

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Europe is 'going electronic commerce', according to market research. By 2001 on-line revenues in business trade, consumer retail, and content in Europe are expected to climb to over \$70 billion Euro, with 53 million users connected to the Internet¹. Finland is one of the most dense Internet countries in the world. In relative terms there is more online shopping in the Netherlands than in the USA². Italy showed last year more than 600% growth in the number of Webpages, the highest rate of all European countries³. France has a rich tradition in online paid-for Minitel services which are now migrating to the Internet. Smart cards are already being used by the millions in Europe and being integrated with online shopping. Europe also has a world class enterprise software and services industry. This issue of the International Journal of Electronic Markets also demonstrates that electronic commerce in Europe is very much alive and kicking, with a growing interest in research, development, and business pilots. We expect that electronic commerce will be the driver for the modernization of industry and services in Europe and the motor for the creation of many new business and employment opportunities, although it will also structurally impact existing industries and patterns of employment. It is an opportunity for Europe that the introduction of the Euro is also happening now as this will help to upgrade financial systems in business for electronic trading.

Despite the encouraging signs, Europe still lags behind the USA in the take-up of electronic commerce. It remains to be seen if this continues to be true. Already now there are indications that the gap is closing.

At the European Commission we are determined to support the promotion of electronic commerce for a more competitive and attractive Europe in the global marketplace. In this spirit we launched in April 1997 the European Initiative in Electronic Commerce⁴. This initiative addresses access to affordable and performant infrastructure, user-friendly and innovative technologies, a favorable legal framework which maximizes the benefits of the Internal Market in Europe for electronic commerce, and awareness and trust amongst consumers and business and public administration, supported by global business pilots. Electronic commerce leads us to rethink our policy approach in many areas, including industrial policy⁵.

Now we are in the midst of implementing the Initiative. Some examples can illustrate this. European Union R&D programmes are focusing work in electronic commerce and we foresee that "New Methods of Work and Electronic Commerce" will become a major area of work in the new Fifth Framework Programme which is expected to start end 1998. Awareness, competence centers and interoperability activities have been launched, supported by the Directorate-General for Industry amongst others⁶. Proposals have been made for the legal framework related to copyright protection, electronic payments, and secure electronic commerce, and more can be expected to come, for example on liability. I also want to mention the strong support of the European Commission for an inclusive international dialogue as proposed by Commissioner Bangemann, to arrive at truly global solutions in the interest of business and consumers worldwide⁷.

I invite anyone who is interested in electronic commerce in Europe and in particular the readers of this Journal to look up the information about these and many more initiatives in Europe

at our electronic commerce Website <http://www.ispo.cec.be/eccommerce>. I welcome your efforts to contribute with us to making Europe a better place to live, work and do business through electronic commerce.



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¹ Forrester Research, European New Media Strategies, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1998.

² International Data Corporation/Link, as quoted in the European Initiative in Electronic Commerce.

³ Evolution of the Internet and the WWW in Europe, European Commission DGXIII, October 1997.

⁴ European Initiative in Electronic Commerce, European Commission, April 1997, <http://www.ispo.cec.be/Ecommerce/initiat.htm>.

⁵ Creating a Favourable Business Environment for Electronic Commerce: The role of European Industrial Policy, Stefano Micossi, <http://www.cec.cec:8080/en/comm/dgiii/speeches/ecpos.pdf>.

⁶ See amongst others projects at <http://www.ispo.cec.be/Ecommerce/whois.htm> and Memorandum of Understanding on Open Access to Electronic Commerce for European SMES, <http://www.ispo.cec.be/eccommerce/MoU/default.htm>.

⁷ The Need for Strengthened International Coordination, European Commission, February 1998, <http://www.ispo.cec.be/ciff/policy/>.