Activities in the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society Partnership

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Abstract: This paper reports on some of the activities within the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society Partnership. In particular, it discusses the Aldana initiative, its role, some of the actions initiated, and the Cyprus initiative. The full version of this paper can be found on the World Wide Web at http://www.euromednet.ucy.cy/eitc97

Summary:

The capacity to efficiently and effectively access, control the flow of, sort and use information will increasingly determine how we lead our lives, both in the professional and private spheres. We are indeed entering a new phase (most call this new phase a revolution) in the development of the world, often termed the Information Society. Information is increasingly becoming (one may be tempted to say it has become) a key to the (further) development of every human, organisation, country, or indeed the whole globe. The term "Global Village" is not accidental. We are witnessing the emergence of thematic social groups, which can physically be located in any part of the world. Thus interests and intellect tend to determine the boundaries enclosing social groups rather than physical proximity and direct communication. The convergence of key information technologies, such as computers and telecommunications, plus the demands for timely, reliable, information to compete in a shrinking competitive world have created a revolution in information exchange networks. We are currently witnessing a transformation in our communication networks, with the forerunner the Internet, a global network capable of delivering in a cost effective manner information to any part of the globe.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership on the Construction of the Information Society


The Aldana initiative:

The ad-hock Euro-Med IS Action Plan Steering Committee was formed as a direct follow on from the ministerial conference in Rome (along the lines of the proposal by Fernando Aldana, Spain). It has met six times (three of them have taken place at the European Commission, hosted by DG1b, DGIII, and DGXIII, two of them at Santiago de Compostella, Spain, and the other at Metsovo, Greece). Its aims are to act as an (informal) advisory committee to the European Union on the preparation of the EuroMed Information Society Action Plan. Also the Steering Committee initiated and coordinates a series of events, within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as for example a series of workshops to take place in the Mediterranean [1]. In each event every country in the EuroMed Society (Mediterranean and European Union) will participate. These events act as a focal point and promote the formation of collaborative Euromed IS project proposals (to be
funded by MEDA). A number of key sectors were identified. Till today, three of the workshops have taken place. These are "Space Applications", Cairo, Egypt, May 26-27 1997, "Electronic Commerce", Metsovo, Greece, 4-6 July 1997 [3], "Piloting IT solutions for industries and services", October 10-12, La Toja, Spain [4]. Planned activities include "EuroMed Cultural Heritage Workshop Towards the Information Society", Cairo, Egypt, 17-19 February 1998 [5], "EURO-MED NET98: Role of Internet and the World Wide Web in developing the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society", Nicosia, Cyprus, 4-7 March 1998 [6], "Multimedia instructional and educational technologies", (Malta, May/June 1998), "Strategy for the EuroMed Information Society" (Turkey, to be decided), "Education and the Information Society", (Morocco, to be decided).

The Cyprus initiative:

The Euro-Mediterranean Ministers in the Rome conference concluded their works with a declaration that stressed the potential of a specific technology, the Internet, to develop network supported communities (pg. 279, [1]) in view of a truly Euro-Mediterranean Information Society. The Ministerial conference concluded on the need to dedicate a specific event to this technology in order to spread the awareness of the potential of global networks from the universities to other “non technical layers” of the Euro-Mediterranean societies such as Chambers of Commerce, Business/Trade organisations, Banks, health care, cultural heritage and tourism operators. It appeared necessary to organise a regional event capable of bringing together regional scientific and economic communities in order to develop co-operative projects for the development of the Euro-Mediterranean private sector or the delivery of modern public utility services. The University of Cyprus took the challenge to organise this event with the support of a large international scientific committee. The Ministry of Communication and Works of the Republic of Cyprus, together with the Directorates Ib, III, and XIII of the European Union, will jointly support the organisation of the conference EURO-MED NET 98: Role of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the development of the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society. The Conference will take place between the 4th - 7th March 1998 in Nicosia, Cyprus [6].

Expected results of EURO-MED NET 98

The need for improved access to information and to the Internet in particular in Southern Mediterranean countries is crucial. Traditional methods of importing or accessing such information are costly and inefficient (for example, employment of foreign experts, purchase of foreign materials, as well as overseas training). Building on the examination of these issues the Conference will seek concrete results to further the development of the EuroMed Information Society. Such concrete results could include:

- **The Internet based exploitation of “information transfer stations”** i.e. thematic centres of excellence capable of disseminating specialised knowledge (e.g. electronic commerce, health, culture/tourism, science/technology, and education) to appropriate communities of interest.

- **The development of specific recommendations and proposals (Action Plan)** on how to exploit the Internet and web potential and how to avoid pitfalls and hurdles. To be sent to governments, private sector development organisations, and private ICT business.

- **Formation of a regional network supporting research education**, to be joined with the existing European network, thus providing the ideal starting infrastructure, to create interdisciplinary cooperative research teams and courseware.

- **Promotion of a Networked Observatory on the Telecoms** in the Mediterranean.

- **Promotion of the Mediterranean Internet, Intranet, and the Web Group INW3MED**.

- **Establishment of collaborative projects** for the high-speed intra and inter connection of the Euro-Mediterranean and access services to networks and information sources.

- **Creation of “virtual communities”** through “low cost conferencing systems”.

- **Formalising the Euro-Med IS Action Plan Steering Committee**.

The overall approach in all areas must be to strengthen not only links between interdisciplinary academic and research oriented institutions, but also with private sector. Such links foster the Internet culture, as well as provide for the foundation that is needed for sustainable development.


