An Information Society for All

WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN?

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An Information Society for All. What does this really mean? Today in practical terms this means using the Internet. Then why is not everybody using the Internet? Because so far the focus has been on technical issues. People issues have been neglected leaving many obstacles behind.
For many people the abstract concept of Cyberspace is difficult to understand. What is Cyberspace? Why can I not keep my regular name in Cyberspace? Why do I need a new name and have to write it in English using the English alphabet? What about law and order in Cyberspace? National law, international law or no law at all? This boils down to the question of who governs the Internet? Governing the Internet is societal matter.

CECUA (Confederation of European Computer User Associations www.cecua.org) is advocating and addressing these people issues at the level of the European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and elsewhere. This presentation outlines the issues together with the reactions and progress made to date.

While the Americans talk about Information Highway the Europeans have coined the term Information Society. The American term reflects on the information transmission technical infrastructure while the European one reflects on society and the people involved. The difference reflects the different value systems on both sides of the Atlantic.

An INFORMATION SOCIETY FOR ALL has been on the EU agenda for several years. Information Society for all is a nice phrase, but what does it exactly mean? In this article I am going to use a simple definition. Anybody using the Internet is a member of the Information Society. Most people will agree with my definition that those using the Internet are definitely members of the Information Society. But to be on the safe side let us call my definition an approximation. My approximation has one big advantage. There are lots of statistics available about Internet users and usage by various categories. First let us ask how well the EU is doing. Are we getting close to achieving the goal of an Information Society for All? Using my approximation this is equivalent to asking if everybody is on the Internet? Now let us look at the "Old" EU, i.e. before the enlargement earlier this year (see Table 1.).

From the table we can come to two (2) conclusions:

1. Nearly one in two EU citizens is on the Internet.

2. There is a North/South divide.

We will now have a look at "New" Europe, i.e. the countries joining the EU on May 1, 2004 (see Table 2.).

From the table we can come to two (2) conclusions:

1. Nearly one in four "New" EU citizens is on the Internet.

2. There is a divide but not an apparent geographical one.

If we put together the "Old" and the "New" Europe we get new results (see Table 3.).

The addition of the "New" states lowers the total EU figure a bit but not much because of the overwhelming population size of "Old" states. Our conclusion remains that close to half of the people of the enlarged EU are on the Internet and therefore Members of the Information Society. There are also two divides: a North/South and Old/New divide. We can also add

Table 1. Internet usage in the European Union

EUROPEAN UNION	Population (2004 Est.)	Internet Users, Latest Data	Use Growth (2000-2004)	Penetration (% Population)	% of Usage
Austria	8,022,300	3,340,000	59.0 %	41.6 %	2.0 %
Belgium	10,367,900	3,769,123	88.5 %	36.4 %	2.2 %
Denmark	5,405,600	3,375,850	73.1 %	62.5 %	2.0 %
Finland	5,224,800	2,650,000	37.5 %	50.7 %	1.6 %
France	59,494,800	22,199,080	161.2 %	37.3 %	13.2 %
Germany	82.633.200	44,842,759	86.8 %	54.3 %	26.7 %
Greece	11,208,400	1,704,900	70.5 %	15.2 %	1.0 %
Ireland	4,019,100	1,319,608	68.3 %	32.8 %	0.8 %
Italy	56,153,700	19,900,000	50.8 %	35.4 %	11.8 %
Luxembourg	457,700	165,000	65.0 %	36.0 %	0.1 %
Netherlands	16,364,500	10,806,328	177.1 %	66.0 %	6.4 %
Portugal	10,389,800	2,000,000	-20.0 %	19.2 %	1.2 %
Spain	41,895,600	13,600,467	152.4 %	32.5 %	8.1 %
Sweden	8,995,900	6,913,676	70.8 %	76.9 %	4.1 %
United Kingdom	59,157,400	34,765,774	125.8 %	58.8 %	20.7 %
European Union	**379,790,700**	**171,199,895**	**97.2 %**	**45.3 %**	**100.0 %**

Source: Internet World Stats, www.InternetWorldStats.com

without going into details that there is a third divide: EU/Non EU Europe. But how does EU compare on global scale? (See Table 4.)

North America (USA) is the tops, Oceania (Pacific South) comes in second with EU trailing as third. The rest of the globe is far behind.

USA is the region EU likes to compare itself with. Let us compare those two regions in more detail by combining data from the other tables. In addition to 2004 figures let us look at growth as well (see Figure 1.).

The figure shows clearly the USA is the winner. EU "Old" is far behind and the gap between USA and EU is widening. That means the number of Internet users is growing faster in the USA than in the "Old" EU. If we would include "New" EU countries the gap gets even wider.

While more than 2 out of 3 Americans are on the Internet less than 2 out of 4 EU Europeans are. Coming back to the original definition of who is the citizen of the Information Society and who is not, i.e. if you are an Internet user you are definitely a citizen, we can only conclude that the EU has quite a way to go before reaching the goal of an Information Society for All.

WHY ARE SO MANY STAYING AWAY FROM THE INTERNET?

Why are so many staying outside the Information Society? Where are the stumbling blocks? Those stumbling blocks need to be identified and removed. What are the issues involved?

To get a better understanding of the issues involved it is necessary to look at how the Internet came into being. The Internet started as an academic project in the USA. And like a snowball rolling down a hill the Internet started growing and growing. From being a local issue it became a national one and then an international one. And the Internet got growing pains. It had

Table 2. Internet usage for the new member countries of the EU

10 New Member States of the EU	Population (2004 Est.)	Internet Users, Latest Data	Use Growth (2000-2004)	% Population (Penetration)	% of Usage
Cyprus	950.400	210,000	75.0 %	22.1 %	1.3 %
Czech Republic	10,287,100	2,600,000	160.0 %	25.3 %	16.0 %
Estonia	1,268,300	444,000	21.1 %	35.9 %	2.7 %
Hungary	10,117,900	1,600,000	123.8 %	15.8 %	9.9 %
Latvia	2,262,000	310,000	106.7 %	13.7 %	1.9 %
Lithuania	3,494.700	500,000	122.2 %	14.3 %	3.1 %
Malta	383,600	82,900	107.3 %	21.6 %	0.5 %
Poland	38,158,100	8,800,000	217.1 %	23.3 %	54.7 %
Slovakia	5,381,200	862,800	32.7 %	16.0 %	5.3 %
Slovenia	1,954,500	750,000	150.0 %	38.4 %	4.6 %
New Members EU	**74,227,800**	**16,239,700**	**155.1 %**	**21.9 %**	**100.0 %**
European Union	**379,790,700**	**168,012,565**	**98.4 %**	**44.2 %**	**-**
TOTAL EU (May/04)	**454,018,500**	**184,252,265**	**102.3 %**	**40.6 %**	**-**

Source: Internet World Stats, www.InternetWorldStats.com

to be managed locally and also globally. Who was going to do that?

To cut a long story short it was agreed to set up a private company, ICANN, in California USA to take care of the technical administration of the Internet, which meant that every user of the Internet had to have an Internet name and address. The Christian name is not sufficient any more. It is a new name was needed, e.g. jon.thorhallsson@cecua.org. The administrative structure relies on registries that in turn sign up registrars who do the actual

assigning of Internet names to users. At the technical level the Internet is based on several servers, so called root servers, which are strategically located around the globe. The connection to those servers is usually provided via the telephone networks.

All this is necessary for the Internet to function normally. And it usually does.

This was the situation as envisaged few years ago. In the mean time there is a realization that the picture is much more complicated. What started as an
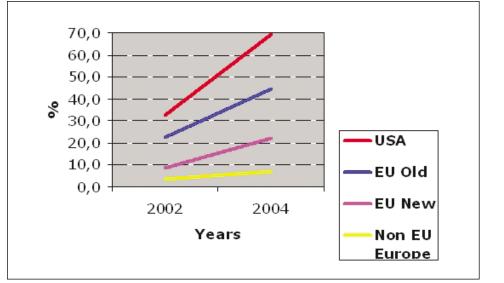

Figure 1. Internet penetration comparison between EU and USA.
Source: Internet World Stats, www.InternetWorldStats.com

Table 3. Internet usage for the European Union including the new member countries.

EUROPE	Population (2004 Est.)	Internet Users, Latest Data	Use Growth (2000-2004)	% Population (Penetration)	% of Usage
European Union	379,790,700	168,012,565	98.4 %	44.2 %	82.7 %
EU New Members	74,227,800	16,239,700	155.1 %	21.9 %	8.0 %
TOTAL EU	454,018,500	184,252,265	102.3 %	40.6 %	90.7 %
Rest of Europe	274,838,880	19,325,309	90.6 %	6.9 %	9.3 %
TOTAL EUROPE	728,857,380	204,557,409	102.5 %	28.1 %	100.0 %

Source: Internet World Stats, www.InternetWorldStats.com

academic exercise has become the backbone of local, national and global business, both for business management and also for electronic commerce.

Governments are beginning to understand that the Internet has become a vital part of the national infrastructure just as roads, water, electricity, telephone, radio and TV are. This infrastructure has to be managed for the benefit of its citizens and that is what governments are for.

The Internet has to be managed or governed and on a global scale. There is a general agreement that Internet Governance is far too important to be left to ICANN alone. ICANN is responsible for technical administration of the Internet. But technical administration is only a part of Internet Governance, although an important one.

There are several different stakeholders involved in this process, but the main stakeholders are Governments, Information and Telecommunication providers industry and Users and these stakeholders must work together to develop the Internet for the benefit of everybody. Successful cooperation of all stakeholders is essential for the future development of the Internet.

Governments:

Governments are there to represent citizen's interest. That is what they are for.

The Internet adds a new dimension to their scope of activities and responsibilities.

Industry:

The industry has a lot at stake. The Internet opens up new markets for products and services. The stakes are high and European competitiveness is at stake. There is a digital divide in Europe. One North-South divide and another West-East divide. Bridging those divides is a big opportunity and also a big challenge for industry. But there are also many obstacles. The obstacles concerning people outweigh the technical ones. This is something that needs to be overcome. And the industry cannot do it alone.

Users:

Users or consumers of Internet services are major stakeholders and a neglected group. Consumer associations have not yet embraced Internet user issues as consumer issues. Therefore, it has been left to organisations like CECUA and ISOC to speak out for the users, ISOC on technical issues and CECUA on people issues. And the neglected people issues are stumbling blocks for more people joining the Information Society. Let me name few of those issues:

Availability

The Internet infrastructure is the telephone network. Where there is a telephone line we can have Internet access. Speed can be limited, but the Internet is there.

Special Internet Service Providers make use of the telephone network to offer Internet services. If the user has a computer he can hook it to the Internet.

Affordability

It is not enough to have a telephone line and a computer if people cannot afford to hook it up and put it on line.

Both availability and affordability have been addressed through the deregulation of national Telecoms and resulting competition have led to lower prices and improved services. Competition has also brought

Table 4. Internet usage on the global scale.

World Regions	Population (2004 Est.)	Internet Usage, (Year 2000)	Internet Usage, Latest Data	User Growth (2000-2004)	Penetration (% Population)	% of Table
Africa	905,954,600	4,514,400	10,095,200	123.6 %	1.1 %	1.3 %
Asia	3,654,644,200	114,303,000	236,591,317	107.0 %	6.5 %	31.2 %
EU	454,018,500	87,643184	184,252,265	102.3 %	40.6 %	90.7 %
Middle East	259,166,000	5,272,300	14,472,500	174.5 %	5.6 %	1.9 %
North America	326,695,500	108,096,800	226,409,994	109.5 %	69.3 %	29.9 %
Latin America/Caribbean	546,100,900	18,068,919	49,504,287	174.0 %	9.1 %	6.5 %
Oceania	31,892,487	7,619,500	15,654,781	105.5 %	49.1 %	2.1 %
WORLD TOTAL	**6,453,311,067**	**358,871,012**	**757,530,737**	**111.1 %**	**11.7 %**	**100.0 %**

Source: Internet World Stats, www.InternetWorldStats.com

down prices of computer hardware and software. The EU Directive of Universal Services addresses those issues.

Trust and Confidence

Internet is one of the most wonderful inventions of the previous century offering unparalleled opportunities for education, entertainment, communication and a wide variety of services. But constant media reporting on Internet fraud and embezzlement keeps many users from entering the wonderful world the Internet offers. Parents are concerned about what their children read and see on the Internet. People shy away from buying goods and services on the Internet because they are afraid that their credit cards will be stolen. Without users gaining trust and confidence in the Internet everybody will be a loser.

The idea of setting up a .eu namespace was a historic opportunity to create a European region of Trust and Confidence, something like the Euro is a currency of Trust and Confidence. This opportunity was missed and .eu will be a copy of .com and little more.

Culture and language

The Internet originated in the English speaking USA. And from the outset English has been the language of the Internet. But English is not the only language in Europe. As a matter of fact only a minority of Europeans have English as a mother tongue. Other European languages have additional letters or their national characters. There is no place for such national characters in user names on the Internet. Let us look at my name again. In Icelandic it is **Jón Þórhallsson**. To make it acceptable to the Internet the **ó** has to go and be replaced by **o**. Also the **Þ** has to go and be replaced by **th**. Jon Thorhallsson is OK for the Internet. But it is really a **MUTILATION** of my name. Other languages have the same problem, the Baltic languages also. Solving those

problems is a big challenge and opportunity for the industry.

The former CEO of ICANN called those language issues "trumped up nationalism" and "anticompetitive". Lack of sensitivity to language and cultural issues such as the use of one's name and using national characters has turned many users away.

Another issue is our name on the Internet. Our name is something special to most people. Why do we need a new and different Internet name? We should have a right to our own name on the Internet, a right instead of the first come first serve method for assigning Internet names today. If we really want everybody to join the Information Society and become Internet users we have to make it easy for them to join.

Legal

Some elements of society are taking advantage of the "no governance" situation. They have turned the Internet into new kind of "Wild West" where lawlessness is the rule. Terms like hacking, spam, phishing, viruses and worms are examples of the armory used. This situation is ruining user trust and confidence and causing business billions of euro damage. But very rarely is anybody arrested and brought to justice for this. A friend of mine was hacked. He went to his Internet service provider and asked him who was hacking him. The provider told him that the EU Data Protection Directive forbade him to give such information. My friend should go to the police. He did so and was told to buy himself a firewall (which he had already installed). If the hacker had been a common burglar who broke into his house the Police would have been out to catch him. Internet crimes are new to the police and they are not well-prepared or equipped to deal with it. Those criminals can be anywhere and in most cases out of national jurisdiction. No government

With the advent of the Information Society and the Internet the world is going through both a cultural and a business revolution. And this revolution is not over anytime soon. Governments, Industries and Users have to work together to get the maximum benefits from this revolution. CECUA is ready for cooperation and invites LITTA to become involved.

ALONE can police this Internet Wild West. The key issues to be addressed are Internet Governance, or WHO RUNS THE INTERNET AND HOW TO RUN IT? The Internet is a global phenomenon and calls for international law and order. Therefore, the issue has rightly landed on the table of the United Nations at the recent WSIS or World Summit on Information Society.

All those user deterrent issues do not make it inviting for users to join the Information Society. Many prefer to stay out and wait for better times. But we need them on board for the Internet to be the driver of the Information Society.

What can be done about this situation?

THE STAKEHOLDERS HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS A SOLUTION.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT AT ICANN AND UN LEVEL

GAC (Government Advisory Committee) originally set up by ICANN to advise ICANN on government issues. At the beginning GAC played a reactive role, advising if asked. More recently GAC is becoming more proactive and more independent of ICANN. The EU is hosting the GAC in Brussels and has also provided the GAC Secretariat with experienced staff. This arrangement has provided a much needed counter weight to USA dominance of ICANN and the Internet in general.

WSIS (The World Summit on Information Society) is discussing Internet Governance and a

working group was set up under the auspices of the United Nations to discuss the issues and prepare recommendations for the next WSIS meeting in Tunis in 2005.

Global agreements are needed to augment/support national legislation and law enforcement. USA can not do it alone, EU can not do it alone either. Other big players such as China and India have to be involved. This is truly a global issue and has to be dealt with as such.

Information and Telecommunication providers industry

Working towards a solution to those issues is a challenge and also a big business opportunity for industry. Solving those issues will make the Internet more palatable to users who have stayed away so far. It means more equipment can be sold to the Internet provider industry and the provider industry will generate more revenue from new users. It is a win-win situation.

Users/consumers/computer users

ICANN has made attempts to create and activate regional At Large User Groups but without too much success. ICANN has limited group membership to individuals and barred organisations like CECUA and/or ISOC from joining. But the effort and the funds needed to organize and operate such a group have been grossly underestimated. Both CECUA and ISOC ECC have offered to help out but so far their offer has not been accepted.

It has been left mainly to CECUA and ISOC to speak up for the users. ISOC is very strong on technical issues, e.g. IPV6, etc. while CECUA has its strength on non technical people issues. Both have advocated their positions at numerous conferences and seminars. CECUA is also working closely with the European Parliament, European Commission and the Committee of the Regions on those issues. CECUA positions on user issues are posted on the website www.cecua.org. ❏