Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Green Paper "Living and working in the information society: people first"'

(97/C 116/11)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Green Paper 'Living and working in the information society: people first' (COM(96)389 final);

having regard to the decision taken by the Commission on 2 August 1996, under the first paragraph of Article 198c of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

having regard to its decision on 18 September 1996 to direct Commission 3 'Transport and Communications Networks' to draw up the relevant Opinion;

having regard to the Draft Opinion (CdR 365/96 rev.) adopted by Commission 3 on 11 December 1996 (rapporteur: Mr H. Jensen),

unanimously adopted the following Opinion at its 16th plenary session on 15 and 16 January 1997 (meeting of 16 January).

1. General comments

1.1. Since it was first established in 1994, the COR has actively concerned itself with the political, economic and technical aspects of the Information Society.

1.2. The Commission's Action Plan 'Europe's way to the Information Society' prompted the COR's first Opinion on this matter, early in 1995. This Opinion welcomed the EU initiative and stressed the great importance of the Information Society for local and regional authorities [1].

1.3. Subsequently the COR has kept a close eye on implementation of the Action Plan and expressed its views on numerous EU activities concerning the Information Society [the latest being the INFO-2000 programme [2]].

1.4. Here the COR's key message has been, and continues to be, the following:

1.5. Local and regional authorities in the EU make active use, and will continue to do so, of the Information Society's potential for job creation, cleaner technology, wider communications/information and greater opportunities for the individual citizen. At the same time they are well aware of the challenges and problems involved.

1.6. Hence the COR has on several occasions pointed to the major upheavals necessitated, both now and in the future, by the introduction and use of ICT in all spheres of society.

1.7. IT generates many new jobs but concurrently renders a large number of traditional crafts and occupations superfluous. The education and training system stands to gain greatly from such technology but teaching methods, aids and results are undergoing radical changes as a consequence. An impressive range of information tools are now available but the general public for the most part lacks the money or knowhow to make use of them.

1.8. The COR therefore welcomes the Green Paper 'Living and working in the Information Society: People first' since it focuses specifically on the political, economic and social changes facing local, regional, national and EU authorities.

1.9. The COR recognizes the need for all public and private authorities, institutions and enterprises, as well as the individual citizen, to show a willingness for innovation and adjustment. In the home, in our studies, at work and at play, we will all experience radical changes.

1.10. These changes must therefore not be defined or dictated solely by technology and market forces. Neither should, or can, they be controlled exclusively through legislation and political pressure. Political, economic and social change must be the product of joint dialogue and action bringing together all the key protagonists in society.

[1] OJ No C 210, 14. 8. 1995, p. 109.
[2] OJ No C 129, 2. 5. 1996, p. 39.

1.11.   Political authorities at all levels, the business world, entrepreneurs, workers, education and training establishments, interest groups and, last but not least, the individual citizen should be actively involved and participate in discussion of the expectations, needs and demands focused on the Information Society.

1.12.   At the same time the COR is convinced that the most effective contribution is usually made by those who are familiar with, and understand, what is at stake.

1.13.   Similarly, the most effectively targeted solutions stem from a partnership between those who are acquainted with the problem and those with the practical experience and resources needed to find a solution.

1.14.   The best response therefore in many cases lies in cooperation at local or regional level between these authorities' politicians, staff and experts and key political, economic and social players in the area.

1.15.   In line with the subsidiarity principle, local and regional authorities should therefore play a prominent role in such efforts by harnessing the potential and mastering the problems of the Information Society, and helping to plan and implement EU action in this sector.

2.   Specific comments

2.1.   The Green Paper contains three chapters ('Working in the Information Society', 'Employment in the Information Society' and 'Cohesion: Living in the Information Society') which focus on the fundamental challenges.

2.2.   *Comments on Chapter 3 'Working in the Information Society'*

2.2.1.   The COR acknowledges that IT brings in its wake a revolution in labour market conditions.

2.2.2.   Standardized, manual production is now giving way to more differentiated, knowledge-based production. From being hierarchical, complex units with simple, well-defined job descriptions, enterprises are now becoming more decentralized, network-oriented organizations with more flexible and complex jobs.

2.2.3.   Major challenges result as one essential problem has specifically been the failure of enterprise-level organizational development and adjustment to keep pace with technological progress.

2.3.   *Cooperation between local and regional authorities and SMEs on new forms of work organization*

2.3.1.   The COR wholeheartedly agrees with the Green Paper's emphasis on the need to build knowledge and raise awareness of new forms of work organization.

2.3.2.   In addition, the COR stresses the need for a special effort to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Though they have the requisite flexibility and readiness for change, SMEs conversely often lack the knowhow and resources to carry through such change and draw full advantage of IT.

2.3.3.   As the Commission points out in the section of the Confidence Pact that deals with territorial pacts for employment, local and regional authorities can usefully play a key role in providing this much-needed boost in SMEs' development and adjustment capacity.

2.3.4.   Local and regional authorities are already trying to support SMEs and boost their growth potential through the setting up of development and advice agencies, start-up and business information centres and similar bodies.

2.3.5.   Advice and guidance on organizational and financing matters, networking and exchanges of experience are just a few of the areas of political, economic and practical cooperation between local and regional authorities and SMEs where such liaison and dialogue are of benefit to both partners. For instance, inquiries from SMEs can be handled promptly and satisfactorily through these channels.

2.3.6.   At the same time local and regional authorities in many Member States make extensive use of IT for their own purposes and have accumulated experience in IT organizational applications.

2.3.7.   They are therefore by no means unfamiliar with concepts such as 'the learning company' and 'work fulfilment'.

2.3.8.   Consequently they are increasingly receptive to the idea that local and regional authority institutions and enterprises should take on board the need for ongoing development and work reorganization as well as updating workers' skills.

2.3.9. To guarantee a working environment where the workforce 'learns by doing' and is constantly faced with new challenges and tasks, is another key task which is mobilizing increasingly widespread support among local and regional authorities.

2.3.10. In Denmark, among other Member States, local and regional authorities have made available their expertise and experience of organizational applications, particularly to SMEs (groups exchanging experiences, on-the-spot visits, trade forums and development networks).

2.3.11. However, the COR does acknowledge these authorities' heavy responsibility, in their capacity as employers and because of their close links with the public bodies and enterprises that employ a substantial proportion of the workforce in most Member States, to play a pioneer role in the development and reorganization of work structures and help provide innovation and experience in this area.

2.3.12. The COR therefore recommends that the programmes and actions aimed at local and regional authorities — including the Structural Funds — focus on the need for knowhow and awareness of new forms of work organization. The Objective 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5b programmes and the Community initiative programmes currently in the process of implementation should in future make provision for meeting the need to co-finance projects in the field of new IT (ranging from vocational training to assistance to enterprises and the introduction of specific infrastructure).

2.4. *Changes on the labour market*

2.4.1. Major challenges are also emerging on the actual labour market. The demarcation between work and leisure, working and learning, wage employment and self-employment is becoming increasingly blurred.

2.4.2. The COR therefore agrees that new forms of work organization, combined with teleworking and other 'outworking' arrangements, make it necessary to balance the worker's need for creating job security and the employer's need for flexibility.

2.4.3. Here the COR would draw attention to the major challenges which have already arisen in the areas of labour market legislation and dialogue between the social partners.

2.4.4. The conditions and requirements of 'non-typical' work are, of course, already the subject of negotiation between the social partners.

2.4.5. The 'non-typical' work of today can easily become the normal employment and working conditions of tomorrow. Consequently the COR is monitoring this development closely and welcomes the Commission's initiative in instigating discussion on these issues, for instance in the form of a Green Paper on work organization and working hours.

However, the COR recommends that the social partners themselves should be responsible for negotiating the conditions to govern non-typical work. The utmost confidence should therefore be placed in them.

2.5. *Comments on Chapter 4 'Employment in the Information Society'*

2.5.1. A better growth climate

2.5.2. The COR recognizes that Europe's growth rate over the latest decades has been sluggish and that the Information Society cannot produce a radical change in this situation without restructuring and adjustment.

2.5.3. Growth potential is high, especially in the service and IT sectors but the COR observes that there is a considerable timelag before this potential is converted into tangible results, partly because the requisite skills are lacking and/or because enterprises/the labour market have not geared up to the new opportunities.

2.5.4. The COR is therefore convinced that, in addition to a truly effective legislative framework, new labour market conditions for work and employment, greater public sector cooperation (particularly with SMEs) and education and training reforms, R&D focussing on sectors and types of products which offer the greatest potential for growth are also essential.

2.5.5. In its earlier Opinion on the INFO 2000 programme the COR pointed out that EU actions and programmes targeted on growth opportunities in the service and IT sectors should receive high political and financial priority.

2.5.6. In the future Fifth R&TD Framework Programme the Information Society's growth sectors should therefore be those considered to be of major importance in determining areas of action, selection criteria for aid, etc.

2.5.7. Hence the COR supports the Green Paper's emphasis on the need for discussion of ways of maximizing the Structural Funds' contribution to optimum

utilization of the opportunities inherent in the Information Society and IT. The COR intends to cover this issue in its discussions on the revision of the Structural Funds.

2.6. Educational reforms

2.6.1. The COR is aware that the Information Society, by doing away with physical boundaries, increasing the volume of information and speeding up access to knowhow, necessitates extensive adjustments both at work and in the home.

2.6.2. In dismantling the physical barriers to movement of capital, goods and services, the internationalization process also generates new expectations and requirements as regards the population's education and training standards and capacity for flexibility, mobility and perception.

2.6.3. The speed and scale of these changes also place a greater strain on people's ability to adjust and learn.

2.6.4. The COR has therefore taken note of the Green Paper's comment that, in ten years' time, 80 % of today's technology will have been replaced by new technology — and that 80 % of the workforce will by then be working on the basis of an education and training that is more than ten years old.

2.6.5. The COR's hope is that the entire population will be provided with effective access to new technologies via a broad knowledge base, flexible education and training facilities and lifelong education.

2.6.6. The Green Paper's call for a reform of systems of education and ongoing vocational training to match the IT revolution therefore has the COR's full support.

2.6.7. In its Opinions on the Year of Lifelong Learning and the White Paper on education and training, the COR has stressed that the radical changes in society and technology bring in their wake major challenges in terms of the courses to be offered by education and training establishments, the capacity of enterprises to provide staff training and, equally important, cooperation between education and training establishments and enterprises.

2.6.8. The COR urges that action be taken to ensure that the entire population, regardless of occupation, age, sex or nationality, has an opportunity to learn, acquire new skills and adjust to the new demands and needs of society and the workplace at all stages of their lives.

2.6.9. All social, political and economic players stand to gain from, and bear responsibility for, this venture:

— the EU can contribute to development, innovation and the exchanges of experience through its actions and programmes;

— national authorities can organize the financial and institutional bases needed for lifelong education;

— the business world can organize in-service training courses and flexible arrangements for the individual worker's further training and refresher training;

— local and regional authorities can adapt educational and teaching facilities to local needs and expectations and target such facilities on groups with special problems.

2.6.10. The COR is therefore convinced that dialogue and cooperation between all the various political, economic and social players are a sine qua non if constructive solutions are to be achieved.

2.6.11. The COR sees local and regional authorities' close links with the locality and the wide variety of players in the region as a natural springboard for dialogue and partnership in introducing relevant education and teaching facilities, to the advantage of both the individual citizen and enterprises. Further, in many Member States, notably in compliance with the subsidiarity principle, the regions and local authorities are responsible for communications and telecommunications.

2.6.12. The COR is therefore drawing up an Own-initiative Opinion on the scope and responsibility of local and regional authorities for coordinating local and regional interests with the needs and expectations of education and training establishments and the business world.

2.6.13. Their close ties with the region's political, economic and social networks place these authorities in a position to bring all the many players together within formal or informal councils and foster the dialogue and partnership needed to frame a coherent education/training and employment policy from which the region, enterprises and the individual citizen all stand to benefit.

2.7. Comments on Chapter 5 'Cohesion: Living in the Information Society'

2.7.1. The COR applauds the Green Paper's focus on the need to avoid socio-economic discrepancies between strong and weak regions being exacerbated by the changes generated by the Information Society and to ensure that all citizens profit fully from the new opportunities.

2.8. *Greater cohesion*

2.8.1.   Greater political, social and economic cohesion is one of the EU's key objectives. Hence, attention must be given in connection with the political, economic and social upheavals necessitated by the Information Society, to the scope for reducing regional disparities within the EU.

2.8.2.   The COR sees IT and the potential for growth, especially within the service sector, as creating greater flexibility for both firms and individuals, which in principle can be of great benefit in boosting cohesion in the EU.

2.8.3.   The reliance of firms and individual citizens on being at the centre of industrial, business, financial, transport and/or research activity is decreasing as the development, financing, production and sale of goods and services are becoming increasingly automated.

2.8.4.   Firms will be able to site their development, manufacture and sale operations independent of physical and geographical structures.

2.8.5.   The COR would point out that the long term result will be to create increased opportunities for those regions which to date have found it hard to attract enterprises and/or labour.

2.8.6.   However, the COR would also stress that this presupposes that all regions are able to benefit from the same opportunities and conditions as regards being able to offer a viable IT base.

2.8.7.   Unless care is taken to prevent the emergence of regions deprived of technical facilities and IT resources, the Information Society will merely aggravate regional discrepancies.

2.8.8.   IT can therefore promote cohesion, provided that the right conditions are guaranteed, but threaten cohesion where the necessary adjustments and action are lacking.

2.9. *Means of action: Liberalization, Structural Funds and employment pacts*

2.9.1.   Here the COR would point to three factors of key importance as regards the impact of the Information Society on cohesion within the EU:

— liberalization of telecommunications,

— the Structural Funds,

— employment pacts.

2.9.2.   Though all these issues have already been examined, or will be examined, in COR Opinions, the importance of all three factors needs to be reiterated.

2.9.3.   The COR therefore supports the full liberalization of the telecommunications sector, which is due to take effect on 1 January 1998 after several years of gradual liberalization.

2.9.4.   However, it would stress the need to ensure that liberalization does not result in sparsely populated regions being placed in an unreasonable or impossible situation because of a deficient technological and services infrastructure.

2.9.5.   The COR is therefore pleased to see that the Commission is aware of the need for global services. It is vital on political, economic and social grounds, that vital types of telecommunications and IT should be available throughout the EU, at prices which do not distort terms of competition.

2.9.6.   Hence greater liberalization and use of IT must not generate new physical, technical or legislative obstacles to free movement of labour, goods, services and capital on the internal market.

2.9.7.   At the same time the COR warmly recommends that advantage be taken of the Structural Funds' potential for establishing infrastructures, improving resources and introducing education and training programmes in the IT field in disadvantaged regions in the EU. As described above, such measures would boost these regions' growth capacity and hence European cohesion, while avoiding 'gaps' emerging in the European network of information and technological transactions.

2.9.8.   Lastly, the COR would reiterate the importance of the Commission's call for greater emphasis on local and regional authorities' capacity to coordinate and develop the job creation partnership between political, economic and social players in the region.

2.9.9.   As the pivot of much regional political, economic, social and cultural activity, it is quite normal for local and regional authorities to instigate closer dialogue and more effective cooperation and coordination of work in the various sectors.

2.9.10. In particular the COR would draw attention to the scope for local and regional authorities, especially in their work with the education/training sector and business policy, to draw on the needs, expectations and experiences of these sectors for purposes of framing local and regional strategies and action plans for the Information Society.

2.9.11. As is the case in most spheres, the best solutions usually come from those who are familiar with the problem and have the knowhow and resources, combined with awareness of the needs and expectations of those concerned.

2.9.12. The EU's initiatives concerning living and working in the Information Society place people first; hence local and regional authorities can, and should, play a key role in such initiatives.

2.10. A 'people-first' approach

2.10.1. Just as IT can be a factor for both good and ill where European cohesion is concerned, it can be either a golden opportunity or risk for European democracy and the individual citizen's possibilities of personal fulfilment.

2.10.2. The COR is well aware that the major changes that follow in the wake of the IT tidal wave breed a sense of insecurity in large sections of the population.

2.10.3. New types of jobs, new forms of work, new hardware and new technology trigger a feeling of uncertainty among many people, who see the changes of recent years more in terms of a revolution than of evolution.

2.10.4. A natural reticence has arisen regarding the use of totally unfamiliar media and machines. This insecurity is intensified by such technology's technical complexity and alien terminology and by the dramatic speed of constant innovation and change.

2.10.5. This situation is compounded by a growing generation gap in the use of new technology and a financial gulf between those who can afford to buy and utilize the new equipment and those who cannot. Accordingly the COR would stress the urgent need to focus living and working conditions in the Information Society on the private citizen.

In its view, the green paper should have concentrated more on practical ways of placing people first and on the top political priority to be given to initiatives designed to prevent the Information Society from resulting in further social exclusion.

2.10.6. It is therefore vital that everyone should be provided with the knowhow and training required to use such technology, and with practical and financial access to the new facilities.

2.10.7. Should that not be the case, European society in its entirety will suffer the consequences. A shortage of skilled labour, large groups without any chance of finding a job and greater economic and social inequality will be only a few of the problems.

2.10.8. In a society where an increasing proportion of jobs, but also communications and information, are dependent on IT, democratic problems will also surface unless the entire population is mobilized in its use.

2.10.9. The COR therefore expresses full agreement with the Green Paper's concern over the potential threat to 'enlightened democracy' if practical and technical obstacles make it difficult for some groups to gain access to knowhow, debate and information.

2.10.10. Active participation in society is a prerequisite in order to be able to understand and take part in the institutions and processes inherent in a democratic system. With IT as the pivot for education and training, employment, dissemination of information and dialogue, the path to democracy in the Information Society therefore lies in extensive use of IT at grassroots level.

2.10.11. The COR would therefore reiterate the importance of the Commission's drive to guarantee and monitor the development of global services.

2.10.12. In addition, the COR calls for direct and indirect Information Society actions and programmes to provide scope for development, experimentation and exchanges of experience in facilitating general, user-friendly IT facilities. Such initiatives include:

— 'drop-in' data and computer centres, where people can for little or no cost, come and be taught how to use IT and try out the wide variety of possibilities;

— the potential of libraries to operate as such centres and act as guide in the information jungle, converting information into knowhow;

— schools and education and training establishments, with their capacity and responsibility for making knowhow, experience, and notably hardware and software, available both during and outside class hours;

— the setting up of local networks providing low cost public access to various networks and information on regional activities.

2.11. Better local and regional service

2.11.1. The COR would point out that local and regional authorities can, and should, help in placing people at the centre of the Information Society.

2.11.2. Schemes of the kind mentioned above aiming to ensure general, user-friendly access to IT are already operating successfully in a number of localities and regions.

2.11.3. In addition, local and regional authorities, through their close contacts with the relevant political, economic and social institutions and private players in the region, can act as coordinator in ensuring closer partnership and dialogue on strategies and action plans to enable the region to tackle the challenges of the Information Society.

2.11.4. Further, local and regional authorities are also able, and willing, to use IT to improve their own performance within the service sectors specified in the green paper:

— investigation and servicing of citizens' inquiries;

— disabled persons' living conditions;

— equality between men and women;

— health policy.

2.11.5. Local and regional authorities have considerable scope for upgrading citizen services and the other services they provide. The desire to provide a speedy, efficient response to citizens is widespread throughout the EU.

2.11.6. The idea behind drop-in info-kiosks, service centres and 'one-stop-shops', where people only need to go to one 'shop' to obtain all the data and help they need from the public administration, is to expedite as much 'easy' business as possible in one place.

2.11.7. The introduction of IT systems for the processing of administrative business and documents will therefore make it possible to standardize and simplify a large number of administrative procedures. A short 'waiting time' is one aspect of good administrative practice and here the new systems can prove a valuable asset.

2.11.8. When IT information centres are set up, an increasing number of citizens and enterprises will be content with a self-service system. Eventually this will free some of the public administration's resources. These extra resources can then be used for more complex purposes and for improving services for citizens requiring more intensive treatment and guidance (e.g. the elderly, the socially excluded, people with disabilities, etc.).

2.11.9. Local and regional authorities have embarked on projects along these lines. However, the COR would stress the great need for projects and exchanges of experiences in this field.

2.11.10. Further, the COR takes a keen interest in the potential impact of the Information Society on people with disabilities. In several Member States attention is already focussed on ensuring that new technologies and media do not create further business but open up new vistas.

2.11.11. The COR would point to the need for European-level action to devise hardware and software that can easily be used by disabled persons and for special schemes to promote their new job possibilities.

2.11.12. The COR therefore welcomes the Commission's Communication on disabled people and urges the Commission to draw on the local and regional authorities' expertise and experience in the planned groups of experts.

3. **Conclusions**

3.1. Local and regional authorities in the EU make active use of the Information Society's potential for job creation, cleaner technology, wider communications/information and greater opportunities for the individual citizen.

3.2. At the same time the COR is well aware of the major upheavals necessitated both now and in the future, by the introduction and use of information and communication technologies in all spheres of society.

3.3. The COR therefore welcomes the Green Paper on 'Living and working in the Information Society — People first', as it focuses specifically on the political,

economic and social challenges facing local, regional, national and EU authorities. Nonetheless, it would stress the need for more practical action and carefully considered policies, as well as better coordination of EU initiatives in this field.

3.4. The COR would point to the constructive contribution that can be made by local and regional authorities, in the shape of advice and guidance, projects and exchanges of experience, as well as discussion and cooperation with the region's political, economic and social institutions and players, to development, debate and implementation of:

— new forms of working arrangements,

— changing employment and work conditions on the labour market,

— support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs),

— reforms to ensure lifelong education and training,

— increased cohesion within the EU,

— schemes to place people at the centre of the Information Society,

— better public services and improved conditions for disabled people.

3.5. The COR also points out that the best response to challenges in many cases lies in cooperation at local and regional level between the public authorities, politicians, staff and specialists and key political and social players as well as — equally important — private entrepreneurs in the locality.

3.6. In line with the subsidiarity principle, local and regional authorities should therefore play a prominent role in such efforts by harnessing the potential and mastering the problems of the Information Society, and helping to plan and implement EU actions in this sector.

3.7. With this in mind, the COR calls on the Commission to take active steps to involve and mobilize local and regional authorities, for instance under territorial pacts for employment, in a drive to:

— frame Information Society strategies and action plans,

— devise job creation strategies,

— support SMEs' development and adjustment capacity,

— implement education and training reforms,

— foster greater local and regional cooperation and dialogue.

3.8. In particular, the COR draws attention to the need for:

— programmes and actions aimed at local and regional authorities — including the Structural Funds — to focus on the need for knowledge and awareness of new forms of working arrangements;

— new employment and working conditions on the labour market to be entrusted to the social partners;

— top political and economic priority to be given to EU actions and programmes that focus on the potential for growth in the service and information technology sectors;

— discussion of ways of maximizing the Structural Funds' contribution to optimization of the opportunities inherent in the Information Society and information technology and to improving information technology infrastructure and resources in disadvantaged regions of the EU;

— drawing on local and regional authorities' close contacts with the wide range of local and regional players as a natural springboard for dialogue and cooperation in providing effectively targeted education and ongoing vocational training facilities;

— ensuring that the entire EU is provided with key telecommunications and information technologies at a cost which does not distort terms of competition;

— making provision, under all direct and indirect Information Society actions and programmes, for development, pilot projects and exchanges of information in the drive to ensure open, user-friendly access to information technology;

— placing people at the centre of Information Society initiatives, actions and programmes, e.g. by giving all citizens equal and free access to information technology information, know-how and debate;

— giving people pride of place in the Information

Society by focusing on ways in which information technology can improve public services, conditions for disabled people, equal opportunities and health policy.

Brussels, 16 January 1997.

The Chairman

of the Committee of the Regions

Pasqual MARAGALL i MIRA

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Learning in the Information Society: Action Plan for a European Education Initiative (1996-1998)'

(97/C 116/12)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Learning in the Information Society — Action plan for a European Education Initiative (COM(96) 471 final);

having regard to the European Commission's decision of 23 October 1996 to consult the Committee of the Regions, in accordance with Article 198C, first paragraph of the Treaty on the European Union;

having regard to the European Commission's intention, underlined by Commissioners Cresson and Bangemann in a letter dated 23 October 1996, for the COR to be fully involved in the implementation of the Action Plan in particular by promoting the exchange of experiences between local and regional authorities in the areas covered by the Action plan and the Commission's intention to provide support for reinforcing local and regional projects in this area;

having regard to its decision on 13 November 1996 to make Commission 6 — Education and Training — responsible for preparing this opinion;

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 368/96 rev.) adopted by Commission 6 on 6 December 1996 (rapporteur: Mr Paul White);

having regard to the request from the European Council in Florence of June 1996 to propose an initiative for schools in the context of the European Confidence Pact for Employment([1]);

having regard to the guidelines set out in the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment([2]) which the communication under consideration aims to support by providing pathways to meet the educational and cultural challenges presented by the information society;

having regard to the COR Opinion on the White Paper on Education & Training — Teaching and Learning: towards the Learning Society([3]);

([1]) European Confidence Pact for Employment, Florence, June 1996.
([2]) White Paper: Growth, Competitiveness and Employment (COM(94) 700 final).
([3]) OJ No C 182, 24. 6. 1996, p. 15.