2.3 insists that at least in the transitional stage, training courses should be provided regarding access to eGovernment, with facilities for those with disabilities, older people and those who are less highly trained, in order to encourage e-inclusion and eliminate any danger of discrimination;

2.4 welcomes the observation that provision is no guarantee of usage of online services and strongly encourages research on demand-side preferences and barriers, both in relation to service type and access methods, as well as on supply-side innovation, to identify channels which will attract the widest spectrum of users, across differing geographic locations and among different age, gender and socio-economic groups;

2.5 stresses that the potential of IT should be exploited to the full when improving the quality and productivity of public services provided through traditional channels;

2.6 recommends the adoption of a protocol that eGovernment programmes and projects supported with public funding are required to share outcomes, and to report the benefits accrued from the initiative and lessons for improvement;

2.7 urges the Commission to encourage support for local and regional authorities to provide eGovernment in different languages with a special focus on regional and lesser used languages;

2.8 acknowledges the complexity of evaluation of major initiatives in new fields of activity, but urges the setting of clear targets at inception and full open critical assessment of outcomes (both successes and failures) on criteria including relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and functionality, with the goal of future improvement.


The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on unsolicited commercial communications or “spam”’

(2004/C 318/08)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on unsolicited commercial communications or ‘spam’ (COM(2004) 28 final);

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 22 January 2004 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to the decision of its President of 5 April 2004 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an Opinion on this subject;

Having regard to its Opinion on the Follow-up to the multiannual Community action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks and the Proposal amending Decision No. 276/1999/EC adopting a multiannual Community action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks (CdR 140/2002 fin) (1);

Having regard to its Opinion on adopting a multi-annual programme (2003-2005) for monitoring of eEurope, dissemination of good practices and the improvement of network and information security (MODINIS) (CdR 252/2002 fin) (2);

(1) OJ C 73 of 26.3.2003, p. 34.
(2) OJ C 128 of 29.5.2003, p. 19.
Having regard to its Opinion on eEurope 2002 Benchmarking report COM(2002) 62 final and eEurope 2005: An information society for all (CdR 136/2002 fin);

Having regard to its Opinion on A common framework for electronic signatures (CdR 332/98 fin);

Having regard to its Opinion on the Sixth Report on the Implementation of the Telecommunications Regulatory Package (CdR 52/2001 fin);

Having regard to its Opinion on the follow-up to the Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services including a proposal for a Council recommendation and adopting an action plan on promoting safe use of the Internet (CdR 54/98 fin);

Having regard to its Opinion on a European initiative in electronic commerce (CdR 350/97 fin);

Having regard to its Opinion on Regions’ Network and Information Security: Proposal for a European Policy Approach (CdR 257/2001 fin);


Having regard to its Draft Opinion (CdR 69/2004 rev. 1) adopted on 5 April 2004 by its Commission for Culture and Education, (Rapporteur: Mrs Susie Kemp, Member of West Berkshire Unitary Council (UK/ EPP)).

Whereas:

1) Unsolicited commercial communications by e-mail, otherwise known as ‘spam’, have reached worrying proportions, rising from an estimated 7 % of global e-mail traffic in 2001 to 50 % at the present time.

2) Spam is a problem not only on grounds of privacy, deception of customers, protection of minors and human dignity, it also represents a commercial threat. It represents extra costs for businesses and lost productivity, and threatens to undermine consumer confidence.


4) While it is a first step, legislation alone will not be enough to combat the problem of spam. Further action is needed to ensure that the Directive has the desired effect.

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 55th Plenary Session, held on 16-17 June 2004 (meeting of 16 June).

1. The Committee of the Regions’ views

The Committee of the Regions

1.1 agrees with the Commission’s conclusion that spam is one of the most significant challenges facing the internet today, requiring not only effective enforcement and international cooperation, but also self regulatory and technical solutions by industry, and community awareness;

1.2 welcomes the Commission’s continued efforts in encouraging Member States to transpose the Directive 2002/58/EC on Privacy and Electronic Communications and the assistance offered to Member States by the Commission and

1.3 notes that unsolicited email is causing a lack of confidence in information networks and that the volume of email traffic is causing systems to slow down. This is a cross-border and international issue and CoR has concerns that the Community’s policy will only succeed with the agreement and cooperation of international organisations and other world powers;

1.4 regrets that the Commission does not recognise the ability of regional and local authorities to interface with their communities and the public at large and urges the Commission to take proper account of how much assistance regional and local authorities can give in combating unsolicited mail;


1.5 emphasises that regional and local authorities can be involved in tackling spam in a variety of different ways. They have a role in terms of raising awareness and disseminating information, and in a more general sense by virtue of their closeness to citizens, organisations and businesses;

1.6 notes that it has already proposed that measures should be taken to inform schoolchildren of both the security aspects of the information society and the consequences of computer-related crime;

1.7 notes that regional and local authorities have a public protection role in the widest sense;

1.8 recognises that regional and local authorities have an important role in ensuring a balanced development of the knowledge and information society in the European Union, particularly post enlargement, in order to enhance economic and social cohesion in regions, cities and districts throughout Europe. Regional and local authorities are in a unique position to ensure that the widest possible access to Community actions is achieved, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups;

1.9 recognises that local and regional government has the responsibility to develop not only online public services, but also information and communication technologies (ICT) in lifelong learning (given that digital literacy is considered a new basic skill) and health care. Local and regional government is also active in promoting information security, in developing online culture and tourism-content services, in improving access to online services and, of course, in developing the interoperability of processes both within government and between organisations in general. It believes therefore that it is vital that effective and unfettered electronic communication is achieved.

2. The Committee of the Regions’ Recommendations

The Committee of the Regions

2.1 calls for the active involvement of candidate countries to be stressed. The Internet does not recognise traditional borders between states and therefore actions taken at the European level should not limit themselves to the participation of the EU Member States. The effects of the lack of information system and network security in the less developed regions of Europe may widen the digital gap between them and the most developed and secure regions;

2.2 proposes that efforts should be made to secure a greater commitment on the part of the main world software manufacturers to undertake research on network and information safety and its immediate practical application. Security should be a priority issue among the telecommunications service and access providers operating in Europe, and more links to activities and organisations outside the EU should also be developed;

2.3 urges the Commission to use the ability of Regional and Local Authorities to communicate with citizens at a local level. For example, Libraries, Community Centres and other Municipal buildings offer great opportunities to raise awareness and offer public access to information. These facilities offer direct contact with the public including disadvantaged groups;

2.4 proposes that many of the problems associated with a safe use of the Internet could be resolved at a local level, in particular by an intensive education drive designed to raise awareness on this matter. Regional and local authorities can signpost information regarding combating unsolicited mail;

2.5 proposes that schools, given their responsibility for education, should adopt measures to inform young people of the security aspects of the information society;

2.6 proposes that regional and local authorities use their existing relationships with business organisations to encourage them to take positive action against spam;

2.7 wishes also to emphasise the importance of cooperation within the EU, and in particular the role of regional and local government in ensuring that cooperation.


The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB