives for fostering the Information Society in order to spread best practices;

26. Urges a major reform of infrastructures to allow access to Information Society technologies in all Member States to avoid the risk of a ‘two-speed Europe’ and to promote economic and social cohesion among all the regions of the European Union, and calls on the Commission to consider Internet access to Information Society technologies in general as part of universal service provision; therefore asks the Commission to study the remaining regional access barriers in detail and to put forward proposals as to when Internet access must be a part of universal service provision in all Member States;

27. Calls on Member States to give prompt consideration to the Commission’s initiatives and recommendations on reducing the cost of access to the Internet (reducing prices for rented lines, approval for licences, unbundling local loop) and to look into ways of implementing them forthwith;

28. Calls on the Member States, Community bodies and regional and local authorities to make use of all possible instruments for training European citizens in the use of new information technologies in order to meet the need for skilled personnel in the new sectors;
29. Calls on the Commission and Council to draw up a global strategy of action which embraces e-Europe and all aspects of the information society, including the creation of highly skilled jobs and education and training measures required to equip the workforce with the skills needed to make use of the new and rapidly changing opportunities and increased social cohesion and considers that this global strategy of action should incorporate guidelines, recommendations and pointers for specific measures at national and European levels and should be linked to national employment plans, achievable targets to be met on an annual basis and the participation of the social partners, educators and training personnel;

30. Calls for a new Employment Guideline to be drawn up or for each of the current Guidelines to be appropriately adapted for 2001 so that this global strategy of action can be taken fully into account at an early stage; asks therefore the Commission to include a point 11 ‘Strengthening employment and social cohesion in the information society’ in its e-Europe initiative, focusing on short-term measures to face the risks of job losses in Europe related to the IT sectors;

31. Highlights the importance of having suitably trained staff in IT in educational and training establishments throughout the European Union and calls on the Commission, the Member States and the two sides of industry to ensure that this aspect is fully taken into account; believes therefore that consideration should be given to establishing a reference frame of the basic skills which are required to help workers train for activities related to information technologies and considers that certification of such basic IT skills should be made possible;

32. Points out that the ‘Innovation’ has to follow environmentally and socially sustainable paths, based on ‘greening’ the IT-infrastructures, products and services, and demanding social innovations as ‘sustainable lifestyles’ and social inclusion of the ‘information poor’; calls therefore on the Member States to ensure universal access to the new service and not just exclusively to those who have the economic power to benefit;

33. Calls on the Commission likewise to extend to older people the specific guideline providing for free Internet kiosks to be made generally available in public buildings as from the end of 2001 and also to organise specific measures for the benefit of older people;

34. Calls on the Commission and Member States to do their utmost to ensure respect for the equal opportunities principle and prevent the information society from engendering new forms of inequality in the opportunities open to men and women to learn how to use the Internet and multimedia resources;

35. Calls for new forms of work arising from the information society to be accompanied by measures to guarantee workers’ rights to social security and proper pensions and to enable them to perform such work under conditions providing a high standard of living and employment and the requisite security; calls in particular for tele-working which, by definition, transcends national borders, to be subjected to specific analysis and for consideration of the desirability of a European framework to guarantee social rights for tele-workers and home-workers;

36. Asks the Commission to develop plans to exploit the benefits of a uniform VAT system for the growth of e-commerce, including consideration of sales taxation at source;

37. Points out that e-commerce will change the traditional way of doing business, particularly for SMEs, and stresses the need to create a favourable environment for investment by SMEs and calls for strong support from Member States and the EU, so that new technologies can be integrated into business practices and SMEs can benefit from a business-friendly legal environment both at EU and global level;

38. Notes that all companies that do not take into account the opportunities of the digital and mobile environment will face difficulties, which means that enterprise and educational organisations and Member States should take action to promote awareness regarding existing possibilities;
39. Calls on the Commission to extend the objectives of e-Europe to other Community policies and, notably through regional policy, to give special emphasis to measures to support intangible investment and access for SMEs and very small enterprises to new communications and information technologies;

40. Calls on the Commission to organise an e-government conference in mid-2000 to enable representatives of European administrative units to exchange experience, firstly on on-line administrative services, as developed in the public-private partnership model, for example, and, secondly, on the consistent introduction of IT technology in civil services, while reorganising work patterns to facilitate an exchange of ideas and know-how;

41. Stresses that the unstoppable development of e-commerce will, like any other technological change, have a major impact on almost all sectors of the economy which will lead to a shift in firms, work, regions and countries and which will bring benefits to those who are best able to adapt to the change; for example, there is likely to be a positive effect on postal services and hence on the jobs involved in such services;

42. Urges the Commission to press ahead with the application of its commercial communications policy so that new SME e-commerce businesses can advertise effectively their new services in traditional media across borders in the European Union and thus build up European brand loyalty on which their cross-border trade will rely;

43. Calls on Member States to develop innovative and comprehensive actions in the field of education for the new economy in pre-school, school, tertiary and higher education, and asks on the Commission to encourage complementarity in programmes — ensuring for instance that new educational programmes have an e-Europe element to give special consideration to concepts of computer supported cooperative learning, the creation of educational information networks and databases, using information networks for intercultural learning and high quality standards for multimedia applications in education and training in its initiative on ‘Europe’s youth into the digital age’;

44. Underlines that e-commerce is a very useful opportunity for consumers as a whole, and for some categories of consumers in particular, such as the elderly, the housebound and the disabled, and that consumers have to be reassured as far as the difficulties of accessibility to Internet are concerned, and need reassurance that their consumer rights and data protection rights are guaranteed in a comprehensive, understandable and effective way; consumers should have a genuine and easy access to complaints procedures — for example through an electronic ombudsman — and any measures decided should be applicable immediately, and therefore asks the Commission and the Member States to introduce a consumer dispute settlement mechanism;

45. Calls on the Commission to redirect the financial resources available (structural and Cohesion funds, research appropriations, etc.) for the projects in this initiative. There is a need for clarity as to which resources are to finance which projects;

46. Stresses the importance of ensuring that the European Social Fund and the EQUAL initiative also contribute to the objective of creating a skilled workforce for all in the rapidly developing IT sector;

47. Stresses that the Internet and e-commerce offer new opportunities for creators and raise numerous questions with regard to the definition of intellectual property;

48. Calls on the Commission to guarantee the ethical security of services offered on the Internet in the EU, taking all possible measures to ensure respect for human rights and the rights of the child;

49. Stresses that the new developments in this sector could make a contribution to sustainable development and calls on the Commission to support in particular environmental aspects concerning hardware and infrastructure and an approach towards use which respects resources;
50. Emphasises the fact that the linking up of researchers via the Internet is a key to the future economic success of the EU and therefore underlines the importance of giving researchers easy access to Information Society technologies;

51. Calls on the Commission actively to promote the development and use of intelligent transport systems based on new communications and information technology, so as to guarantee the development in Europe of safe, reliable and efficient networks, with the emphasis on intermodality, strengthening public transport and respect for the environment;

52. Considers that e-commerce is a reality that cannot be ignored; therefore Member States and Commission should take the appropriate steps to make the most of this opportunity in terms of the economy, the job market and consumers' needs;

53. Calls on the Commission to ensure that the EU's competition policy affords European enterprises a level playing field in all Member States and that there are equal opportunities for access to the market;

54. Asks to be informed by the Commission about the results of the consultations with the Member States concerning the major policy review to improve the coherence of available instruments to finance venture capital;

55. Asks the Commission, in the new point 11 of its e-Europe initiative 'Strengthening employment and social cohesion in the Information Society' to give priority to promoting literacy in new technologies for all citizens, focusing on short-term measures to fill the large number of job vacancies in Europe related to employment in the IT sector, on a broad qualification offensive to strengthen skills also of average age and older employees needed for a knowledge based society, on creating social regulation for new forms of work generated by the IT revolution, as well as on strengthening initiatives for equal access to information networks for socially excluded persons;

56. Welcomes the Commission's recent initiative on free software and open source, which is a major priority of the IST work programme (WP 2000); asks the Commission to promote along the lines of the French Government's Internet plan the use of open source platforms in its Internet strategy and to consider new initiatives in favour of innovative SMEs, universities, etc., in order to develop user-friendly application software based on open source;

57. Considers that people with disabilities should be part of the targets in each section of the communication, and that an Information Society for all will not be achieved unless the access needs of disabled people are mainstreamed throughout all sections of the communication and invites the Commission and the member States to take further steps toward legislation harmonisation related to availability of on-line services offered to disabled within the EU;

58. Calls on Member States to devote a larger part of their health budgets to information technologies with a view to improving their networks of hospitals, laboratories and screening centres, pharmacies, primary care centres and homes; to make information broadly available — with appropriate safeguards — to healthcare professionals, administrators and patients to improve the transparency and efficiency of the system; to empower European citizens to play an active role in managing their health, and to improve the overall quality of healthcare;

59. Calls on the Commission to coordinate its efforts to provide rapid Internet access for researchers and students with its efforts to create a European research area, by promoting virtual centres of excellence and research institutes, as well as speeding up the networking of research workers and databases at European level;

60. Asks all Member States to improve the use of information access systems in their administrations;
61. Calls on the Commission to make full use of information technology in administration and communication, in particular by promoting e-commerce through purchasing and payment procedures;

62. Expressly supports the Commission in its call at WTO level for the establishment of a competition policy with an international dimension. This is particularly important for enterprises operating in the information and communications technology sector because their activities are genuinely geared towards the international market;

63. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure, by means of an 'e-Europe test', that new legislative measures do not constrain the opportunities afforded by the new economy;

64. Calls on the Commission and the Council to guarantee free and complete public access in future to the information stored digitally in public centres (libraries, archives, universities, etc.). Any restriction on this right means a major intrusion in the development potential of individual citizens;

65. Calls on the Council and the Commission to draw up a comprehensive concept for ensuring that all public areas (libraries, archives, universities, etc.), particularly in rural regions, can benefit to the full from the development of the Internet;

66. Asks the Commission and the Council to ensure that the full potential of the e-Europe initiative and the follow up action plan fully respect the internal market and interaction between various regulations and instruments;

67. Calls on the Commission to ensure, in this connection, that all existing directives and regulations have the same legal logic and are not contradictory;

68. Asks the Commission to establish a portal for all Community venture capital instruments, including other information sources about financial instruments;

69. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.