

European Declaration on the World Summit on the Information Society –

Youth Proposed Text Bucharest, Romania 7-9 November 2002

Youth are users and creators of information and communications technologies. As early adopters, adapters and innovators, youth are stakeholders that have valuable input into and are greatly affected by ICT policy.

In order to stimulate the WSIS process to involve youth in a more structured and democratic way, the youth caucus suggests the adoption of the following text towards the final documents of the conference in Bucharest:

"Youth participation is of vital importance for the WSIS process. Therefore, the participation of youth representatives will be secured through a youth forum, preceding the second and third preparatory committee and the Summit in Geneva. The result of this forum will be an outcome document encompassing the youth's perspective on the topics debated in the Summit. This document will be presented through a speech to the plenary of the Summit. Furthermore, national governments, NGOs and the private sector are encouraged to bring youth delegates, who are representative and have affinity with the Information Society, to the preparatory committees and the Summit itself. After the Summit in Geneva the procedures will be evaluated and, if necessary, adjusted for the Summit in Tunis."

The Youth Caucus has been supported through the Youth Creating Digital Opportunity initiative, a partnership between TakingITGlobal, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, and the Global Knowledge Partnership.

Introduction

1. We, the representatives of member governments of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, non-governmental organizations and the business community have met this week in Bucharest, Romania, 7-9 November 2002. We discussed the challenges and opportunities presented by the information revolution, began to define our vision for the information society, and identified concrete opportunities for action from a pan-European perspective. These conclusions are designed as input to the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva (Switzerland) in December 2003.
2. Our countries include some of the richest and most developed in the world, with the highest rates of literacy, the most internet connections per capita and a relatively strong culture of transparency, democracy and respect for human rights. Building on these strengths, the last ten years have seen a truly extraordinary revolution take place in our citizens' ability to access, create, utilize and benefit from information and knowledge. We recognize our responsibility in making the information society a success story for all today's and future generations.
3. Recognizing the difficulty for policy-making to keep pace with the forces of

change, we believe more work must be done: to harness the full potential of digital applications for achieving sustainable development. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) will enhance social and community services, access and quality of education, employment and investment frameworks and dematerialisation, which in turn decreases environmental depletion. By all this, ICTs will promote the emergence of a more equitable information society. We have to ensure the information society does not have unintended negative consequences such as human exploitation, privacy invasion or environmental degradation. Above all, we must ensure our global information society remains people-centered - a society where the decrease of global inequalities is a major goal, where the natural resources are protected, where individual learning and expression, relevant local content, cultural diversity and citizen-engagement are valued and nurtured.

4. While we still have much work to do at home, the significant progress we have already made towards creating an information society means we not only have a special obligation to help those of our neighbours who are lagging behind, but an ability to make a tangible contribution to realize digital opportunity for all. The digital divide between the "information haves" and "information have-nots" is a serious trend that must be reversed. This gap reflects, and has the potential to exacerbate, the serious social and wealth disparity between various parts of the world. At the same time, access to information and applications of information and communication technologies are powerful enablers for poverty reduction and can thereby give significant contributions to promote equality on a global level.

5. The information society is a global society. More than ever before information, finance and ideas online have little regard for national borders. With the changes impacting our society, politics, culture, and environment, there is a pressing need for public understanding and policy response – cohesive vision for sustainable society of where we are heading and creation of a road-map to guide the path towards our goals. Given the global nature of the information society, this conversation and commitments must take place at a global level to be effective.

6. To this end, we recognize the vital opportunity of the World Summit on the Information Society, as well as other international initiatives led by the United Nations such as the UN ICT Taskforce, UNESCO's Information for All program, and the development work of the International Telecommunications Union. We also recognize the importance of other bilateral initiatives such as the G8 DOTforce, the European Commission's Information Society Directorate General, private-sector efforts such as that led by the World Economic Forum, and cross-sector or civil society efforts spearheaded by networks such as the Association for Progressive Communications, the Global Community Networking Partnership, and the Global Knowledge Partnership. We also recall the commitments made by member states to the Millennium Development Goals, and believe action towards achieving these targets, particularly around education must be central to our vision for an

Information Society.

7. The forces driving change in information and communications were a dominating topic of public enthusiasm and media attention in mid-to-late 1990s. Yet, perhaps as evidenced by the downturn in the technology share market, too much emphasis was placed on purely the economic potential of change, at the expense of their equally pervasive social, cultural, environmental and political impacts. More recently, following the events of September 11th, the global fight against terrorism has become the priority concern of world leaders. However, we affirm that the Information Society is a larger issue requiring a broader response over the long term – it is literally a revolution in how we live, work and play. And indeed, coming to terms with these changes and nurturing the development of an information society can present numerous benefits in the shorter term. Reigniting the global economy and creating sustainable livelihoods through entrepreneurship, preventing conflict through enhanced cultural understanding, developing new ways to protect and restore our environment, and saving lives through health-care innovation, are just some of the digital opportunities we might grasp through concerted and sustained international effort.

8. We call for attendance at the highest levels of political representation at the Summit, as well as the active participation of all stakeholders including governments, international inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, business, trade unions, academics, women and youth.

Towards a Pan-European Vision for the Information Society

1. Our vision is for a participatory and sustainable information society, where citizens are empowered to influence and contribute to the development of their local and global communities – both online and offline - by developing content, celebrating diversity, learning for life, connecting with government, and using technology and information to better address global problems. Our vision is based on the guiding principle for the 21st century, agreed upon in the Millennium Declaration and Agenda21 - participation, transparency, democracy, equality, human rights along with intergenerational and intragenerational justice.

2. We must ensure equitable access to an information society - people cannot be left behind. We understand the digital divide is largely a social divide and that an information society and its potential to help solve world wide problems will never be

fully realized while populations remain hungry, where children do not learn to read, where women and girls are discriminated against, where health is poor and the threat of war is present.

3. An information society is about much more than laying telephone lines and installing computers in schools. Creating equitable access to technology is vitally important, yet we also need to determine what type of society we are trying to create with these tools - both in terms of how its characteristics are different from the model of society that came before, and in terms of the principles and philosophies underlying our commitment.

4. In our vision of the Information Society, people are empowered by their access to and control of information. Whereas in the industrial society, information was scarce and access came at a premium, in the new information society the problem is more likely to be information overload. Barriers to entry such as education, cost, and distribution are no longer major difficulties. Increased literacy means more people can create content, documenting their stories, presenting new ideas, highlighting their cultures. And new technologies mean content can be infinitely copied electronically and instantaneously distributed to and accessed from locations anywhere in the world. A special importance will lie in the field of management of information and data.

5. In our vision of the Information Society, local cultures are revitalized as people create local content. In the industrial society, culture was relegated to institutions – art galleries, museums, movie theatres, and mass media. It was controlled by a small number of major companies, editors, and producers. Less sources of content meant less cultural and linguistic diversity. In the Information Society, the tools to record, preserve and distribute culture are easily accessible. Indeed, entertainment and culture is seen increasingly as a participative rather than passive activity.

6. In our vision of the Information Society, people have an enhanced sense of community through online interaction. As more people interact with, create and share content, “information” which was previously considered a static resource or media becomes more akin to a creative community. Online communities are not merely substitutes for real-life interaction, but a powerful opportunity for new interaction based on interest, a place for lifelong learning. Online communities can also help reinforce, connect and preserve physical community identities - providing a place for publishing local content, sharing stories, discussing issues and developing solutions to local challenges. As people’s daily lives are increasingly busy and

fragmented, online communities can provide a point of reference and continuity.

7. In our vision of the Information Society, the 'global village' enhances people's international outlook, ingrains a sense of solidarity with people of other cultures, and supports new mechanisms to address global challenges by joint efforts. Online communication can just as easily be with someone across the world as across the street, and through personal communication, citizens can gain a better understanding of others cultures and daily challenges, reducing conflict and fostering collaboration. Citizens are able to connect more effectively with governments and international institutions such as the European Union and the United Nations to contribute to solving global problems.

8. In achieving our vision of the information society, one of our greatest hopes is young people. Those under 25 years of age comprise more than half the world's population. Almost two-thirds of the population in many developing countries is aged 14-25. Having grown up with technology, many young people have little memory of a society without computers. We must tap into their skills and value their participation. In this new paradigm, youth - like all citizens - are not just passive consumers and recipients of information, content and culture, but rather are active participants in creating and shaping the Information Society.

Action Plan for an Empowering Information Society

1. Access and Connectivity

We commit to bridging the digital divide, to ensure everyone has access to the information society.

- a. Basic conditions must exist as pre-requisites for an information society, such as education (especially literacy), peace, healthcare, and a sustainable environment, and we commit to achieving the millennium development goals while recognizing that ICTs can be important tools for poverty reduction and environmental protection.
- b. We are convinced that an enabling framework is essential to bridge the digital divide. To do so, we see the "Global Deal" as a major component: This means the co-financing of development in poor countries by rich countries, reciprocated by the adoption of certain standards. A positive example of Co-Financing Mechanisms is the Co-Financing practiced within the Enlargement Process of the European Union.
- c. In providing access to information, it is vital to use the most appropriate technologies available, not simply the latest, broadest, or most advanced. Empowering "low-tech" technologies can include community radio and community networks, portable media

such as videos and tapes, and even the telephone. While it is recognized such technologies do not all match the interactive and social nature of the Internet, they are all aural technologies accessible to the illiterate.

- d. Private sector investment within/by small-to-medium-sized-enterprises should be encouraged in the information society, including through the increased provision of micro-credit. Large scale initiatives by governments or business can only go so far – for the information society to reach the village level and for communications technologies to become ubiquitous, local entrepreneurs are required to champion and market the products, and we encourage the growth of the open-source software movement to provide flexible and economical solutions to worldwide markets.

2. Content

- a. One of the most exciting opportunities presented by the Internet is the low cost of entry to producing your own content; whereas previous mediums required large investment in television transmission licenses, newspaper printing machines, or distribution systems, the Internet makes publishing easy. Promoting the development of expression online, and ensuring it remains free and accessible must be one of our key goals. An 'information society' must include a public space for the free exchange of information and ideas.
- b. While our world is becoming a 'global community' through enhanced communications, we also have a heightened sense of belonging to a local community or place. Providing and encouraging creation of local content on the Internet, such as helping citizens interact with government services, access local news, experience their own culture and monitor environmental conditions is vital to ensure the information society becomes relevant to people's day-to-day lives. We support complete freedom of speech in this regard.
- c. We recognize the importance of content creators, for-profit and not-for-profit. Europe and North America have a proud history of cultural, educational and informational product development. We believe that the quality and diversity of local content for new interactive mediums will be a key indicator of our readiness for an information society. Community and Public Service Broadcasters, key institutions in the new information society, have an important role to play in championing local content and developing services. Where appropriate they should extend and repurpose their services from television and radio to digital interactive media. Furthermore, content will be an increasingly important sector in the knowledge economy, and all nations should place emphasis on the development of home-grown content industries including broadcasters, educators, journalists, film-makers and academics. Without such industries, the most successful content producers with large home-markets will dominate content worldwide. In this regard, we endorse the concept of local content quotas combined with government incentives to preserve and promote local cultural

identity and locally relevant information.

3. Education

a. The information society also requires pervasive change in our approach to education. As some of the jobs of the future are yet to be invented, it is unlikely that tomorrow's workforce will stay in the same job or even the same sector for long. Students will require generic and transferable skills in the areas of literacy, communication, research, science, languages, technology, as well as the development of an open mind and adaptability.

b. Our formal education system is changing from being teacher driven to student driven. With more information easily accessible through a simple Internet search than could ever be imparted by a teacher, providing context that allows students to decipher relevance and meaning – helping students turn information into knowledge – must become a key goal of the formal education system.

c. Technology is changing the way classrooms operate, integrating multimedia textbooks, online research, and student presentations with the assistance of ICTs, making learning more interactive and participatory. The success of these programs is partly due to innovative design, and partly due to the fact that students find it natural using technology in day-to-day situations. However we recognize the same can't always be said of teachers, and there is a need to match the integration of technology into the curriculum with more rigorous professional development. One opportunity is for students to help train their teachers in ICT matters – not only does this tap a resource existing within schools, but it builds student confidence and creates a learning community, where everyone has something to share.

d. More informal approaches to education are also valuable in the information society, providing young people with an opportunity to learn through practical experience at voluntary non-governmental organizations, community service, and business activities. Formal education systems need more flexibility to allow students to undertake and gain credit for such activities. Peer based education, where students help students, and student exchange programs are also beneficial and popular.

4. Employment

a. Technology has changed the structure of the economy, making many jobs obsolete and putting people out of work. Yet, the information society also increases flexibility, emphasizes collaboration over hierarchy, creates the need for ongoing learning at work, and reduces the distinction between our home and workplace. Effort and resources must be put into retraining workers for knowledge-based industries, while also recognizing the state has some responsibility for some who can not easily change occupations due to age or skills.

b. New industries have been developed as a result of technological change, and from the hubs of Silicon Valley to Stockholm, the information society is a now a major part of our Pan European economy. Europe and North America are technology leaders, with more patents than other regions, and a higher percentage of workers in knowledge-based or high-skilled jobs. These new industries are

built upon innovation, and instilling a sense of entrepreneurship. A culture of risk-taking and the skills to take an idea and turn it into a profitable venture are vital to ensure the sustained growth of these industries, and new ones not yet envisaged.

- c. Fostering entrepreneurship is vital not just here in Europe and North America, but in every part of the world. Supporting young entrepreneurs in the developing world with education, financing, mentorship and encouragement is a critical pathway to bridging the digital divide and fostering the creation of sustainable livelihoods.

5. Health

- a. Information is a powerful tool for health promotion, prevention and care. We must use all available communications technologies for the distribution of information related to priority health concerns, such as HIV/AIDS, family planning, hygiene and sanitation, and drug use. Information and communications technologies can be harnessed to assist in the provision of medical care and services, including the use of video conferencing to connect specialist virtual doctors to patients at remote or under-resourced community health facilities.
- b. At the same time, we recognize the many health concerns specifically associated with the information society and the knowledge-based economy. These including obesity caused through lack of exercise, vision impairment and chiropractic problems caused by computer usage, and cancer caused by electronic radiation. We must promote awareness of these ailments and develop strategies to reduce their prevalence.

6. Multilingualism

- a. The many languages of Europe are an integral part of our culture, heritage and individual national identities. As English increasingly dominates as the international language especially on the Internet, there is a difficulty in finding and navigating online content in our own native languages. In the longer term, without a major place within this new medium of choice, our languages may slip from day-to-day usage. Consequently, we must support the development of local content industries, encourage our own native-language national broadcasters, and ensure that government information is translated into multiple languages. We can also harness technology to help achieve this goal, through the use of machine translation – investment in the development of this technology would improve its effectiveness and accuracy.

7. Environment

a. While the information society was originally meant to herald the development of a paperless world, the result has not been positive for the environment. Indeed, paper usage has more than doubled with the widespread use of sophisticated printers and copiers. This rebound-effect is also experienced e.g. in the field of transport or electronic waste. A global framework should be established, which creates prices, that internalise costs for the global common goods. Thus it can be guaranteed, that innovations which are to be expected further contribute to environmental decrease rather than help to solve environmental problems.

b. Other major environmental concerns include the use of rare minerals in computer circuitry, mining for which is destroying unique rainforest and the habitat of endangered species. The short usable life-span of computers also creates masses of waste products full of heavy metals, plastics and glass for landfill. We commit to encouraging the computer recycling industry, and recognize this industry is a particular opportunity for developing countries if proper health and safety legislation is applied.

8. Safeguarding the vulnerable & Privacy issues

a. Recognizing that global communications have enabled the growth of a cyber-pornography industry degrading to all, we will take action to bring access in line with community expectations, underlined by a belief that the most effective barriers to access are personal initiative and parental control. Illegal pornography can never be tolerated and we commit to redouble efforts to shut-down this illegal industry and the related international trafficking of women and children.

b. We believe that online privacy is a basic human right, and we support any practice or law that respects this right, in accordance with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. We recognize the importance of storing Internet usage data by governments and ISPs, with use of such data responsibly restricted to court-authorized searches.

9. Governance

a. The concept of governance extends beyond decision-making within formal government structures. It includes how decisions are made within and between all institutions - including corporations, civil society organizations and intergovernmental agencies. The information society provides an opportunity to require greater transparency from and interaction with all institutions with public roles and

responsibilities.

- b. Due to a close interconnectedness between globalization and ICT use, problems in the Information Society no longer arise on national levels, but on a global level. Therefore, we encourage the strengthening of existing global government systems to address the challenges of today.
- c. Increasing government communication and service delivery online can make governments more efficient, transparent and accountable to their citizens. Governments should develop comprehensive websites with clear system to navigate through the many policies, programs, and services they offer. All governments should aim to provide tools and online forms to support tax payments, social security, and other common transactions. Specific information in a clear manner explaining government policies and laws helps make politics more accessible. Publishing information such as budgets, ministerial reviews, and transcripts of parliamentary debate helps keep governments accountable to their electors.
- d. We encourage the utilization of technology to make voting processes more responsive, accessible and efficient for citizens of all ages, especially the increasingly disengaged group of young voters.

10. The world's biggest untapped resource: YOUTH

- a. The world's largest untapped resource in creating an information society is not technology, but young people. Youth are a huge and growing demographic, making up more than two-thirds of the population of some developing nations. Yet, young people have too often been seen as a burden rather than an asset, a group to be taught but not to teach, and to receive but not to give. We commit to working with youth to change this paradigm. After all, young people, the first European generation to have grown up with computers, have a lot to offer: energy, enthusiasm, and above all expertise to help bridge the digital divide. While young people have been at the forefront of almost every innovation in the development of the information society, from the founding of Microsoft through to the dot.com era, it is only now that we formally recognize their potential in a development context. Youth need to be engaged in decision-making processes related to the information society – as students, and as citizens with an affinity for technology, they are informed stakeholders in the evolution of education and innovation. We commit to supporting youth efforts and engaging them as participants in broader initiatives towards realizing digital opportunities and an information society for all.

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