

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

DECLARATION

OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

ON A EUROPEAN POLICY FOR NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 1999,
at its 104th Session)

The Committee of Ministers,

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Council of Europe;

In response to the decision of the Council of Europe's Second Summit to develop a European policy for the application of new information technologies with a view to ensuring respect for human rights, promoting cultural diversity, fostering freedom of expression and information and maximising the educational and cultural potential of these technologies;

Taking into consideration all relevant international texts in this field, including those which have come into being since the Second Summit, notably the political texts adopted in Thessalonika by the 5th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy (December 1997) and Resolution 53/70 adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (December 1998);

Conscious of the profound changes brought about by the digitalisation, convergence and continuing globalisation of information networks;

Welcoming the opportunities offered by the new information technologies to promote freedom of expression and information, political pluralism and cultural diversity, and to contribute to a more democratic and sustainable information society;

Recognising the potential of new information technologies to improve openness, transparency and efficiency at all levels - national, regional and local - of the governance, administration and judicial systems of member States and hence to consolidate democratic stability;

Aware also of the potential risks involved in the use of these technologies for both individuals and democratic society;

Convinced that a clear regulatory framework will help to promote those opportunities and avoid those risks;

Acknowledging the important role of the private sector in the creation, development and use of the new information technologies and wishing to foster partnership between the public and private sectors to maximise the benefit of these technologies to their societies;

Convinced that a genuinely democratic information society based on the core values of the Council of Europe can be achieved through a policy framework encouraging Access and Participation, Competence and Empowerment, Creativity, Diversity and ensuring Protection;

Urges the governments of member States, acting, where appropriate, with public and private partners,

(i) With respect to Access to and Participation in new information technologies

- to promote the broadest possible access for all to the new information and communication services, for example through the development of widespread access points in public places;

- to enable all individuals to play a more active role in public life, at national, regional and local levels, by using the new information technologies to:

 - provide easy access to information about and direct links to local, regional and national administrative and judicial services;

 - make available official texts of local, regional and national laws and regulations, of international agreements and of the jurisprudence of national and international jurisdictions;

 - to encourage the free flow of information, opinions and ideas through the use of the new information technologies;

 - to encourage the development, production and distribution of cultural and educational material and its widespread dissemination;

 - to encourage effective international co-operation to deliver the benefits of improved access and increased transparency;

 - to contribute towards equal possibilities in the use of new technologies for all European countries.

(ii) With respect to Competence and Empowerment with regard to new information technologies

- to promote broad understanding in all sectors of society of the new information technologies and their potential;

 - to help individuals to develop competence in the use of new information technologies:

 - through training at all levels of the education system, formal and informal, and throughout life,

- through the definition of new professional profiles and training curricula;
- thereby to enable individuals to make active, critical and discerning use of these technologies;
- to promote better and wider use of the new information technologies in teaching and learning, paying special attention to gender equality issues;
- to encourage use of information networks in the education field to promote mutual understanding between peoples, both on individual and institutional levels.

(iii) With respect to Creativity of individuals and of cultural industries

- to encourage the use of the new information technologies as a form of artistic and literary expression and as a means of forming creative partnerships, in particular between art, science and industry;
- to stimulate the innate creativity of each individual through media literacy and the development of educational programmes using new information technologies;
- to work, in the context of convergence and continuing globalisation of information networks, with the cultural industries to help ensure that their development enhances creativity;
- to encourage the European cultural industries to work together to increase their creativity and so provide a wide variety, while ensuring the quality of products and services in the information networks.

(iv) With respect to Diversity of content and language

- to encourage the development of a wide range of communication and information networks, as well as the diversity of content and language, so as to foster political pluralism, cultural diversity and sustainable development ;
- to promote the full use by all, including minorities, of the opportunities for exchange of opinion and self-expression offered by the new information technologies;
- to acknowledge the usefulness of these technologies in enabling all European countries and regions to express their cultural identities;
- to encourage the provision of cultural, educational and other products and services in an appropriate variety of languages and to promote the greatest possible diversity of these products and services;
- to ensure, as far as possible, that information systems, in the administrative and legal fields, offer material which takes account of regional and linguistic criteria and which meets the specific needs of concerned minorities.

(v) With respect to Protection of rights and freedoms

- to ensure respect for human rights and human dignity, notably freedom of expression, as well as the protection of minors, the protection of privacy and personal data, and the protection of the individual against all forms of racial discrimination in the use and development of new information technologies, through regulation and self-regulation, and through the development of technical standards and systems, codes of conduct and other measures;

- to adopt national and international measures for the effective investigation and punishment of information technology crimes and to combat the existence of safe havens for perpetrators of such crimes;

- to ensure the effective protection of the rights holders whose works are disseminated on the new information and communication services;

- to encourage the establishment of international standards and safeguards essential for the guarantee of authenticity of electronically transmitted documents and legally binding agreements;

- to enhance this framework of protection, including the development of codes of conduct embodying ethical principles for the use of the new information technologies.