



European Union and the Information Society

Slovakia's integration in the European Union will largely be connected with approximation of economic and social strategy of the former with the latter. The key documents setting out the orientation of the EU for the 21st century include the White Paper "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment - Challenges and Approaches for the 21st century". The document represents a strategic programme for the EU in the framework of global economy.



The White Paper

The core of the White Paper contains philosophy of the EU transformation towards the information society. The direction is seen as irreversible embracing all aspects of the society and partner relations.

Modern information and communication technologies dramatically change a number of aspects of the economic and social life. That includes work methods and labour relations, corporate management, education and training, and communication. That leads to increasing industrial output and quality of services. A new information society evolves. Its key factors include competitive management, and quality and speed of information flow. Information and communication technology determine the economy in all phases - from industrial input to consumer services. The White Paper is based on the premises, pointing at the introduction of the information society:

- Introduction of multimedia world (sound - text - picture) as the core change comparable with the first industrial revolution.
- The future world is present: the number of television channels will increase 10 times by the end of the century while the number of cable networks subscribers will triple. The estimates suggest that millions of people in the USA work via television today.
- The US sets an example: major companies increasingly use information highways.
- The core of the developmental model for 21st century concerns the information society and the survival of Europe.
- The answer to the new needs of the European societies can be given by communication networks in companies, work broadly applied via television, broad access to scientific databases concerning the use of free time, development of preventive health care and home care for the elderly.

Development of common information space plays a major role in the transformation towards the information society. Its development within the EU will enable the Union to grasp the opportunities of the process. The White Book suggests that the building of the information society will be a global phenomenon with the leading role of the United States, Japan and the EU, while the first two already enjoy certain experience and results. The information society will gradually expand globally. While implementing the strategy, according to the White Paper Europe attempts to achieve three objectives:

- to integrate its approach in the global prospective from the outset, thus supporting the strategy of its enterprises moving internationally, support development of open systems and international standards, to open markets of the third countries in order to achieve actual reciprocity without discrimination,
- to assure appropriate consideration of specific features of Europe by the developed systems: multilingualism, cultural and economic diversity, and general preservation of its social model,
- to create conditions allowing Europe to continue to dispose with the basic technologies, efficient and competitive industry within the global competitive system.

Further exploitation of the potential provided by the information and communication technologies may

- create new service markets
- facilitate private as opposed to public services, including new partnership between the two sectors, e.g. in vocational training,
- facilitate proper decision-making.

Cooperation between the EU and Central and East Europe within the information society



Cooperation between the EU and CEE concentrates on activities derived from the Forum of the European Union and the CEE on the information society. The establishment of the Forum involved the CEE in the architecture of the information society. The 1st Forum was held on 25 June 1995 in Brussels. The CEE countries were advised to open National Project Offices for the Information Society in order to support the process at national level. The activities of the Forum have been divided into four working groups. The first deals with infrastructure for the information society and coordinates its funding and is coordinated by Slovakia. Slovakia coordinates the second group, "Institutional and Legislative Framework of the Information Society". The third - "Standardisation" is coordinated by Poland, and Slovenia coordinates the fourth one "Science and Research". The second Forum was held in Prague in 1996. It produced an action plan "Towards Information Society in CEE: 27 Ideas for European Initiatives". The document contains 27 pilot projects on development of the information society in CEE. The pilot projects have since been amended bringing the number of projects to 30. The third Forum was held in Brussels in 1997. Ministerial conference "Global Information Network - Exploitation of the Potential" in Bonn in 1997 was another major event for the CEE.

The pilot projects of the action plan "Towards the Information Society in the CEE" contain proposals and outlines of actions as an inspiration for the national level. The action plan concentrates on cooperation projects at the European level and should serve as an amendment to the national programmes on the information society, not as their replacement. Each participating country should develop its own national programme, set its own priorities and implementation tools.



The Slovak Republic has been taking an active part in the Forum as a participant as well as coordinator of the working group for the institutional and legislative framework of the information society. In 1996 the Slovak Government adopted Resolution 807/1996 on the conclusions of the Forum. The Resolution calls for development and implementation of the National Programme for Implementation of the Information Society in the Slovak Republic. The process is expected soon and will include Slovak enterprises and institutions in the pilot projects. Successful implementation of the Programme should support successful integration of Slovakia in the EU and help it to enjoy the benefits of the global information society.

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