

**The Analysis of Impacts of Benchmarking  
and the eEurope Actions in the  
Open Method of Co-ordination**

## **How the eEurope OMC worked: Implications for the Co-ordination of Policy under i2010**

**Final Report**

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## Executive Summary

The Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) was first introduced at the Lisbon Council (2001) as a 'means of spreading best practice' and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals and 'help(ing) Member States to progressively develop their own policies'. One of the first applications of the method was the eEurope Action Plans (2002 and 2005).

This document reports on the results of a multi-method study whose three main tasks were to: (i) investigate how the OMC is working in the context of eEurope, (ii) evaluate the effectiveness of the OMC approach in the delivery of the eEurope goals and, (iii) to examine how the OMC could be applied and adapted to better support the Lisbon Council Information Society goals in the future.

### The Open Method of Coordination

OMC reflects a new set of instruments for coordinating multi-level governance which are based on consensus building, learning through action and learning from peers. Along with other major national and international actors, the EU has been at the forefront of innovations in policy coordination which create new steering possibilities beyond the traditional instruments of legislation and expenditure.

Whereas previous policy instruments have tended to be uniform in type and application, this new family of instruments can be configured in different ways to suit different settings and circumstance, and may include various combinations of:

- Strategy development and agenda setting;
- Targets;
- Action plans;
- Definitional and measurement work (development of indicators);
- Peer pressure;
- Learning and exchange of good practice; and
- Mobilisation of the wider stakeholders (including the social partners and civil society).

### OMC across different areas of Community policy

Although there are a number of interpretations, implementations and developmental variants of the OMC in operation across the different European policy areas, the generic aims of the Open Method of Coordination as an instrument are to spread best practices and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals. To a large extent *'it is based on catching-up and benchmarking'*<sup>1</sup>.

The OMC involves a variety of elements, these can include: fixing goals for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals; establishing appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States as a means of comparing best practices; translating EU guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences; periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

The current state of development of OMC as an instrument of EU policy can be briefly summarised thus:

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<sup>1</sup> High Level Group on the Future of Social policy. This observation was made particularly as regards Enlargement.

- OMC in practice appears to be about attempting to create collegiate cultures between Member States, the Commission, and sub- and trans- national actors. These collegiate cultures involve information sharing, problem solving, common objectives, joint action, mutual commitments, and mutual accountability; using a combination of indicators, benchmarks, targets, national action plans, peer learning and peer review.
- OMC allow matters which have been jointly identified as significant problems of public policy for Europe as a whole, which cannot be addressed through the traditional community method, to be addressed in a manner which is hoped (by the Commission and at least some of the Member States) will be systematic and will have cumulative impact.

### ***Improving the OMC as an instrument***

Discussions with the actors in the Member States and in the Commission suggest four highly interconnected current priorities for improving the OMC as an instrument:

1. Greater concentration and emphasis on getting appropriate practical processes in place through which substantial, strategic and tailored objectives and commitments are identified, designed and agreed for individual Member States.
2. Putting a real substantive peer exchange process in place that is based on a peer learning philosophy – that is, is supportive, contextualised and developmental - but that also has some power in terms of critique, sense making, problem solving and recommendation.
3. Using indicators and benchmarks (*contra* Kok) not so much to name and shame or fame, as to aid problem identification and task definition in setting objectives/ commitments/ targets and to underpin the peer exchange process.
4. Involving and mobilising a wider set of actors from among the social partners, civil society and local and regional governance in the open co-ordination process so as to ensure a strong and real user pull through in policy making and delivery.

## **Experiences with the eEurope OMC across the Member States**

### ***OMC as applied to eEurope***

The eEurope Action Plans (2002 and 2005) provide distinctive features of OMC, crucially based on benchmarking (league tables with 'naming, shaming and faming'); and exchange of best practice.

Our initial scan (interview and document survey) of eEurope OMC experiences across the 25 Member States indicated that:

*With regard to the eEurope agenda:*

- Most countries have their own national IS strategy which to some extent mirrors eEurope and may have been influenced by it, and in some cases eEurope is the basis of national strategies
- The way countries react to eEurope depends on the degree of development of their Information Society and of their pre-existing IS policy, and on their wider relationship to the Community (receipt of Structural Funds, EU-10 conditions of accession).

*With regard to OMC:*

- OMC as a policy instrument is with some exceptions, generally not well understood. People do know about benchmarking and exchange of best practice, but not necessarily that it is part of eEurope or OMC.
- Different people emphasise different aspects of OMC in relation to what sector they represent. In some areas OMC is mainly viewed as exchange of best practice, but, in other areas, and more commonly, informants relate OMC to benchmarking.

*With regard to implementation across different Member States:*

- There is huge institutional and market diversity across the MSs. Typically governments do what they can (e.g. putting schools online) but struggle with more tricky issues (e.g. market reform).
- National governance structures, most notably degrees of centralisation and decentralisation, have structured the possibilities for the implementation of eEurope in the Member States.

### ***Achievements and limitations of the eEurope OMC***

The initial scan highlighted a number of matters about OMC as applied to eEurope, which were subsequently confirmed by more detailed case studies:

- The most important element of the current OMC is the existence of the eEurope strategy in itself. Depending on circumstances, most Member States have defined their own IS strategies along the lines of the eEurope strategy (typically the new MSs) or in some contextualised relationship to eEurope.
- Almost all our informants in the MSs see the key challenge for the open coordination of IS policy in Europe as the coordination *within* individual Member States (hence the importance of regional and sectoral linkages). The challenge for the eEurope OMC is how to encourage and support internal coordination and policy delivery.
- There was wide support for the benchmarking process within the OMC mechanism: it provides guidance in establishing national priorities and creates internal political visibility and leverage – both symbolically and in actuality. However, the benchmarks require constant adjustment and updating (given the ever changing IS context).
- Open coordination is seen as the only possible way to implement common European policies in the area of IS. However open co-ordination in IS works best when it goes with the grain of existing Member State policy and practice – where the economic case for action is seen as compelling by political actors and where there are available funding streams (including Structural Funds) and mechanisms to take it forward.
- The institutional and market realities of the different Member States continue to remain very diverse and each country has to find its own appropriate expression of eEurope. That is, different aspects of eEurope will be (and are) seen as more important in different MSs and different MSs can make different contributions to achieving the overall common Lisbon goals.
- Given the differences between countries there is unsurprisingly considerable support in the Member States for seeing the exchange of learning and best practice as central to the operation of OMC in the context of eEurope.
- What still appears to be missing in the eEurope OMC is concrete mechanisms which promote mutual learning; policy refinement and development; and actual action at the level of the individual Member State (see below for recommendations as to how this might be accomplished).

## **eEurope, OMC and Information Society policy in Member States: synthesis of 10 case studies<sup>2</sup>**

### ***The concordance of the eEurope agenda with Member States' policy actions***

All the areas of the eEurope action plans are covered to a greater or lesser extent by proactive policy action in the MSs. However, such policy action tends to be concentrated on:

- a) those areas where government can exert direct influence
- b) those areas, often more advanced areas, which do not feature as strong eEurope priorities where there was a prior identified pressing national need or interest or;
- c) those areas where individual MSs and/or non-governmental actors were already very active

There are a wide range of forms of institutional arrangements for handling the eEurope co-ordination responsibilities at national government level. These range from: no particular arrangements except for an occasional check that pre-existing national policies remain roughly consistent with eEurope; to designated lead ministries with a cross governmental coordinative role; to situations where the eEurope vision, via the Structural Fund OP delivery mechanism, is the basis of state policy. Often significant IS developments and decisions will not be reflected in any national IS plan nor be related to eEurope or national action plans will concentrate on newly emergent issues and opportunities which barely feature in the eEurope agenda.

However, perhaps, a more significant issue is the degree to which IS policies are central MS socio-economic development policies – and here the variety among the MS is striking and ranges from utterly central to very peripheral.

In the individual MSs national action plan(s) for the IS take a wide variety of forms: from general orientations and objectives; to specific funded programmes of action; to 'recommendations' which have virtually the significance of legislation. Typically, general orientations and objectives are translated into, negotiated with or coordinated with regional or municipal activities depending on the administrative structures and division of labour in the individual state. Where partnership is the dominant mode of policy development or delivery in the MS or where the regions are particularly autonomous, any simple delivery of a centrally determined IS policy may be out of the question and more consensus-driven coordination called for. Obviously any coordination with or encouragement of changes in private or third sector behaviour can usually only be achieved on a largely voluntary basis though dialogue and engagement, aided by various carrots (subsidies) and sticks (regulation).

Where the ICT industry is a key national player or the social partners are at the centre of the policy making process, government IS policy may be driven by a public-private consensus. However normally IS policy in the MSs tends to be dominated by governmental actors at

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<sup>2</sup> The case studies were designed to:

- Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of benchmarking and the exchange of good practice in meeting eEurope goals.
- Examine how OMC could be applied and adapted to better support the Lisbon goals and in particular more coherent policy and programme development across all information society initiatives.

Based on identified characteristics the following 10 MSs were purposely selected: Finland, Estonia, Italy, Slovakia, Greece, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands and the UK. In each country we sought to understand empirically, through interviews and documentary review, generally and focusing on one or two specific sectors or policy areas, what is going on in the MS with regard to the eEurope OMC (in more depth than the scanning exercise) and the OMC influence, if any, on overall policy and progress on the eEurope overarching themes and specific action areas.



both a central and (to a greater or lesser extent) regional/local level. Much of MS policy is characterised by a concentration on what government can do (eGovernment, eHealth, eLearning) and a struggle to effectively engage the broad private sector (eCommerce, eBusiness).

By contrast IS developments on the ground are largely private sector driven, reflect and react to global trends, and, while they may be enabled or disabled on the margin by governmental action, their dynamics are largely independent of government. Indeed the difficulties that government has experienced in trying to promote more interest in IS technologies among the private sector is a hallmark of a number of our Member State case studies.

### ***eEurope and IS policy in the Member States***

So, to summarise, eEurope in the MSs is characterised by general objectives, orientations and implicit alignments at a national level, usually encapsulated in a formal national plan, and largely along the lines of existing national policies and priorities; and lightly coordinated by ministries or other structures with designated responsibility but little or no powers.

The case studies revealed that the eEurope OMC made a quite limited contribution in practice to helping MSs with: exchanging best practice, learning and policy borrowing; posing questions and problem solving; and focusing on important IS actions.

Notwithstanding this, the case studies show that IS policy – quite apart from eEurope - continues to be viewed as having central economic importance in most economically advanced MSs and continues to receive considerable and appropriate political attention and priority in most MSs. And, furthermore, IS policy development is a growing or continuing priority in the less economically advanced states and regions, indeed the idea of ‘catch-up’ is an important motif in less economically advanced states and provides an impetus for policy borrowing through mechanisms like eEurope.

The presence or absence of particular eEurope IS policy elements in individual MSs is usually explained by sound reasons related to national realities. In other words, where MSs *are* fully implementing the eEurope agenda it is for reasons extraneous to eEurope, and where they *are not* implementing elements of the eEurope agenda, it is usually because it is not appropriate, not possible or not enough of a priority.

While the formal National Action Plan documents contain many similar elements across the MSs and are in accordance with the eEurope agenda, the balance of actual activity varies enormously. Looked at from this perspective – the perspective of the balance of actual substantive activity – it would be hard to determine that any two Member States activity sets derived from the same master agenda. Indeed, our national informants also consistently view the eEurope agenda to be at such a level of generality that it allows them and others freedom to pick and choose and never requires them to do anything specifically.

In fact national actors do not think first and foremost in terms of the IS in Europe. The more economically advanced MSs think of the global situation among the world’s advanced economies and their position within it, and pay much attention to what is going on in the non-European OECD countries (and how they benchmark against them). Within Europe, the economically advanced economy MSs look to their traditional ‘policy borrowing’ counterparts and everybody looks to the Nordic countries. The less advanced MSs and regions do look to the more advanced MSs, though both groups think of this in terms of ‘catching-up’ with the rest of Europe and helping others to catch-up.

Many of the MSs examined in the case studies already have national equivalents of OMC operating within their own country in the sense of ‘consensus led convergence processes’ for policy making and involving a broader set of stakeholders in policy development and

delivery, while many others make use of targets, benchmarks, and indicators across different areas of public policy. However all MSs still struggle to effect convergence across different ministries, between different levels of governance, and between the public and private sector, whether through consensus or more top-down approaches.

### ***Conclusions from the case studies***

Thus, a number of specific conclusions were drawn from the case studies, namely:

- i. The eEurope agenda has shaped national policies to some extent and in various ways.
- ii. eEurope's main effect is through its very existence and not through any of the specific eEurope OMC mechanisms.
- iii. Actual implementation of IS policy and any of the elements of eEurope is completely dependent on national circumstances and structures.
- iv. The difficulty of implementing the eEurope agenda stems from the variety of different national contexts and challenges and thus the lack of specific relevance or priority of some elements of eEurope to national actors.
- v. The OMC mechanism in eEurope (benchmarking, exchange of best practice) has had little effect except where it is in tune with national ways of doing things and pre-existing practices.
- vi. Where OMC has helped frame or reinforce policy objectives and orientations, it has not helped to define actual policy, nor has it helped to define actions to be taken.
- vii. While MS prefer their IS policy to be defined as consistent with eEurope where possible, the actual content of IS policy is largely determined regardless of European policy.
- viii. The eEurope OMC mainly has a substantive effect on MS IS policies where:
  - there is a policy vacuum,
  - areas of action are specifically and narrowly targeted,
  - the eEurope OMC agenda and mechanisms complement other European influences – above all Structural Funds, or
  - there is limited coordination between levels and areas, and there is a recognised need for it.
- ix. 'Naming and shaming' has had limited effect on MS behaviour – in part because it does not fit well with some national political cultures but in any case because targets are too general and do not obviously link with specific actions. 'Faming', or positive reinforcement, may perhaps have had a little more effect.
- x. The general effects of the current elements of the eEurope OMC instrument are limited but additional new elements might help create greater effects.
- xi. An eEurope OMC is only worth having if it is continuously developed and adapted, and carefully aligned in its emphasis with other policy areas (regulation, RTD, Structural Funds) and the broader Lisbon strategy.

However these specific case study findings need to be understood in the broader context of all the findings of this study as a whole:

## Overall conclusions from the study as a whole

### **Summary of conclusions**

This study has established that the impact of eEurope OMC on the ground depends on its ability

to concretely influence MS policy development and policy delivery processes; and

to persuade individual MSs to do things that are both in their own interest and in the interest of the collectivity

in a situation where the actors on the ground are dispersed and semi-autonomous and where is no one right way to go about things.

Thus, we can offer the following conclusions from our empirical work and our discussions with the actors:

- a) That OMC makes most sense (has most to offer) when applied to the whole of IS policy agenda/arena (and related policy areas) and not just limited to eEurope.
- b) That as *currently* conceived the eEurope OMC has probably already had its main effects and there will be diminishing returns to successive rounds of agenda setting and target setting.
- c) That the use of targets and indicators ('naming, shaming and faming') may well have accelerated progress in and across the Member States but it did not reduce the gap between Member States (nor as presently constituted is it likely to).
- d) That the whole area of exchange of best practice needs further attention if it is to have a real impact on MS policy performance: to make a real contribution best practice exchange has to help mobilise and galvanise the whole range of actors at the sub-national and sectoral level whose cooperation and enthusiasm is needed to make the eEurope agenda happen.
- e) That it is hard to see how OMC will materially impact on (add value to) the achievement of the Lisbon Agenda in the area of IS, without some mechanism for agreeing specific concrete actions with individual MSs.
- f) That such a mechanism for agreeing concrete actions should focus as much on the organisation of the implementation of policies (particularly at the sub-national and sectoral levels) and the mobilisation and involvement of wider stakeholders as on policies/actions *per se*.
- g) That appropriate policies and the arrangements for their implementation will vary greatly in their specifics from country to country, and that different MSs can and must contribute in quite different ways and in different timescales to the achievement of collective European goals.
- h) That the OMC be more consciously deployed in specific areas as one of a number of complementary instruments (which also include regulation, RTD spending, and spending on infrastructure, business support and training) available to EU IS policy to effect change.

- i) That strong involvement of all the stakeholders at every point in the policy coordination process will be needed to ensure a real user pull through on policy development.

***Network management: mobilising, resourcing and energising diverse contributions***

The study has established that the eEurope OMC has more potential to make a difference to IS policy development provided it crucially acknowledges the need to exploit and build upon national differences to achieve common European goals, and it focuses attention on influencing those things that make a difference at sub-national and sectoral levels.

A greater reliance on the open method of coordination marks a shift for Member States and the Commission from administration and project management *to network management* – from control and direction and managing risk *to mobilising, resourcing and energising the contributions of others*.

This implies that the Member States and the Commission have a common role to support and develop existing networks, put in place new ones, set terms of reference, provide resources and generally fuel (rather than lead) innovation. The key requirements are to:

- delegate to the levels where there is real commitment to innovation; and
- push responsibility and opportunity down and out to the appropriate levels and places.

Given the limited resources available under i2010 one way to maximise leverage is through focusing spending on energising, communicating and sustaining networks. The role of the Council and the Commission can be to exercise leadership in identifying tasks - and resources to perform those tasks, developing structures, and enabling action and supporting delivery.

OMC is after all an instrument that is well suited to IS policy: the deployment and marketisation of IS technologies implies diversity and varying speed of application in response to user drivers. As the Member States face a diversity of challenges – from establishing basic infrastructures to exploiting the advanced infrastructure already in place – this suggests that quite a wide variety of policy coordination measures may be appropriate, ranging from the very loose to quite tight.

Thus coordination in different areas of IS policy might legitimately range from-

A loose model of coordination – in cases where there is already a rich mix of the needed elements for IS development on the ground - based on

- Common strategies and agendas
- Exchanges of best practice and
- Peer learning

An intermediate model – where many elements exist but more need to be established - with additional use of

- Standard indicators of progress,
- Some additional financial resources, and

- Peer pressure

Or a tight model – where basic elements need to be put in place - based on

- Clear targets
- National action plans
- Significant additional financial resources
- Transparent monitoring of progress
- Peer review

Thus not only should there be a diversity of foci and actions across the MS, the methods used to coordinate these actions may also be diverse.

## Recommendations

In the light of these conclusions and our exploration and elaboration of them with the actors, we would make the following set of practical recommendations:

1. In order to achieve the broader Lisbon goals, the coordination of IS policy between the Member States and the Commission under i2010 should be based on a focused set (limited number) of targets for the EU as a whole *but with a different order of priority and different expected rate of advance for different Member States depending on their needs, opportunities and circumstances.*
2. This implies a melding of general EU and country specific actions plans as part of an ongoing dialogue between the Member States and the Member States and the Commission. This implies in practice:
  - Peer review *before* planning;
  - Institutional arrangements to routinely put new tasks on the i2010 agenda;
  - More focused dialogue on specific issues;
  - Continuity from exchange event to event; and
  - 'out-of-Brussels' locations and more inclusion of the wider stakeholders in events.
3. The method of coordination should vary from loose to tight depending on the tasks and the Member States involved *but always be rooted in the broader arrangements agreed for pursuing the Lisbon Agenda and the total set of European policy instruments operating in the Member States (Structural Funds, Framework Programme, Regulation).*
4. Targets and indicators are still needed as part of the coordination mix but they need to be much more qualitative and user focused and designed to motivate and empower a broader set of stakeholders (rather than to 'name and shame').
5. More, and more targeted, stakeholder (social partners and civil society) involvement and dialogue is needed, including, where appropriate, support for capacity building in wider society. This will help i2010 define more 'real world' objectives, create more user (business and NGO) 'pull through', and wider demand from society.
6. Benchmark progress against goals not against each other (league tables). Technically it would help to have:
  - better quantification and definition of problems;
  - better indicators of policy impact;
  - qualitative indicators of progress; and
  - regional analysis and indicators.

7. Better linkage should be created between IS policy and the other policy areas of the Commission itself (enterprise, markets, employment, social inclusion, education and training) to complement action in the Member States so that *existing* national, sectoral, regional and social innovation platforms can be utilised and exploited to best effect.
8. i2010 itself should be expressed through annually updated rolling action plans *with a peer based review mechanism to review progress and learning from the execution of such plans, perhaps supported with inputs commissioned from non-governmental experts and Commission monitoring.*
9. Action plans should explicitly seek to create new policy learning – about needs for contingency models, best practices or common rules/principles - and exchanges of good practice should focus on the experience of trying to implement elements of the action plan.
10. The key substantive foci should remain the same in the transition from eEurope to i2010 – content, access, eLearning, data protection and security, ‘back office’ standards, innovation and RTD – *but the mode of address should shift to being a) fundamentally user and use driven, with more qualitative and use focused indicators, and b) integral to other substantive policy areas (mainstreaming IS and ‘e-proofing’ other areas of social and economic policy).*

# 1. Introduction

## ***Overview of the study***

The Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) was first introduced at the Lisbon Council (2001) as a 'means of spreading best practice' and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals and 'help(ing) Member States to progressively develop their own policies'. One of the first applications of the method was the eEurope Action Plans (2002 and 2005).

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Whereas previous policy instruments have tended to be uniform in type and application, this new family of instruments can be configured in different ways to suit different settings and circumstance, and may include various combinations of:

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- Targets;
- Action plans;
- Definitional and measurement work (development of indicators);
- Peer pressure;
- Learning and exchange of good practice; and
- Mobilisation of the wider stakeholders (including the social partners and civil society).

This document reports on the results of a multi-method study whose three main tasks were to:

- (i) investigate how the OMC is working in the context of eEurope,
- (ii) evaluate the effectiveness of the OMC approach in the delivery of the eEurope goals, and
- (iii) to examine how the OMC could be applied and adapted to better support the Lisbon Council Information Society goals in the future.

The study was based on extensive documentary review, an interview survey across the Member States and ten country case studies of the eEurope OMC in operation. In order to address these objectives the full report is presented in three main sections:

1. *OMC across different areas of Community policy*: an overview of our understanding of the current position with OMC in relation to some of the EU's key policy areas: Information Society, Employment, Research, Education, and Enterprise. This section is based upon documentary review and interviews with key informants across policy areas and DGs.
2. *Experiences with OMC/eEurope across the Member States*: a summary of the findings from an initial scan of experiences in all 25 Member States. Evidence is presented from interviews and documentary review in each country.
3. *eEurope, OMC and Information Society Policy in Member States: synthesis of ten case studies*: a synthesis of findings from our case studies in ten Member States. Cases were purposefully sampled based on the characteristics and differences in OMC operation in eEurope, established through the initial scan of all 25 Member States.

In order to explore the actual operation and contribution of OMC in the context of eEurope case study data is based on extensive interviews with those actors who have implemented measures in line with the eEurope Action Plan and associated wide ranging documentary reviews in each country.

These three main sections are followed by a concluding section which presents a discussion of the findings and our overall conclusions from the study as a whole including specific recommendations: how and to what extent OMC in eEurope works and does not work and how it might be made more effective. This discussion is informed by the results of discussions with actors from the Member States and the Commission including:

A series of workshops with national and European actors in the same Member States (December 2004/January 2005). The workshops:

- validated case study findings, and
- explored the potential of OMC at a national level to contribute more widely to IS policy development and delivery.

And a 'Future Conference' (working conference) convened in Brussels (February 2005) to further explore of the potential contribution of OMC to wider information society policy development and delivery in the context of the findings of the study.

This methodology is elaborated in the study's Inception Report (April 2004).

### ***Structure of this document***

Specifically, in this document we present and discuss:

An overview of our understanding of the current position with OMC in relation to the EU's various policy areas (Section 2),

A summary of the results of our initial scan of the 25 Member States (Section 3),

A synthesis of our findings from our case studies in 10 Member States (Section 4) and;

A concluding section which presents a discussion of the findings and our overall conclusions from the study as a whole (Section 5).

A more detailed presentation of the ten individual country case studies can be found in Appendix II.



## 2. OMC across different areas of Community policy

### 2.1 The Open Method of Coordination

The Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon summit describe the OMC in these terms:

- *“A means of spreading best practices and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals*
- *A fully decentralised approach in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using varied forms of partnership.*

*The OMC involves:*

- *fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;*
- *establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practices;*
- *translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;*
- *periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes;*
- *A fully decentralised approach to be applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using varied forms of partnership. A method of benchmarking best practices on managing change will be devised by the European Commission networking with different providers and users, namely the social partners, companies and NGO's.”*

The High Level Group on the Future of Social policy has already observed that: *‘OMC has proved remarkably successful in employment policy and has had very positive effects in social inclusion (cf. last National Action Plans)’*. They have further argued that the open method of coordination is all the more important in the context of enlargement *‘since it is based on catching-up and benchmarking’*.

They go on to say that it can foster convergence on common interest and on some agreed common priorities while respecting national and regional diversities. It is an inclusive method for deepening European construction. By taking into account the differences between Member-States, European policy can define common objectives yet not try to harmonise the social systems, which is both impossible and incompatible with the European political framework.

Nevertheless they also rightly observe that *‘if the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy remain valid and the open method of coordination fits well with an enlarged Europe, the economic and social context has much changed since the Lisbon Summit in 2000.’*

## 2.2 OMC across the DGs

### **OMC as applied to eEurope – DG Information Society's perspective**

According to DG Information Society<sup>3</sup>:

*"The Commission was invited by the Lisbon European Council to draw up the first eEurope Action plan using the open method of co-ordination (OMC). Since then, there has been a second Action Plan, a Council Resolution and a number of related Council conclusions.*

*The eEurope Action Plans (2002 and 2005) provide distinctive features of OMC:*

- *While OMC usually addresses national competence, it relies on a combination of Member States, Commission and private sector commitments;*
- *It sets common objectives but does not coordinate national policies as such; it does not require the submission and reporting on national action plans; until very recently, no formal coordinating committee was set up as has been the case for Treaty based policies such as the EES; nevertheless the approach contains peer pressure elements from benchmarking exercises;*
- *It complements existing policies in the field of the information society (regulation, R&D) instead of providing a policy umbrella for EU level action."*

A recent internal DG Information Society review of OMC<sup>4</sup> has claimed that OMC had been successful in political terms, namely:

- It has succeeded in its intention as a political initiative, in raising the profile of Information Society and galvanised Member States into taking urgent action;
- it has been widely copied in both the 'name and style'
- it has generated a political consensus and common vision for the information society; and
- private sector support confirmed its relevance.

And in practical terms:

- it has stimulated actions in other DGs;
- it has been a successful benchmarking exercise; and
- it has provided focus for information society activities and means of publicising the work of INFSO.

However, failings are also noted:

- Europe is still far from being the front runner in the knowledge based economy, benchmarking shows the EU average to be a long way behind the leaders, and this gap is not narrowing;
- despite eEurope, disparities between MSs are still as wide as in 2000;
- eEurope has failed to maintain a high level of political interest; and
- MSs have always been reluctant to provide information on progress on their own actions and this has meant there has been no clear picture of developments in those areas that are MSs' responsibility.

Further, inside the Commission:

- IS policy's visibility in the context of the Lisbon strategy has declined;

<sup>3</sup> Internal communication to the General Secretariat (June 2004).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- they have failed to generate the 'quick wins' from research programmes and to give visibility to Research Outcomes; and
- eEurope has not had a political impact on Commission decision-makers.

Later in this document we will see (from our review of data from our initial scan and ten case studies) that while DG Information Society is correct in its identification of the limits of eEurope per se nevertheless information society policy more generally continues to be central to the national policy priorities of most MSs. But first it is interesting and instructive to compare this experience with OMC in the field of information society policy with the experiences with OMC in other policy fields:

### ***Operation of OMC in the field of Employment***

The Employment OMC is based on a model of The European Employment Strategy [EES], which had its origin in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty. The EES involves the co-ordination of Member States' employment policies in the shape of employment guidelines and National Action Plans (NAPs).

Each year, the European Commission proposes a series of Employment Guidelines which are then adopted by the European Council (i.e. adopted by Council Decision). Once adopted, the guidelines are translated into national policy by the National Action Plans (NAPs). Every EU government produces its own annual National Action Plan describing how it is putting the guidelines into practice, with progress measured against some 100 indicators, ranging from basic economic figures (e.g. gross domestic product (GDP) and unemployment levels) to the availability of career breaks and of childcare. NAPs are submitted to the Commission and Council for examination every October. They are then analysed by the Commission and the Council, and the results presented in an annual Joint Employment Report, whose findings are the basis for reshaping the Guidelines and putting forward country-specific recommendations for employment policies. In 2000 for the first time the Commission proposed that the Council draw up Recommendations on the implementation of the employment policies in the Member States on the basis of a comparative analysis of the Member States' results in the field of employment. As a result, the Council, following a proposal from the Commission, issues specific recommendations to each Member State in order to complement the Employment Guidelines.

The employment guidelines are discussed, *inter alia*, with the Employment Committee (EMCO). The EMCO plays an important role in the development of the European Employment Strategy and, in general, in promoting co-ordination between Member States on employment and labour market policies. The Employment Committee is a Treaty-based Committee which was formally created by a Council Decision (24 January 2000). The EMCO acts as an intermediary between the Commission and the Council on all aspects of EES and its instruments, i.e. the Employment Guidelines, the Joint Employment Report and the recommendations on the implementation of national employment policies. The membership of EMCO is made up by high level representatives from MS (typically from Ministries of Employment) and the Commission (two members and two alternates from each MS and the EC). The EMCO is serviced by a Secretariat provided by Commission Services, which allows the Commission to work closely with the Chair and in one informant's view "to keep close tabs on what's going on". As part of an external validation mechanism, there is a network of independent experts who review the country-specific NAPs, in our informants' view NAPs are usually an accurate reflections of the employment situation in MS because the respective Ministries of Labour are not averse to being honest and highlighting problems/issues in this field since in that way they can draw EU funding (e.g. Structural Funds).

A key change is a renewed focus on mutual learning as opposed to rigidly relying on the quantitative benchmarking indicators as a way of inducing MS to follow the Employment Guidelines and their country-specific recommendations. There has been a growing realisation among both MS and the EC that benchmarking through quantitative indicators has reached its limits/potential in the short-term and that the “naming and shaming” aspect of OMC through peer pressure has gone so far and cannot go farther. The upshot of this has been that both the EC and MS have decided to reinforce the mutual learning aspects of OMC.

In this vein, the peer review process, first launched in 1999 and now renamed “Mutual Learning Programme” is being revamped in order to promote mutual learning and exchange of best practice. This Mutual Learning Programme now consists of three main elements (a detailed summary is provided in Appendix 1, pp.):

- *Thematic Review seminars* focusing on broad policy discussion within the selected theme,
- *Peer Review meetings* focusing on more specific good practices, and
- *National and Joint follow-up activities* enhancing the dissemination of the thematic and peer review results

Structural indicators that monitor the implementation of the Employment Guidelines in MSs were developed by the EMCO's Working Group on Indicators where the EC and MS worked together. These monitoring indicators were reviewed in 2003 in line with the new Employment Guidelines. At the moment there are in total 40 key indicators and 26 context indicators. There is a standardised methodology for each indicator and the relevant information is collected by the National Statistical Offices of MSs. EMCO has to agree every year on the number/type of indicators.

One concern by MS is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to collect all of the information that is necessary for the indicators because National Statistical Offices are under increasingly tighter budgetary constraints with obvious resource implications. An alternative solution for MS could be to submit such information and NAPs on a bi-annual rather than annual basis, not least because of the considerable work that has to be done in the preparation of the relevant documents<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Operation of OMC in the field of Research***

The field of Research provides a contrasting ‘lighter touch’ approach to using the OMC instrument, an approach which emphasises Member State ownership (OMC is an optional enhancement not a burden) and the alignment of European and national level activities:

The application of OMC for research policies was proposed by the Competitiveness Council in March 2003, which recommended in the first instance five areas of application: the 3%

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<sup>5</sup> New MS receive technical assistance on how to undertake the NAPS and how to collect the relevant information. Moreover the country officers of DG Employment and Social Affairs are heavily involved in this preparation. In any case, these new MS have already drawn up JAPs [Joint Action Plans]. To prepare the future Member States to participate in the EU employment co-ordination process after accession, the Commission proposed in 1999 to the accession countries a specific co-operation known as the *JAP process*. Key challenges and policy priorities were identified in a "Joint Assessment of Employment Policy Priorities" (JAP), signed by the Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs and each candidate country. A follow-up process was also initiated to monitor the implementation of these priorities, including the preparation of the future intervention of the European Social Fund (ESF).

objective; human resources and researchers' mobility; science and society; networking and mutual opening of national and joint RTD programmes; and infrastructures of European interest. The Spring European Council 2003 subsequently endorsed the application of OMC to research policies, and specifically to the 3% objective and to human resources.

In April 2003 the Commission identified the in the 3% Action Plan 25 actions for which main competence lies in the MSs where OMC could be applied. The Competitiveness Council in September of that year concluded that the Committee for Scientific and Technical Research (CREST) would be the interface responsible for putting into practice and overseeing the 3% OMC.

CREST regrouped the 25 Actions into 5 different themes<sup>6</sup> and created in November 2003 5 expert groups (EGs) to deal with them. The EGs were due to deliver, for the relevant actions, the following:

- Review the main developments in the MSs
- Identify good/novel practices and obstacles to progress
- Identify indicators for measuring progress
- Contribute to the development of joint/concerted actions among several MSs
- Contribute to the development of EU guidelines, and
- Identify need for other initiatives at Community or national level.

The 3% OMC is a Member State led process where MS participation has taken place on a voluntary basis. Participation ranged from 20 to 26 countries from MSs, candidate countries and associated countries, depending on the EG.

The working method of the EGs has been specific to each group but they all had the following common elements:<sup>7</sup>

- The EGs exchanged information during the meetings with the aim to create awareness of common problems and possible solutions.
- Each EG had a chair who led discussions and prepared, together with a rapporteur, all documents discussed by the EG.
- The Commission supported the process by providing assistance in the organisation of meetings, contributing to discussions, planning the activities of the EG and drafting the reports.
- Each EG defined and agreed on a roadmap and a work plan. Meetings were held every 4-8 weeks.
- Information on national policies was collected on the basis of agreed templates.

Each 3% OMC EG submitted in June 2004 a report to CREST including main trends in the MSs, key issues, and suggestions for action by the MSs. Building on these recommendations CREST adopted in October 2004 a report on the first cycle of the application of the open method of coordination in favour of the Barcelona research objective (3% of GDP). The report included 30 recommendations within 20 different action-areas, as well as orientations for the second cycle of the OMC. This report has been submitted to the Council.

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<sup>6</sup> Public research spending and policy mixes;  
Public research base and its links to industry;  
Fiscal measures and research;  
Intellectual property and research; and  
SME's and research.

(5 Actions related to Human Resources were taken up the Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility (SGHRM), the work of which has also been reported to CREST).

<sup>7</sup> The methodology followed by the SGHRM is different from that of the EGs. There, Commission services provide the chair and the secretariat of the Steering Group. The agenda for 2004 is for the large part determined by ongoing actions as well as by rather specific new actions.

As regards orientations for the second cycle of the OMC, CREST proposes in its report that the future use of OMC should be directed by a 'clear model'. To that end, it proposed to establish a sub-group to define such a model, bearing in mind the agreed principles of OMC 'lite' (that is, with respect to its voluntary nature and minimising the administrative burden on the Member States). This model or 'modus operandi' will be developed before launching a second cycle and will:

- focus on the priorities for evidence-based policy making in Member States;
- enable more detailed examination of those Member State policies which are likely to have the greatest impact on increasing R&D levels;
- facilitate greater use of the expertise of MS policy-makers when assessing policies or policy mixes;
- optimise the engagement of MS policy-makers by balancing their involvement with appropriate central support;
- provide clarity with regard to the requirement for and expected output of any extra groups established; and
- ensure optimal linkage to other related activity of the EU (e.g. innovation trendchart, scoreboards and policy fora) and other international bodies (e.g. OECD).

### ***Operation of OMC in the field of Education***

Education and Culture also has its own interpretation of OMC with real policy co-operation being confined to languages, quality, and mobility. Education and training is an area of great national sensitivity but central to economic growth in the IS and there is a fear of the Community interfering and addressing what are exclusively national competencies<sup>8</sup>. 'League tables' are particularly sensitive, benchmarks are highly complex and potentially controversial and there are gaps in the statistical data. The cost of improved performance is also huge. For example, major structural issues such as early school leavers cannot be solved just by additional spending. Nevertheless where quantitative international comparisons (between the MSs and the US and Japan) have been undertaken the political repercussions have been significant (the most striking example being PISA and Germany).

Something like OMC had its own history in Education pre-Lisbon: as far back as the 1998 Finish Presidency, there had been considerable frustration in the Council concerning the work invested in education, the resolutions that had been passed, yet the lack of concrete progress. It was noted that the annual Employment reports already highlighted the challenges faced by the MSs in education and training. The decision was made to adopt a rolling agenda for education and training and the common themes of mobility, ICT and quality. The rolling agenda implied a more active role for the Commission involving objectives, national reports and Commission synthesis, but no guidelines. Articles 26 and 27 of the Lisbon Conclusions created common European educational objectives for the first time – subsequently the Commission wrote objectives for Stockholm and a Workplan for Barcelona. However, according to our informants, the national education ministries intensely disliked this departure, and within the Commission it was never clear how to respond to (or take advantage of) OMC.

In contrast to the Commission's agenda setting approach, best practice exchange has been less sensitive and more successful. By and large, it is only the smaller MSs who are open to policy borrowing in the field of education – the big countries are uninterested. In education a peer learning approach at the MS level is supported by a parallel approach working directly at the level of networks of schools and universities<sup>9</sup>. Some informants believe that the

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<sup>8</sup> Though the new Treaty Third Pillar does allow for the possibility of groups of MSs practically collaborating.

<sup>9</sup> However the actors on the ground, for example in the universities, may be even more set in their ways than their governments and networks are very much dependent on a minority of enthusiasts and reformers.

Erasmus experience has shown the value of exchange and the group pressures that can be created for reform. However some of the more sceptical informants questioned whether European level activities even where they involved thousands of people can ever have more than a marginal influence given the sheer size of the education and training sectors in Europe, though they do allow that the mobilisation of *networks of networks* (as in Social Inclusion policy, for example) may have more effect.

The social funds do however make a difference and have been central, for example, to the development of post-compulsory education in Portugal, vocational education of Irish students through travelling abroad, and in specific areas, such as eLearning, in Greece. However even if NAPs were politically acceptable in Education, which they are not, Education and Culture does not have the money to 'put behind NAPs' unlike Employment and Social Affairs. Additionally, the Commission itself suffers from the same lack of co-ordination across policy responsibilities as do the MSs (e.g. ICT in schools appears as an issue in Education and Culture, in eEurope, and in Regional Policy). In the view of one Education and Culture informant a single OMC and a single NAP for each country with limited, tailored priorities might be a way forward. But the same informant confirms that in the area of education the MSs do what they can do, not the things they need to do.

For DG Education and Culture, the weakness of OMC is that it is a mechanism to raise awareness and to create pressure, not to do things. For example, the OMC mechanism can help highlight that there is not a policy for life-long-learning in Europe, but what are the implications of this? (*Peer review* is not acceptable to the MSs in general although it might be acceptable for some modest, micro-targets.) Education had to depend on the goodwill of individual MSs and the pressure of US and other comparisons.

Nevertheless indicators and benchmarks could create momentum: the Dutch, for example, speak of 'mutual accountability in the field of education'. The key characteristic of indicators and benchmarks in Education is that *they are collective objectives, common reference marks - European averages, not for individual countries*.<sup>10</sup> And where there is mutual accountability in the Council a role is created for the Commission to promote the process of mutual accountability – not just through indicators and benchmarks but in agenda setting and debate structuring. However although the framing of problems and the creation of agendas for action can be very influential at MS level, according to our informants, this 'won't be acknowledged'. For some in DG Education and Culture this is not a problem, for them it is management-by-objectives (the system is too big, too complex to ever understand how things happen, it is enough to know that (the right) things are happening).

### **OMC and Enterprise**

In contrast to the experience in Education, Enterprise policy is clearly a Community competence and targets and benchmarking have been used in the area of Enterprise for some time<sup>11</sup>, however these are rather specific and focused on particularly micro-issues. They are also voluntary and do not necessarily involve all MSs. For DG Enterprise achieving targets is not an end in itself, rather it is way of promoting policy change. On a broader scale, DG Enterprise is disappointed with the progress towards the Lisbon objectives and thus the contribution the OMC has made, although the support for quantitative targets from the MSs has been better than perhaps expected. This is in part because quantitative targets are both a familiar business management tool and an integral part of the New Public Management where targets are linked to the competition for resources and to creating focus.

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<sup>10</sup> Targets for individual MSs would be impossible under the Treaty anyway.

<sup>11</sup> Currently for example, in the BEST projects; the Charter for SMEs; and the Target Project (which now has 120 quantitative targets in 21 countries with targets for ICT, VET, Businesses, Administrative burdens, eGovernment, Innovation and R&D).

As with Education, in DG Enterprise there is a concern as to where the leadership comes from in the OMC mechanism. Strictly speaking there is no role for Commission initiation under OMC, the Commission must wait for the Council to create an agenda and to ask for Commission support. At worst this reduces the Commission to a mere secretariat to the Council. In Enterprise this is exacerbated by economic responsibilities being so widely spread across the Commission.

## **2.3 Discussion: OMC now and in the future**

### ***The current state of OMC***

Based on our interviews with informants in DGs Enterprise, Education and Culture, Research, Information Society, and Employment and Social Affairs (and consistent with our interviews with informants in all 25 Member States<sup>12</sup> and with academic experts) it appears clear that:

- a) OMC as a method cannot yet be said to be a success or a failure; at least in the sense that OMC simply has not really been fully implemented yet in most policy areas. To date the work of the Commission directed towards OMC has involved taking time and care to recognise and address Member State sensitivities; clarifying the definition of benchmarks, and promoting national activities consisting of that which Member States can easily do or were doing anyway. Peer learning and peer review arrangements have in most cases (with the exception of Employment and Social Affairs) barely got underway.
- b) OMC in practice seems to be about attempting to create collegiate cultures of Member States, and the Commission, and sub- and trans- national actors. These collegiate cultures involve information sharing, problem solving, common objectives, joint action, mutual commitments, and mutual accountability; using a combination of indicators, benchmarks, targets, national action plans, peer learning and peer review.
- c) OMCs allow matters which have been jointly identified as significant problems of public policy for Europe as a whole, which cannot be addressed through the traditional community method, to be addressed in a manner which is hoped (by the Commission and at least some of the Member States) will be systematic and will have cumulative impact.
- d) 'Naming and shaming or faming', through benchmarking mechanisms where currently practiced has tended as much to reinforce game playing and oppositional grand standing as it has to promote desirable behaviour: the prospect of naming and shaming only seems to have effect on behaviour where genuine and practical commitments have been made to common objectives and where individual Member States are reporting on targets that they themselves have set themselves as part of a contribution to achieving broader common objectives.

### ***The future of OMC***

Is there any consensus on OMC and its future at this stage? Experience across the DGs seems to suggest four highly interconnected directions of improvement:

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<sup>12</sup> Though it has to be said that not all of these felt competent or sufficiently informed to comment on OMC in general in their countries and many merely commented in the context of eEurope. See Section 3.1 *Initial Scan* below.



1. Much greater concentration and emphasis on getting the appropriate actual practical processes in place through which substantial, strategic and tailored objectives and commitments are identified, designed and agreed for individual Member States.
2. Putting a real substantive peer review process in place that is based on a peer learning philosophy – that is, is supportive, contextualised and developmental - but that also has some power in terms of critique, sense making, problem solving and recommendation (while avoiding the pitfalls of the types of counterproductive reactions that have been created by the public nature of ‘naming and shaming’).
3. Using indicators and benchmarks that are not so much to name and shame as to aid problem identification and task definition in setting objectives/ commitments/ targets and to underpin the peer review process.
4. Involving and mobilising a wider set of actors from among the social partners, civil society and local and regional governance in the open co-ordination process so as to ensure a strong and real user pull through in policy making and delivery.

### 3. Experiences with OMC/eEurope across the Member States

#### 3.1 Initial Scan of 25 Member States

Our Inception Report (April 2004) lays out the initial conceptualisations and research hypotheses we used in seeking to understand the operation of the OMC mechanism in eEurope. The Inception Report includes the research reporting template that the study team employed in carrying out the initial scan across the 25 Member States.

At the time of the Inception Report the initial research hypotheses in relation to E-Europe, OMC and their implementation across different member states were as follows:

*eEurope hypotheses:*

- 1) That the importance of eEurope is that it has shaped national policy (or not, or vice versa).
- 2) That the difficulty of implementing eEurope stems from
  - i. turbulent environment of implementation (technology and markets),
  - ii. difficulty of focusing attention of politicians and policy makers<sup>13</sup>, or
  - iii. level of activities and influence of industry and other actors.

*OMC hypotheses:*

- 3) That the stronger form of OMC depends on the existence of external demand (political/lobbying power)<sup>14</sup>.
- 4) That the purpose of OMC is to build the vision (and not so much to implement the vision, as the vision does not yet exist). OMC is about defining and constructing the IS, that is, reinventing and defining policy through action.<sup>15</sup>

Hypotheses about the implementation of eEurope and OMC in different MSs:

- 5) IS policy is approached in the MSs in ways which are consistent or inconsistent or irrelevant to EU policy.
- 6) Implementation of eEurope is highly dependant on level of decentralisation (and commitment, dissent, etc.) in the MSs. The cross-cutting coordination needed at EU and national levels is mirrored at the sub-national level.
- 7) Implementation depends on whether eEurope which can make a difference to national circumstances and whether OMC is helping national implementation (and not just benchmarking correlations).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example, our informants suggest that the Netherlands 'is serious about eCommerce' but 'just talking about' eDemocracy, or, until very recently Cyprus was really just thinking about IS, still planning (though they have moved on now to substantive activities in the last six months).

<sup>14</sup> So, to take the Cyprus example again, Government has been carried along by private sector interest and activities and especially by Foreign Direct Investment.

<sup>15</sup> For example, an informant in the Dutch Presidency describes OMC as 'forcing people to develop policies in areas they don't have them'.

<sup>16</sup> For example, on the face of it, it is difficult to envisage how OMC in its present incarnation – with the same targets for every country – can make a significant difference to the more advanced European economies (for whom these targets are not very stretching).

As will be seen below, all of these hypotheses were confirmed by the subsequent research (both initial scanning exercise and case studies). However, as we shall also see, OMC is not necessarily driving European IS policy and OMC is certainly not the only way to deliver IS policy. It is about policies where only OMC is available as a steering mechanism, and, in any case, OMC is not just one tool, it is a multi-functional tool box.

### **3.2 Findings from the initial scanning exercise**

#### ***Summary of findings from the initial scan***

These initial hypotheses were to a large extent confirmed by the initial scan, most notably:

With regard to eEurope: (Hypotheses 1) and 2)) we found that:

- Most countries have their own national IS strategy which to some extent mirrors eEurope and may have been influenced by it (e.g. Sweden or Austria<sup>17</sup>), and in some cases eEurope is the basis of national strategies (e.g. we have been told that a country like Latvia would not have an IS strategy if it were not for eEurope).
- The way countries react to eEurope depends on the degree of development of their Information Society and of their pre-existing IS policy, and on their wider relationship to the Community (receipt of Structural Funds, EU-10 conditions of accession).

If, for example a country is largely dependent on Structural Funds they will think of eEurope in relation to it. On the contrary, if a country is a high performer on the EU comparative studies, they will not think of OMC in relation to funding, and may therefore focus more on the learning aspect of OMC.

- Some of the new MSs (EU 10) see eEurope as a European initiative (e.g. Slovakia), while most of the old MSs (EU 15) say that eEurope is just making explicit things they were doing anyway (e.g. the UK).
- eEurope implementations can be seen as a drive from both internal and/or external policy developments. (For example, Irish promotion of workforce literacy just reflects broader and longer term industrial policy over many years, while in Portugal attention to post-compulsory education literacy is very much an eEurope via ESF phenomenon.)
- Those who are responsible for the implementation of eEurope in MS are being reactive or proactive depending on how advanced the country is in its information policies implementations. (For example, not just, obviously, in Finland but also, say, in Denmark. By contrast catch-up is a huge issue in Estonia, Malta and Slovenia.)

With regard to OMC: (Hypotheses 3) and 4)):

- OMC as a policy instrument is with some exceptions, generally not understood. People do know about benchmarking and peer review, but not

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<sup>17</sup> A Swedish informant described eEurope as 'it's a great motivator, gives us internal leverage', in Austria eEurope was said to have 'put [IS] back on the national agenda'.

that it is part of eEurope and OMC. Most of our informants were not aware of the OMC mechanism *per se* in relation to eEurope, but through discussions it emerged that they know of its content using other names like benchmarking, peer review and exchange of best practice.

- There seems to be two main philosophies represented in relation to benchmarking. One is 'naming and shaming', this understanding has been reported in most of the initial scanning reports and is often associated with rhetorical compliance (for example, in Greece). The other is the idea that benchmarking can be used to facilitate learning across regions or MSs (and is often associated with catch-up situations, e.g. in the Baltic).
- Different people emphasise different aspects of OMC in relation to what sector they represent. In some areas OMC is mainly viewed as peer review and exchange of best practice, but, in other areas, and more commonly, informants mainly relate OMC to benchmarking. Typically in areas which are easy to measure, such as broadband provision, informants usually refer to benchmarking, in other areas which are less easy to influence and measure, such as market developments (for example, ebusiness and ecommerce), peer review and exchange of best practice may be referred to. It is unusual that the informants interviewed can relate to all the different aspects of OMC.
- Peer review and exchange of best practice is usually considered as a more blurred area than benchmarking.

With regard to implementation across different Member States: (Hypotheses 5) to 7)):

- There is huge institutional and market diversity. Typically governments do what they can (e.g. putting schools online) but struggle with more tricky issues (e.g. market reform).
- OMC is not systematically applied to all the policy factors in the IS, i.e. eEurope does not really address:
  - Liberalisation (e.g. market restrictions on broadband in Italy and Ireland)
  - Legislation (e.g. eCommerce)
  - R&D and HE (i.e. their crucial roles in the development of the information economy)
- Issues of centralisation and decentralisation were proven to be relevant for the implementation of eEurope at a Member State (MS) level. In fact the degree of centralisation~decentralisation is critical to the manner in which IS policy is developed and implemented (so, for example, in Belgium, Germany and Spain which are highly decentralised). It should be noted that in most European states public responsibility for training, social inclusion and business support (and hence there IS dimensions) lies at the regional or local level, as often do other key public services (education, healthcare, transport), and thus little can be done on the ground without regional and local leadership and support.

Part of the move towards decentralisation is a move from central direction towards co-ordinative and consulting mechanisms, i.e., from compliance-driven towards co-ordinative governance (e.g. between the centre and the regions in Italy).

However, the effects of decentralisation on the implementation of information society policies and hence eEurope varies greatly from state to state – for example, in Italy regional decentralisation has been the vehicle for roll out on the ground and for vertical and horizontal coordination; in Spain by contrast decentralisation has meant limited interest from central government (vertically) and little consistency or coordination between the activities in the different administrative areas (horizontally).

### ***Further findings of the Initial Scan***

Further, the initial scan indicated that:

- The effectiveness of OMC as an instrument in eEurope depends on the receptivity in the Member State to the mechanisms of OMC. It is important to understand how some operations can be clear on a structural level, but the objectives are not necessarily communicated or filtered down at a regional or local level. OMC is only influential if OMC logics are internalised at the different levels: that is to say, OMC is only influential if coordinative and participative logics are internalised at the different levels of governance in the Member State, e.g., either norms of normative steering or dirigisme, or Structural Fund support is available.
- These findings are consistent with other EU studies on eGovernment – the more centrally coordinated an action is, the easier it is to do. This gives rise to a danger that policy making gives preference to what can be centralised rather than to that which is most important (a much debated IS issue in, for example, the UK today). Certainly, it might be said that as eEurope has evolved there has been some narrowing over the years to a focus on communications and government, that is, those things which are covered by national political competences – but this is not necessarily the way to build the IS, and not necessarily in keeping with the broad view of the involvement of the social actors promulgated at Lisbon.
- OMC has different origins and different meanings in different policy fields (as we have already discussed in the previous section). In some policy fields top down logics (central direction) is important, while in others other coordinative and compliance structures seem to be more effective. In relation to eEurope it is interesting to see how different aspects of eEurope are understood in relation to these two different steering philosophies.
- A lot of the effectiveness of eEurope depends on how indicators are constructed. (An illustration: the proportion of people with broadband access is not a policy, it is a by-product of degree of urbanisation/dispersal. However, the decision to have broadband connections in remote rural regions is a policy. Thus, individual indicators may not be connected to actual policy vehicles. Policies may be embedded in many unusual places and may have very tenuous connections to OMC. We offer more evidence of this in the Section 5: Case Studies below)

### ***Achievements and limitations of the OMC as applied to eEurope***

The extent to which eEurope has actually directly influenced the achievements claimed for it by the Commission and the extent to which the failings noted by the Commission can be overcome (see *Section 2*) were questions for further investigation in our case study work. However the initial scan highlighted a number of matters about OMC as applied to eEurope, which were subsequently confirmed by more detailed case studies:

1. The most important element of the current OMC is the existence of the eEurope strategy in itself. All Member States now have more or less coherent information society (IS) strategies (whatever their limitations in terms of conceptualisation and implementation) and IS strategy has moved up political agendas (with, for example, a number of countries appointing dedicated ministers and agencies). Depending on circumstances, most Member States have defined their own IS strategies along the lines of the eEurope strategy (typically the new Member States) or in some contextualised relationship to eEurope (depending on their state of advancement – for example, some of eEurope's content is less relevant to more advanced countries such as Finland). Almost all Member States have defined Action Plans (or the equivalent) and have defined a leading responsible government department.
2. Almost all our informants in the Member States see the key challenge for the open coordination of IS policy in Europe as the coordination *within* individual Member States.<sup>18</sup> In all Member States there is a complex challenge of co-ordinating multiple governmental departments, organs and agencies at a national and regional level as well as a diverse set of private and third sector actors. What is clear is that there is no one, single, a priori way of effecting this coordination. Each Member State must find its own path based on its specific circumstances. However currently eEurope has little to say and provides limited encouragement – other than some very limited discussion of best practice and some very general (one-size-fits-all) targets – about what needs to be done, what can be done, and how it might be done in individual countries.

(Likewise there are similar challenges effective coordination of, and appropriate priority setting in, information society policy within and across the various policy areas of the EU itself – particularly the relationship between regulation, the content of RTD programmes and the content eEurope as complementary methods of achieving overall IS policy goals; and the relationship between IS policy as developed in DG Information Society and Research policy, Enterprise policy and the uses of the ESF (HRD<sup>19</sup> policy).

(These issues – coordination within MSs; and coordination across EU IS policy and with other policies – are not unconnected: encouraging appropriate policy mixes and delivery mechanisms in individual MSs would be made easier by more consistency between different EU policies as they effect the individual MSs and more realistic prioritisation<sup>20</sup>.)

In the next Section (Section 4: *Case Studies*) we will see some examples of how sub-national and sectoral coordination of IS policies may take place in practice.

3. For the Member States with less advanced economies (and these tend to be correlated with being less highly developed in IS terms) the Structural Funds play a key role in actioning and funding IS strategies related to eEurope. IS policy becomes

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<sup>18</sup> For example:

- governance arrangements for promoting the IS as with most policy areas in Austria are very complex; only France and the UK (as would be expected) have centralised supervision; but powerful inter-ministerial partnerships exist in some other countries (e.g. Germany has an inter-departmental taskforce),
- while, there are more dispersed responsibilities for the IS in more regionalised states, e.g. Belgium, Spain and Germany,

- but, 'scrutinizing' is weak everywhere

<sup>19</sup> Human Resource Development policy – i.e. skills and employment initiatives and programmes

<sup>20</sup> As happened with the annual monitoring of the Accession Agreements of the then Candidate Countries in the run up to membership of the Union.

manifest in the detail of the operational programmes and in the management of the operational programmes (OPs) and in the ways the different actors come together. (So, for example, in Greece the Operational Programme for the Information Society *is* the Greek IS policy.)

4. There would appear to be wide support for the benchmarking process within the OMC mechanism: it provides valuable guidance in establishing national priorities and creates internal (within Member State) political visibility and leverage – both symbolically and in actuality. Generally the targeting approach fits well with the management-by-objectives philosophy of the ‘New Public Management’, hence the emphasis on action plans and the integration with Structural Fund OPs in many Member States. However the benchmarks require constant adjustment and updating (given the ever changing IS context). This ongoing process of definition and revision of benchmarking appears to provide a particular method of taking forward the discussions of what is important and what needs to be co-ordinated. This process has contributed to making the implementation of eEurope more collegiate and less ‘top-down’ as time has gone on.<sup>21</sup>
5. More generally, open coordination is seen by both our informants in the 25 Member States and academic and Commission experts as the only possible way to implement common European policies in the area of IS. However open co-ordination in IS works best when it goes with the grain of existing Member State policy and practice – where the economic case for action is seen as compelling by political actors and where there are available funding streams and mechanisms to take it forward.
6. Nevertheless, however useful the concepts of the common strategy and the practical benchmarks are, the institutional and market realities of the different Member States continue to remain very diverse and each country has to find its own appropriate expression of eEurope. That is, different aspects of eEurope will be (and are) seen as more important in different MSs and different MSs can make different contributions to achieving the overall common Lisbon goals.
7. Given the differences between countries there is unsurprisingly considerable support in the Member States for seeing the exchange of learning and best practice as central to the operation of OMC in the context of eEurope. There are particular opportunities for policy borrowing and emulation between different clusters of Member States. Informants see exchange of learning and best practices as central to the OMC process in eEurope, though actual attention to exchange really only came to the fore with the Dutch Presidency. However, the reality of this exchange of learning and best practice appears to be very limited as yet. As noted from the recent evaluation of the Promise Programme (main funding vehicle for the eEurope 2002 Action Plan) the exchange of best practice as yet lacks an effective support mechanism for dissemination and for embedding of best practice particularly within Member States’ regions. Many informants identify the limited exchange as a real lack, and some see exchange as a necessary precursor to any attempt to introduce guidelines or peer review.
8. In our view – on the basis of the initial scan and reinforced by the subsequent case study findings (see below Section 4) - given the need for IS policies which are tailored to specific, complex Member State circumstances and the challenge of open coordination within those Member States, what still appears to be missing is concrete mechanisms which promote mutual learning; policy refinement and development; and actual action at the level of the individual Member State. That is to say, the

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<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless there is resistance to workloads caused by benchmarking in national statistical agencies.

mechanisms of peer review, recommendations and guidance anticipated in the Lisbon adoption of OMC has not yet been fully realised in the operation of OMC in eEurope and this limits internal leverage within MSs.

The peer review systems used in other policy settings (for example, by the OECD or in EU monetary and fiscal policy) and the approach of the 'benchmarking club' familiar from the private sector could provide the basis of such a mechanism. The introduction of such a peer review system would appear to have most potential for leveraging successful coordination of effective IS strategies within Member States. This implies shifting the focus of 'benchmarking' somewhat from 'naming and shaming', to the application of learning and to addressing opportunities in individual member states for practical progress.

There is clearly a great deal to be learnt from the fully blown systems that exist in the area of Employment and Social Affairs (see above), however more exploration is needed of what aspects of these mechanisms are most relevant to the delivery of Information Society policies. For example, peer review was never envisaged for OMC in eEurope. Further, it is important to distinguish between 'exchange of best practice' (how things work) and 'peer review' (why things work or do not work).

Taking these matters all in all, it cannot be emphasised too much that all our data indicates that internal coordination within the Member State is the key issue for delivering eEurope. (This is particularly well illustrated in the (more extreme) case of Spain where strongly autonomous regional administrations of varying political compositions exhibit a wide variety of IS activities but little inter-regional or regional-national coordination.) Our informants stressed this point over and over again. The challenge for OMC in the IS, in a nutshell, is how to encourage and support internal coordination and thereby promote new institutional reflexes and cultures. As already suggested in the conclusion to the previous section (Section 2: *OMC across different areas of Community policy*) this implies *much greater concentration and emphasis on getting the appropriate actual practical processes in place through which substantial, strategic and tailored objectives and commitments are identified, designed and agreed for individual Member States.*



## **4. eEurope, OMC and Information Society policy in Member States: Synthesis of 10 Case Studies**

In this section we present a thematic synthesis of the findings of case studies on eEurope, OMC and IS policy in 10 MSs. The section begins with a description of the case study methodology and the case studies, and then presents thematically a synthesis of case study findings, with references to individual cases as appropriate. Boxed examples drawn from individual cases are used to illustrate some of the thematic findings. A more detailed description of each individual case study can be found in Appendix II: *Summaries of 10 Member State Case Studies*.

### **4.1 The case study approach**

The case studies were intended to:

- evaluate the impact and effectiveness of benchmarking and the exchange of good practice in meeting eEurope goals,
- help us to understand which measures would be optimal for the purpose of benchmarking and to support the exchange of best practice.
- examine how OMC could be applied and adapted to better support the Lisbon goals and in particular more coherent policy and programme development across all information society initiatives.
- Understand how OMC in eEurope may be related to the operation of OMC in other policy areas in the Member State (noting broader, overarching and overlapping issues).

We sought to understand empirically:

- what is going on in the Member States with OMC and eEurope (hence the scanning exercise) the range of activities across MSs involving OMC and e-Europe,
- whether national action plans are reflected in regional and sector plans,
- whether connections between national and regional or sector plans are rhetorical or real.

A further key purpose of case studies was to build resources (raw materials) for subsequent workshops and the Future Conference (in January and February 2005) including:

- data (examples, illustrations)
- hypotheses / propositions (models)
- scenarios (prospectives/choices)

The principles for case study design were that:

- The case studies map and empirically test 'theories' of intervention.
- Data comes from key informants and be triangulated across key informants (the scanning exercise has allowed us to understand in more detail who the stakeholders and key informants are, who they represent, at what levels and to what purpose – as well as establishing basic access to a reasonable cross section of informants in each case).
- Case studies were conducted with an open, exploratory approach<sup>22</sup>, but
- The required outputs of the case studies were tightly defined in line with the conceptual frameworks outlined in the previous sections and further developed in light of the scanning exercise.

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<sup>22</sup> E.g. Using field questions of the nature of 'please describe your strategy for ...', 'why did you choose your present strategy?', 'how does it work', 'why do you think it will work?', 'what are the barriers to it working?', 'what is actually happening?' etc.

- The case study reporting instrument was highly structured to ensure comparability of data and ease of cross cutting analysis.
- Cases were defined both in terms of policy areas and eEurope themes.
- Case studies allowed us to build models of OMC operation in eEurope which highlight barriers to operation and opportunities for change and development.

*As will be seen below, formal 'theories of intervention' proved very difficult to test in practice as national IS activity proved in all cases to be only loosely associated with eEurope and even less so with the OMC mechanism.*

Nevertheless the Initial Scan helped us better focus the subsequent case study investigations. Questions that we were subsequently particularly concerned with in the case studies were:

- *Who has the leadership of eEurope and OMC in the MS?*
- *How is the leadership manifested in the MS?*
- *What are the links and cooperation between this leadership and other parts of government?*
- *Where does the money come from to implement eEurope objectives?*
- *What is the influence of funding mechanisms?*
- *What are the strategies and tactics used to implement eEurope and OMC in the MS?*
- *Is there any evidence of creative use of implementing eEurope objectives, especially benchmarking? Is the latter applied creatively or mechanically?*
- *Which form of external push towards policy implementation has already happened in the MS?*
- *How are eEurope strategies prepared? How have they evolved?*
- *How have the deliveries mechanisms developed and evolved?*
- *What are the relevant co-ordinating mechanisms?*
- *What is the consistency/coherence between the IS strategy and eEurope Action Plan?*
- *How programmatic is the implementation of the eEurope Action Plan?*

The specific areas and foci of each case is summarised in the table overleaf:

## Case study Countries, Areas and Focus

Country	Area 1	Area 2	Focus
Finland	Transport	New services& applications	Consensus led convergence process <sup>23</sup>
Estonia	Access	eCommerce (SMEs)	Catch-up
Italy	eGovernment	Structural Funds	Regional delivery
Slovakia	eliteracy and expertise	eGovernment	Institutional capacity
Greece	eliteracy and expertise	Research & Student	Structural Funds
Denmark	eHealth	Disability	Leading edge innovation
Ireland	Disability/ inclusion	Health	Leadership/ inclusion
Spain	Youth	Inclusion	Structural Funds
Netherlands	eCommerce (SMEs)	eBusiness (SMEs)	Market delivery
UK	Smartcards	eGovernment	Targeting and benchmarking

In some cases the chosen area for examination proved to be less fertile than expected and this at times led to some shift in focus (for example, from Disability to eHealth in the Irish case study).

All case studies also examined the OMC influence, if any, on overall policy and progress on the eEurope overarching themes:

- access and online connectedness (individuals; homes; schools; businesses; administration)
- eliteracy and expertise (basic literacy; advanced expertise; promoting entrepreneurial activities)
- inclusion (access; trust; cohesion)

The general approach to case studies was:

(a) top level super scan (overarching questions about OMC and eEurope)

- documents
- or 5 informants at national/coordination level
- identify areas of progress/lack of progress

(b) selection of 2 or 3 specific areas for further interview and documentary analysis

In summary, the case study process involves:

- documentation
- up to 9 interviews

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<sup>23</sup> i.e. Normative steering

- testing, validation and sharing of information in workshops<sup>24</sup>

## 4.2 The concordance of the eEurope agenda with Member States' policy actions

### *Main areas of eEurope activity in the Member States*

All the areas of the eEurope action plans are covered to a greater or lesser extent by proactive policy action in the MSs. However, such policy action tends to be concentrated on:

- d) those areas where government can exert direct influence (e.g. eGovernment and eLiteracy in almost all MS except for least economically advanced of the new MSs);
- e) those areas, often more advanced areas, which do not feature as strong eEurope priorities where there was a prior identified pressing national need or interest (e.g. intelligent transport systems in Finland) or;
- f) those areas where individual MSs and/or non-governmental actors were already very active (e.g. Danish eHealth, Slovakian eliteracy)

#### *Example of area of eEurope activity in a Member State*

While Estonia is a leader among developing countries in its ability to support eCommerce, its population and businesses are still slow to avail of these opportunities and actual usage rates do not vary greatly from those of other new Member States. In its development of eCommerce, Estonia benefits from a close relationship with its Nordic neighbours (as it does in many other IS policy areas). The main impact of Europe on Estonian eCommerce had been through the legislative framework on telecommunications that the Community has promoted, before and since Estonia took on the *aquis*.

### *Institutional responsibilities for eEurope*

There is a wide range of forms of institutional arrangements for handling the eEurope co-ordination responsibilities at national government level. These range from: no particular arrangements except for an occasional check that pre-existing national policies remain roughly consistent with eEurope (UK); to designated lead ministries with a cross governmental co-ordinative role (Ireland); to situations where the eEurope vision, via the Structural Fund OP delivery mechanism, is the basis of state policy (Greece).

However, perhaps, a more significant issue is the degree to which IS policies are central MS socio-economic development policies – and here the variety is striking: for example, in the UK IS policy is central to a range of government policy (not least, Modernising Government, reform of the health system, life-long-learning). The Netherlands, Denmark and, of course, Finland are little different. Typically, in these countries IS policy is so pervasive in general government policy that responsibilities are diffuse and widely shared. This diffuseness tends to be reinforced in the Nordic countries at least by a strongly consensual culture of policy development and implementation.

<sup>24</sup> Case study interlocutors and the workshop participants will be the same individuals. They include those who conceptualise policy and policy delivery and those who deliver at national, regional and sectoral levels. They are primarily national actors who have some European relatedness and may come to a workshop for a variety of reasons. These include: to confront specific difficulties they experience, to learn how things are 'made happen' in other countries, to understand and influence European policy, to compare how things happen in different policy areas, to learn how to reconcile (real, existing) national IS policies with (rhetorical) EU policies, to create some EU added value, sector by sector, in areas of high consensus, to learn from each other and take action without simply being agents of Brussels.

*An example of a country where IS is central to public policy*

There are two distinctive characteristics of Finnish information society policy development. Firstly, a rather strong national consensus has prevailed on the objectives between the public and private actors. A wide collection of public, private and third sector actors have been represented in most of the decisive preparatory task forces and working groups. Secondly, there has been a common understanding between the representatives of the central government and regional and local actors on the necessary measures to be taken. Overall, a consensus has been attained across both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

In a further group of countries, responsibilities are more obviously concentrated on a specific node of influence – in Ireland the key governmental committee is chaired by the Prime Minister (and the co-ordinative function is located in the PM's office); in Italy a rather complex and sophisticated co-ordinating mechanism shares the leadership responsibility between the regions and central government; while in Spain the Ministry of Industry coordinates across central government. Nevertheless, and at the same time, all these countries are encountering challenges where, for politico-economic reasons, it is extremely difficult to make practical progress (e.g. broadband roll out and take up remains an issue in Ireland, Italy and Spain, but for very different reasons in each case<sup>25</sup>).

In other countries such as Estonia, Greece and Slovakia, IS policy is slightly less central to government activities both because of the countries stage of development and hence the relative relevance of the IS agenda, and because of simple constraints of capacity and competing priorities. However the differences between these countries are much more striking than this similarity: Estonia is heavily influenced by and engaged with IS developments in the Nordic countries. Greece largely handles IS matters as part of a multi-faceted, well established, Structural Fund led socio-economic development process, while Slovakia struggles to master much more basic socio-economic challenges than the IS. In all these MSs, national circumstances almost entirely determine where responsibility for IS policy lies, its centrality and the account taken of the eEurope agenda if any.

Strikingly, in these MSs, where there are units in government with explicit eEurope responsibilities (as opposed to IS responsibilities), typically they perceive themselves and are perceived by others in and out of government as relatively powerless in the greater scheme of things.<sup>26</sup>

***Delivery mechanisms for eEurope***

It is difficult to say that there are any actual delivery mechanisms for eEurope in the MSs *other than the Structural Fund OPs*. We have certainly failed to identify any (despite talking to scores of informants and reviewing hundreds of documents). What there is in the MSs is a complex variety of national mechanisms for delivering IS policy which may or (more likely) may not have some connection or alignment to the eEurope agenda.

*Example: in Greece the OPIS is the main instrument of delivering the government's IS strategy*

The Greek Operational Programme for the Information Society (OPIS) is the main instrument for realising the government's IS strategy and achieving the targets set by eEurope. It represents a major innovation since it is a horizontal programme cutting across departments and as such aiming to promote the IS in a coherent and integrated manner. It involves (i) an

<sup>25</sup> National politics in Italy; market structure in Ireland; and indifference among the population in Spain.

<sup>26</sup> This was reported from several countries which for reasons of confidentiality we do not name here.

overall co-ordination by the Ministries of National Economy and Interior/Public Administration/Decentralisation; (ii) decentralised implementation and supporting mechanisms; and (iii) a new public-private partnership. The OPIS Managing Authority act as the 'umbrella' for the management of all actions funded under this OP. The OPIS total budget is approximately 7% of the whole Greek CSF.

### ***The delivery and steering of Information Society policies in the Member States***

As noted above, almost all the MSs are very active in the area of IS policy. However these activities are very loosely related to eEurope and highly related to individual MS needs, situations and opportunities. Most MSs visited in our ten case studies have a global action plan for the IS, the remainder (UK, Ireland) have multiple plans addressing different dimensions of IS. Where global action plans exist, sometimes eEurope was the catalyst for their formal production (though usually this was in fact merely the revision of pre-existing national plans, as, e.g., in Spain and Denmark). Far less often (Greece, Estonia) did eEurope have any practical impact on their content.

#### ***An example of various steering arrangements for information society activities***

In Spain the various autonomous regions take quite different approaches and have quite different priorities for IS activities. This variety is heightened by party political differences between some regional administrations and central government. There is little consensus on what is important and hence what needs to be done, perhaps reflecting weak consumer and private sector interest in key aspects of the IS (internet, ecommerce).

### ***Presence and main characteristics of national/local strategy in the area of Information Society***

In the individual MSs the national Action Plan(s) take a wide variety of forms: from general orientations and objectives; to specific funded programmes of action; to 'recommendations' which have virtually the significance of legislation (on web standards in the public sector in the Netherlands, for example).

Often significant IS developments and decisions will not be reflected in any national IS plan nor be related to eEurope (for example, the hundreds of millions of Euros spent in the UK via a variety of programme vehicles on providing free neighbourhood internet access points) or national action plans will concentrate on newly emergent issues and opportunities which barely feature in the eEurope agenda (for example, advanced services and applications in Finland).

#### ***Example of the predominance of the domestic policy milieu***

While Finland has participated extensively in European R&D actions concerned with intelligent transport systems, intelligent transport system policy has mostly evolved bottom-up and been quite unconnected with broader eEurope agendas. This is typical of most advanced services areas in Finland, where activities are normally consistent with Community concepts and standards *where they exist* but where most activities emerge from the domestic policy milieu.

Typically, general orientations and objectives are translated into, negotiated with, or coordinated with regional or municipal activities depending on the administrative structures and division of labour in the individual state. Where partnership is the dominant mode of

policy development and/or delivery in the MS (as it typically is in Ireland, Finland, and Denmark) or where the regions are particularly strong (in a federal state such as Spain) delivery of a centrally determined IS policy may be out of the question anyway and more consensus-driven coordination called for – and any simple transmission of objectives from a European level to MSs and on to ‘the ground’ will be equally out of the question or, at least, will be where there is no Structural Fund OP<sup>27</sup>.

Obviously any coordination with or encouragement of changes in private or third sector behaviour can usually only be achieved on a largely voluntary basis though aided by various carrots (subsidies) and sticks (regulation).

***Main actors involved in IS policy (national and local level: government actors; non-governmental actors; and other actors)***

Formal IS policy in the MSs tends to be dominated by governmental actors at both a central and (to a greater or lesser extent) regional/local level. However where the ICT industry is a key national player (Finland) or the social partners are at the centre of the policy making process (Ireland), government IS policy will be driven by a public-private consensus. Nevertheless much MS policy is dominated by both a concentration on what government can do (eGovernment, eHealth, eLearning) and a struggle to effectively engage the broad private sector (eCommerce in the Netherlands, eLiteracy in Spain, eAccess in Ireland, and so on).

Strikingly also, a number of MS governments (e.g. Denmark, The Netherlands) are struggling more with establishing their own independent competence and capacity in ICT matters than with getting closer to the ICT industry (that is, with separating themselves out from their ICT consultants, reducing their dependency and trying not to pay repeatedly for the same development work).

*IS developments on the ground are by contrast largely private sector driven, reflect and react to global trends, and, while they may be enabled or disabled on the margin by governmental action, their dynamics are largely independent of government.* Indeed the difficulties that government has experienced in trying to promote more interest in IS technologies among the private sector is a hallmark of a number of our case studies (Netherlands, Spain, Estonia). The economic impact that government could have on IS developments through increased spending on Higher Education or RTD, as required by Lisbon and advocated by, among others, the Sapir Report, is, of course another matter.

In fact government can have an influence on ICT usage through the development of ‘killer content’ such as the BCC website in the UK, or the Spanish Public Employment Service’s development of an electronic document exchange service for employers and job seekers; or through subsidised access (free public access points to the internet are now common in many countries) and training (often in the form of the ECDL and supported by the ESF), though these two latter often tend to be aimed at specific (often disadvantaged) target groups and not at the population as a whole. (We can only speculate what, for example, would be the effect on the Spanish public’s seeming disinterest in IS technologies of a coordinated programme of content development, free local internet access and ICT training, but our case study suggests that innovative action – perhaps through new applications of DiTV or mobile telephony – is needed if a step change from current low usage levels is to be achieved.)

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<sup>27</sup> Though the UK and France, if they were willing, do retain such a dirigisme capacity.

*Example: the role of different actors in the emergence of an IS policy*

The promotion of eLiteracy in Slovakia and in particular the attempt to prepare young people for the information age was born largely from NGO activity. However the NGO vision would not have been able to become a reality without the support of the state – both through spending and compulsion – and the involvement of private companies. It is interesting to trace the government's preparedness to become involved – despite a lack of higher level political interest, and many other competing socio-economic challenges – to the pre-accession negotiations which considered the IS one element of the *acquis communautaire*. It is also interesting to see how best practice around Europe was taken as a model and how there has been co-operation with the UK and the Czech Republic on content issues, while conceptual and pedagogical approaches have attempted to be consistent with European strategies and norms. The eEurope benchmarking exercise has been used to push Slovakia into building the base conditions for the Information Society in the country even if has not been enough to strongly influence the national policy agenda on IS.

### **4.3 eEurope and IS policy in the Member States**

So, to summarise, eEurope in the MSs is characterised by general objectives, orientations and implicit alignments at a national level, usually encapsulated in a formal national plan, and largely along the lines of existing national policies and priorities; and lightly coordinated by ministries or other structures with designated responsibility but little or no powers.

Notwithstanding this, our case studies show that IS policy – quite apart from eEurope – continues to be viewed as having central economic importance in most economically advanced MSs and continues to receive considerable and appropriate political attention and priority in most MSs. And, furthermore, that IS policy development is a growing or continuing priority in the less economically advanced states (Greece, Estonia, Slovakia) and regions (of Spain, of the UK, of Ireland, and of Italy).

'Catch-up' is an important motif in less economically advanced states and provides an impetus for policy borrowing.

*Example: policy development supported by policy borrowing*

In Greece, for all OPIS-related streams of work there has been a strong emphasis on learning, sharing best practice and exchanging information, through the setting up of working groups by sector. The most prominent example of this type of national consultation mechanism is the eBusiness Forum. The OPIS itself was subject to ex-ante evaluation including a full SWOT analysis.

### **Substantive content of Member States IS policies and their relationship to eEurope**

Our case studies suggest that the presence or absence of particular eEurope IS policy elements in individual MSs is usually explained by sound reasons related to national realities. In other words, where MSs *are* fully implementing the eEurope agenda it is for reasons extraneous to eEurope, and where they *are not* implementing elements of the eEurope agenda, it is usually because it is not appropriate, not possible or not enough of a priority. Substantive examples of what we are referring to would include:

- The Danish commitment to eHealth and the UK commitment to eGovernment (both already mentioned above).



- Slovakian activities in eliteracy (driven by non-governmental actors) and Greek activities in eliteracy (driven by a wider commitment to developing the education and training system).
- Finnish activities in a variety of advanced activities hardly addressed by eEurope (e.g. Transport).
- Barriers to fully rolling out broadband in Italy, Ireland and Spain (mentioned above).
- The relative low priority given to e-services for the disabled in Ireland compared to the necessary prioritization of ensuring the provision of basic services.
- The lack of interest among SMEs in eCommerce (other than those already doing it) in both (the otherwise utterly contrasting countries of) The Netherlands and Slovakia.

Hence, while the formal National Action Plan documents contain many similar elements across the MSs and are in accordance with the eEurope agenda, the balance of actual activity varies enormously. Looked at from this perspective – the perspective of the balance of actual substantive activity – it would be hard to determine that, say, Irish and Finish activity sets, or UK and Italian activity sets, derived from the same master agenda. Indeed, our national informants also consistently view the eEurope agenda to be at such a level of generality that it allows them and others complete freedom to pick and choose and never requires them to do anything specifically.

*Example of a substantive area of MS IS policy and its relationship to eEurope*

In Ireland eHealth is not strongly on the political agenda, and, in so far as it is, this relates to accountability around the use of eHealth based services rather than their development. While in the past there has been a considerable amount of disaggregated activity in eHealth, this lacked any significant co-ordination or policy coherence and cohesion at national level. Though there have been pockets of European partnership working, these have been on a project by project basis.

The current limited number of national eHealth activities/actions are aligned and congruent with eEurope (as are the majority of IS policy areas) but there is no evidence that the operation of OMC in eEurope has influenced the current approach to eHealth in Ireland.

***Member State views of the key issues for eEurope and the Information Society in Europe***

By and large national actors do not think first and foremost in terms of the IS in Europe. The more economically advanced MSs think of the global situation among the world's advanced economies and their position within it, and pay much attention to what is going on in the non-European OECD countries.

Within Europe, the economically advanced economy MSs look to their traditional 'policy borrowing' counterparts (e.g. Netherlands to UK and vice versa) and everybody looks to the Nordic countries (especially Finland). The less advanced MSs and regions do look to the more advanced MSs, though both groups think of this in terms of 'catching-up' with the rest of Europe and helping others to catch-up.

Indeed it was striking how little our informants – including both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chamber informants – had to say about what 'Europe' (as opposed to individual MSs) needed to do in IS terms. Although it is true, as would be expected, that 1<sup>st</sup> Chamber members tended to be much more cautious about the scope for possible action than 2<sup>nd</sup> Chamber members.

Most informants also stressed the importance of extra-European benchmarks (as the boxed case study example indicates below). When we examine benchmarking below, one of the issues will be precisely what to benchmark: individual MSs against a European standard? or Europe as a whole against the US, Japan and other advanced economies?

*An example of national benchmarking*

The Danish Digital Taskforce has chosen the OECD as their international source for the IS for a number of reasons: first, Denmark is one of the best performing countries on ICT in Europe and they feel they have to look beyond Europe towards the US, Canada, Japan and Korea if they are to remain a high performer; second, they want to concentrate on areas which are possible to implement and can be measured – they are particularly interested in quality not just quantity; third, the eEurope agenda is considered to be too wide and they have decided not to concentrate on areas such as eDemocracy, eGovernance and the digital divide; fourth, the Digital Taskforce is based at the Ministry of Finance – other ministries though contributors to the Digital Taskforce also have their own agendas and initiatives.

***Views on the ‘Open Method of Co-ordination’ in eEurope per se***

Awareness and understanding of the OMC per se is low among our informants. For most it represents very new, largely untried concept. In so far as there is any consensus view it is that an ‘OMC’ type approach is appropriate for IS policy (at least in the absence of any obvious alternatives). Among the minority of informants who do have a view on OMC as a mechanism, it is felt that benchmarking, though it has many limitations, is on the whole useful, but not central nor particularly important to the development or delivery of IS policy. Our informants also thought that best practice exchange is limited, largely undeveloped and of unknown potential added value; and that there may be a role for more substantial direction from the European level (though, it must be understood, for other Member States and for other parts of their own state, and not themselves, of course).<sup>28</sup>

Many of the MSs examined in the case studies (Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Netherlands, Ireland and Italy) already have national equivalents of OMC operating in their country in the sense of ‘consensus led convergence processes’, while the UK makes great use of benchmarks, indicators and ‘naming and shaming’ across all areas of public policy.

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<sup>28</sup> It might also be interesting to add that some of our case study informants saw their interview as a chance to ‘do OMC’ in a sense, they saw this study as a channel of communication and would say ‘tell the Commission this, tell the Commission [that]’.

#### *Example of a consensus led convergence process*

In Italy the achievement to date in IS policy has been to build consensus in the formulation and implementation of policies between the national and local levels. International comparisons such as the Commission's Innovation Scorecard and through them the identification of specific Italian weaknesses have helped underpin the development of this consensus. The commitment to a regional approach (and the use of the Structural Fund mechanism in achieving this through regional OPs for those IS aspects eligible for Structural Funds); has been central: regional plans have explicitly set out regional objectives – based on the specific needs and characteristics of the territory - within a framework of the national plan and eEurope. A network of Regional Research Centres have helped draw together the different actors and to maintain a shared vision.

Nevertheless all MSs (and particularly Greece, Spain and Slovakia) still struggle to effect convergence across different ministries, between different levels of governance, and between the public and private sector, whether through consensus or more top-down approaches.

In the following sub-section we examine the actual and potential role of the OMC in IS policy development in the Member States.

#### **4.4 IS policy development and the role of the OMC in the Member States**

##### ***The role of Europe and of European policies for the development of the Information Society in Member States, and specifically in relation to eEurope***

As related in the previous chapter, our 25 MSs Initial Survey indicated that it was the very existence of the eEurope agenda which had most impact on the MSs. Our case studies confirm that in most MSs examined eEurope provided at least some reinforcement for existing IS policies: in some of these MSs eEurope helped national policy become more coherent and/or comprehensive; while in a few MSs (the less economically advanced) eEurope actually helped frame national policy or was catalytic in providing an impetus or push towards national IS policy development.

But the case studies also revealed in more detail the very limited contribution the eEurope OMC made in practice to helping MSs with:

*Exchanging best practice, learning and policy borrowing:* our case study informants made clear that as actors in their MSs they are already part of a complex global web of international exchanges and personal and institutional networks – conferences, visits, networks, professional journals, electronic communities, and so on – a web in which formal eEurope best practice exchange activities could only ever play a very small part.

*Posing questions and problem solving:* the eEurope agenda, has not required MSs to look beyond aggregate performance and (re-) examine the effectiveness of their activation measures<sup>29</sup>, it does not pose substantive questions nor suggest or draw attention to possible solutions to problems (though peer exchange might to some extent contribute to this in the future).

<sup>29</sup> (O'Donnell, R. & Moss, B., 2002: 30) *Ireland: the very idea of an open method of coordination*. Workshop paper presented at the European University Institute (Florence).

*Focusing on important actions:* as already said earlier, eEurope does not require MSs to focus on particular, measurable actions that might be particularly important to that countries overall IS performance and *might be important to overall European performance*.

However, as we will see below, the eEurope benchmarks have helped focus national policy makers' minds, at least initially, and that the 'faming' dimension of the benchmarking exercise is at least as an important influence on policy makers, if not a more important influence, than 'shaming'.

### ***Elements of OMC and the effectiveness of eEurope***

In our case study design we initially set out to look at whether different elements (mechanisms) of OMC in eEurope – the common agenda, the benchmarking exercise, sharing of best practice – had a differential effect in different areas of the eEurope agenda - access/online connectedness, eliteracy/expertise/entrepreneurship, inclusion, and on the 10 sub-areas and 3 cross cutting themes. We also wished to explore whether other possible OMC elements – guidelines, national action plans (NAPs), peer review, recommendations - might have any differential effects if introduced.

In practice, as explained above, it was difficult to discern any area specific effects at MS level of specific OMC elements under eEurope.

Nevertheless, the case studies have allowed us to better understand the general effects of the eEurope OMC instrument:

*The common agenda:* we have already noted the considerable impact of simply having a common eEurope agenda. However, most of our informants noted how fast moving and dynamic the IS scene is and how agendas and action plans need to continuously evolve and adapt to developments on the ground and globally. For this reason one would have to be sceptical whether any use of *guidelines* or *NAPs* as formal mechanisms would be of use in the arena of the IS (other than perhaps in the area of the content and longer term funding of HE and R&D).

*Benchmarking:* the case studies indicate that the benchmarking exercise was, at least initially, very useful politically at a national level. Benchmarking did draw attention to weaknesses and helped mobilise resources to address important issues. However many informants stress that, given how dynamic the situation is, for benchmarks to be useful 'the right indicators' must be deployed.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, once the benchmarking 'league tables' were, as it were, established, politicians only tended to react to changes in their country's relative position.<sup>31</sup>

The case studies also confirmed what the initial scanning exercise had already indicated, that the impact and credibility of the benchmarking exercise depended significantly on national political and bureaucratic culture, and that while 'faming' could indeed have positive impact, 'naming and shaming' just as often led to perverse effects.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, naming and shaming has led to a variety of responses including:

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<sup>30</sup> For example, levels of broadband connectivity may be more about geography than policy.

<sup>31</sup> One Danish civil servant reported that 'our ministers love to go to the media and say that Denmark is number 1 in an area'. A Dutch civil servant reported that if the Netherlands did worse in an area from the previous year Ministers were quick to ask why and to approve remedial action.

<sup>32</sup> A well positioned informant in one Member State openly admitted to 'fiddling the data', and pointed out that his state had submitted misleading data in relation to even more important matters as well (EMU).

- cheating, fighting back (attacking 'Brussels' through the media), ignoring,
- acceleration or reinforcement of prior agreed actions (but this is impossible to attribute directly).

These differential reactions to benchmarking are of great importance as there is such a great deal of unevenness in MS performances and as – outside an obvious MS group of persistent laggards – there are no clear leaders and laggards in general<sup>33</sup> just some MSs who are very strong in some respects but not in others.

*Best practice exchange:* we have already noted that best practice exchange under eEurope is a quite marginal activity, though it has had some limited effects<sup>34</sup>. The case studies confirmed that best practice exchange was unlikely to effect actual behaviour unless linked much more explicitly to *peer review*, problem solving and actual *recommendations*.

### ***Reinforcing the European role in the steering of information society policies***

In the final stages of this study – the national workshops and Future Search Conference – we together with some of the actors will be looking at what ways, if any, the European role in steering information society policies might be reinforced. Nevertheless, the case study findings recounted above have already given us some indications of the possibilities:

*Positive reinforcement:* smaller MSs with traditions of successful policy borrowing (like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Ireland); countries who like being first and worry about being left behind (UK, Denmark, Netherlands, Finland); countries who are politically committed to catch-up as a core economic strategy (Estonia, Ireland); and countries with a productive relationship to existing OECD peer review mechanisms; all seem to respond to some extent to positive reinforcement through 'naming and faming or shaming' and peer exchange in the IS arena, and may also react well to peer review and specific recommendations. There may also be an opportunity here, as one informant put it, 'for countries that do well to do better'.

*Exchange of practice:* as already noted, best practice exchange has been pretty limited in eEurope. Experience from elsewhere<sup>35</sup> suggests that for best practice exchange to be effective it needs to be both *focused*<sup>36</sup> and *frank*<sup>37</sup>, as well as supportive and fairly informal. Peer learning/exchange of best practice has had some limited effects. Suggestions from case study informants to increase effectiveness have included:

- more conferences with different kinds of themes,
- conferences to include area experts with high-level IT experts,
- more recognition for informal and nationally specific mechanisms for peer learning, and
- more use of 'official recognition' (e.g. best practice awards).

*Peer review:* while, as noted above, the concept of the Open Method of Coordination was not widely understood by our informants (though, unlike in the initial survey, most of our case study informants had heard of it and had some notion of its meaning), the concept of peer review (often know as 'the OECD method') was familiar, though not

<sup>33</sup> Always with the exception of Finland

<sup>34</sup> For example on Greek broadband policy and on the Estonian eCommerce strategy.

<sup>35</sup> Evaluation of the Programme to promote cooperation between the Member States to combat social exclusion.

<sup>36</sup> Which implies careful preparation.

<sup>37</sup> Which implies 'Chatham House rules'.

always seen as appropriate (not least because the OECD already holds this role). Though widely seen as politically sensitive in practice, peer review is also seen as a normal and useful part of public policy development if used sensitively but seriously.

*Specific agreed recommendations on concrete actions:* if advanced states are to do better and less advanced states to catch-up; if enhancing the overall performance of the whole European IS space is an objective not just bringing the performance of individual MSs up to scratch; then specific agreements and recommendations on limited numbers of concrete actions, which address both national and European needs and agendas, will be more important than one-size-fits-all benchmarks.

## 4.5 Conclusions from the case studies

Taking the foregoing into account, a number of specific conclusions can be drawn from these case studies:

- xii. The eEurope agenda has shaped national policies to some extent and in various ways.
- xiii. eEurope's main effect is through its very existence and not through any of the specific eEurope OMC mechanisms.
- xiv. Actual implementation of IS policy and any of the elements of eEurope is completely dependent on national circumstances and structures.
- xv. The difficulty of implementing the eEurope agenda stems from the variety of different national contexts and challenges and thus the lack of specific relevance or priority of some elements of eEurope to national actors.
- xvi. The OMC mechanism in eEurope (benchmarking, exchange of best practice) has had little effect except where it is in tune with national ways of doing things and pre-existing practices.
- xvii. Where OMC has helped frame or reinforce policy objectives and orientations, it has not helped to define actual policy, nor has it helped to define actions to be taken.
- xviii. While MS prefer their IS policy to be defined as consistent with eEurope where possible, the actual content of IS policy is largely determined regardless of European policy.
- xix. The eEurope OMC mainly has a substantive effect on MS IS policies where:
  - there is a policy vacuum,
  - areas of action are specifically and narrowly targeted,
  - the eEurope OMC agenda and mechanisms complement other European influences – above all Structural Funds, or
  - there is limited coordination between levels and areas, and there is a recognised need for it.
- xx. 'Naming and shaming' has had limited effect on MS behaviour – in part because it does not fit well with some national political cultures but in any case because targets are too general and do not obviously link with specific actions. 'Faming', or positive reinforcement, may perhaps have had a little more effect.

- xxi. The general effects of the current elements of the eEurope OMC instrument are limited but additional new elements might help create greater effects.
- xxii. An eEurope OMC is only worth having if it is continuously developed and adapted, and carefully aligned in its emphasis with other policy areas (regulation, RTD, Structural Funds) and the broader Lisbon strategy.

However these specific findings need to be understood in the broader context of all the findings of this study as a whole. To this we turn in the concluding section overleaf.

## **5. Overall conclusions from the study as a whole and recommendations: how the OMC in eEurope worked and how it might be made more effective in the context of i2010**

### **5.1 Study Conclusions**

#### ***Reflections on the nature of OMC as an instrument and its role in eEurope and EU IS policy***

Understandings of OMC are part of the debate about the building of Europe. There are two broadly held views of OMC – either (1) something to use when there is a desire for common action but strong political objections to legislation, or (2) something that achieves results that legislation cannot achieve. Is OMC in eEurope a compromise or a fad or a first stage towards legislation? While the use of OMC (instead of legislation or other instruments) is controversial in some policy areas (as we have seen in Section 3: OMC across different areas of Community policy), there is a consensus that the open method of coordination is usually the *only* way to implement common policies in many areas of European IS development.

Generally, across different European policy areas, we find that the elaboration of the different possible elements of the OMC mechanism is a consequence of the degree of European policy development, not the cause. Nevertheless OMC in eEurope is not just inspired by the Lisbon process but it marks a genuinely new attempt to define this process in areas not susceptible to central/legislative control. Has our study shown that OMC can change institutional, individual or market behaviour? Under OMC in eEurope we have seen that IS policies are implemented according to the usual, individual MS way of doing things or failing to do things (by legislation, dirigisme, consensus led coordination, or benign neglect) and thus the impact of eEurope OMC on the ground depends on its ability to concretely influence MS policy development and policy delivery processes.

In some countries eEurope is a natural extension of existing IS policies, in other countries eEurope is the basis of IS policies, in yet again others eEurope is not very relevant to IS policy (though key domestic policies may have been re-badged as ‘eEurope’, for example, eGovernment in Germany). It is therefore important to distinguish between these MSs where: eEurope is the basis of national policy; eEurope reinforces national policy; eEurope is a natural extension of national policy, or eEurope not very relevant to national policy.

The mechanisms of OMC (benchmarking, exchange of best practice - its ‘organisational technology’) are one thing. Strategic use of multi-level governance is another: the point of European cooperation is for MSs to achieve goals that they cannot achieve by themselves – the goals do not have to be the same but the possibility has to be real. Thus, the key question is ‘how can Europe add value to national policies’ or ‘how can Europe (as a collectivity) get individual MS to do things that are both in their own interest and in the interest of the collectivity’ - in a situation where actors are dispersed and semi-autonomous and where is no one right way to go about things.

The current juncture is a particularly testing one for OMC in eEurope: eEurope has moved on from getting Europe online (from readiness to intensity to impact). Europe is now online and the next stages of the eEurope action plan are more difficult to achieve, more nebulous and harder to sell (i.e. it is harder to change behaviour than to provide infrastructure, as the Dutch, for example, have learnt with eBusiness). Nonetheless, potentially OMC in eEurope continues to allow the MSs to manage uncertainty; develop consensus on general directions, and make difference productive.



In IS policy, as in other policy areas, the EU, the national, and the sub-national levels all interact with each other along a continuum that involves feedback–reinforcement–change–innovation. Full implementation of the eEurope agenda at the Member State level (all elements present; recognised as such; and actually implemented) depends on the existence of compelling circumstances (political and economic).

We have seen that eEurope has affected national policies but not through the mechanisms of OMC *per se*. One question then is, is it worth having an eEurope/EU IS strategy? Most of our informants in this study would answer: ‘probably yes as long as it continuously evolves and adapts’. Another question is, is it worth having an OMC in eEurope/EU IS strategy? And on the basis of the findings of this study, it could be said that having an eEurope strategy seems to be enough and it is not clear what the OMC is adding beyond the having of a common strategy in itself.

However, OMC in eEurope currently does not include guidelines, national recommendations, peer review, or NAPs. As we have seen, many of our informants consider that:

- National recommendations could make a difference – they are more pointed than general benchmarking and can have real effect on new Member States, Structural Fund countries, (and even ‘advanced’ Member States who are resting on their laurels).
- Peer review has real benefits if it is part of peer learning in the sense of problem solving and tied to recommendations and subsequent monitoring.
- NAPs (and for that matter Guidelines) may not be worth having due to the swift changeability of circumstances.

It remains a puzzle why there has been no convergence across member states under eEurope - i.e. although all MSs show enhancements in eEurope roll out, the gap between them remains proportionately the same. There seem to be two reasons for this: first, OMC as it operates in eEurope does not require or necessarily lead to specific actions, thus, on the face of it, there is no reason why convergence should be encouraged. Second, national divergences are rooted in real national political and structural differences – convergence may be both difficult and undesirable, that is, convergence may not be appropriate given different contexts. It would seem that it is the overall EU benchmark vis-à-vis US, Japan and other OECD countries that is more significant and should be the focus of attention.

The lack of convergence is also a reflection of a weakness in the benchmarking logics: once benchmarking ‘league tables’ are established there is little subsequent incentive to do more than maintain your position in the table. Also benchmarks may also simply reflect broader geographical, income or industrial realities. Could it be that all MS are working equally hard and so progressing proportionately? Certainly not. Some countries are very serious about IS policy, others are at least to some extent just going through the motions, for still others it really is not that important compared with other things.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on how a change in focus from an eEurope OMC to an EU IS OMC might bring new possibilities into view. The OMC is just one of the instruments available to EU IS policy (the key others of course being regulation and spending on RTD, as well as infrastructure, business development, and human resource development spending via the ERDF and ESF). It must almost inevitably be the case that some areas of IS policy can be more effectively addressed by these other instruments, perhaps allowing the agenda addressed by the OMC to become somewhat more targeted in its general intent as well as in its country specifics.

### **Overall conclusions for the eEurope/OMC study as a whole**

This study has established that the impact of eEurope OMC on the ground depends on its ability

to concretely influence MS policy development and policy delivery processes; and

to persuade individual MSs to do things that are both in their own interest and in the interest of the collectivity

in a situation where the actors on the ground are dispersed and semi-autonomous and where is no one right way to go about things.

Thus, we can offer the following conclusions from our empirical work and our discussions with the actors:

- j) That OMC makes most sense (has most to offer) when applied to the whole of IS policy agenda/arena (and related policy areas) and not just limited to eEurope.
- k) That as *currently* conceived the eEurope OMC has probably already had its main effects and there will be diminishing returns to successive rounds of agenda setting and target setting.
- l) That the use of targets and indicators ('naming, shaming and faming') may well have accelerated progress in and across the Member States but it did not reduce the gap between Member States (nor as presently constituted is it likely to).
- m) That the whole area of exchange of best practice needs further attention if it is to have a real impact on MS policy performance: to make a real contribution best practice exchange has to help mobilise and galvanise the whole range of actors at the sub-national and sectoral level whose cooperation and enthusiasm is needed to make the eEurope agenda happen.
- n) That it is hard to see how OMC will materially impact on (add value to) the achievement of the Lisbon Agenda in the area of IS, without some mechanism for agreeing specific concrete actions with individual MSs.
- o) That such a mechanism for agreeing concrete actions should focus as much on the organisation of the implementation of policies (particularly at the sub-national and sectoral levels) and the mobilisation and involvement of wider stakeholders as on policies/actions *per se*.
- p) That appropriate policies and the arrangements for their implementation will vary greatly in their specifics from country to country, and that different MSs can and must contribute in quite different ways and in different timescales to the achievement of collective European goals.
- q) That the OMC be more consciously deployed in specific areas as one of a number of complementary instruments (which also include regulation, RTD spending, and spending on infrastructure, business support and training) available to EU IS policy to effect change.
- r) That strong involvement of all the stakeholders at every point in the policy coordination process will be needed to ensure a real user pull through on policy development.

## 5.2 Discussion and recommendations: coordination in the context of i2010

### *Information Society and socio-economic development*

The Lisbon European Council (March 2000) and the ensuing Lisbon Strategy/Agenda set the following strategic goal for Europe by 2010:

*“To become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable **economic growth** with more and better jobs and greater **social cohesion**. (...). The shift to a digital, knowledge-based economy, prompted by new goods and services, will be a powerful engine for growth, competitiveness and jobs. In addition, it will be capable of improving citizens' quality of life and the environment.”*

Achieving this goal requires an overall strategy aimed at:

- preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society by better policies for the information society and R&D ;
- modernising the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion; and
- sustaining the healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects by applying an appropriate macro-economic policy mix.

ICTs are a key component of the Lisbon Strategy for:

- the contribution they make to overall economic performance; and
- the benefits they offer to society at large.

Thus ICT is crucial to European competitiveness and industrial development and it is an important tool for sustainable development and cohesion. Indeed, the importance of ICT can be summarized as<sup>38</sup>:

- ICT equipment and services sector is an important sector in its own right (most innovative and productive sector);
- ICT are central to boosting productivity and improving competitiveness (40% of the productivity growth in EU between 1995 and 2000 was due to ICT); and
- ICT provide a boost to citizenship and to the quality of life.

EC policy towards IS is:

- shifting away from infrastructures - most of which is already in place - towards services to EU citizens, companies and organisations using ICT;
- reorienting structural assistance towards the new technologies (human resources, innovation, content etc.); and
- focusing on a consistent integration of Information society into the priorities of regional policy.

EU policy is adopting an integrated approach towards IS:

- The EU has adopted an integrated approach towards Information Society viewing both human and social capital as key factors for socio-economic development.
- This approach seeks to address such issues as learning by adopting an integrated set of policies with a view to bringing about a more inclusive and participatory society.

Key EU policy frameworks which reflect this approach include:

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<sup>38</sup> COM(2004) 757 final

- The European Employment Strategy (EES) and its focus on *lifelong learning* and skills development (including ICT skills);
- The central position awarded to *education and training* as ways of generating a skilled and adaptive workforce (Structural funds, particularly ESF, the Community Initiative EQUAL and the Leonardo da Vinci programme);
- The Social Inclusion process and ensuing Social Policy Agenda which in supporting the transition towards a KBE addresses *social cohesion* issues and defines the role of social policy as a productive factor;
- The focus on *innovation* and the relevant role of the human capital (eEurope Action Plan, eLearning Action Plan and eLearning programme).

Thus, to sum up:

- The contribution of IS to socio-economic development is partly direct (ICT sector) and partly indirect (gains in productivity and the development of human and social capital); and
- In order to achieve these goals EU policies have to be integrated.

### ***A territorial understanding of IS and socio-economic development***

The spatial perspective on the relationship between the Information Society and broader socio-economic development in Europe emphasises that:

- Socio-economic development is a very particular 'object';
- Most importantly if obvious: socio-economic development is about development; and
- Socio-economic development encompasses many possible interventions.

Socio-economic development has several key elements:

- Development is a discontinuous process that cannot always be predicted or controlled;
- It has a spatial dimension - all development occurs in some territory
- It has an existing base - socio-economic development tries to build on foundations that already exist;
- There is a quantitative and qualitative dimension - growth in numbers (of income, jobs, firms etc.) but also the quality of work, the environment, the educational opportunities etc
- There is a policy and normative dimension - development can go in different directions and policy sets a framework of priorities and values within which choices are made

The following table summarise some of the characteristics of socio-economic development programmes

<b>Problem definition</b>	<b>Intervention characteristics</b>
Persistent structural and development needs	Long term perspective
Need to address different aspects and themes	Multi dimensional interventions
Different characteristics of setting and context	Tailored approach

Need to mobilise different partners and actors	Emphasis on partnership principle
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So, we see, local development and the new economic geography offer a possible way forward for thinking about the development of the IS:

- ultimately the genesis of socio economic development is always local in nature;
- local development is possible when there is a range of under utilised resources (social, economical, natural, cultural, human, etc.); and
- where the challenge is to create networks between themselves and between the local context and the global economy

Information society policy has focused until now mainly on the national or European dimension facing the challenge of integration. Part of the challenge for the future is to exploit the many opportunities of information society in local, regional and sectorial development.

Thus the policy questions are:

- If all development is contextualised how to generalise the good results?
- How to disseminate good practices?
- Which part, if any, of OMC can help us in implementation and delivery of i2010?

### ***Making IS policy work***

What do we now know about the *effectiveness* of the eEurope OMC? How do we achieve *impact* on economic growth and social development through information society policies (i2010)? What options does the Council and the Commission now have to ensure *delivery* of the Lisbon IS goals?

Kok has said<sup>39</sup>:

- There is nothing wrong with the Lisbon policy, the targets and the timescales – the problem is delivery;
- Information Society policy is as central as ever to achieving the Lisbon goals; and
- Effective coordination between the Member States and ensuring effective action by the Member States is now the priority.

The Commission has now proposed<sup>40</sup>:

- Three i2010 pillars – the three ‘i’s’:
  - ‘information space – seamless information economy’
  - ‘innovation and investment in research’
  - ‘inclusion – better public services and quality of life’
- Consolidating and focusing existing policies
- Consistently executed and communicated
- With broad overall goals and flexible sub-goals adaptable to changing circumstances

Our informants in the Member States in this study have indicated that what they want is a strategy which:

<sup>39</sup> Wim Kok (2004) Facing the Challenge, Report of the High Level Group on the Lisbon Strategy

<sup>40</sup> Frans de Bruijne, Director “Lisbon Strategy and Policies for the Information Society”, DG INFSO and Media, 22 February 2005 and see further below.

- is more differentiated between countries
- is more responsive to changing circumstances
- has more realistic mutual accountability

Thus the focus of this concluding section is on:

- Learning from the experience of OMC in eEurope and in other policy contexts
- Reforming the implementation framework in the light of i2010
- Developing actionable delivery strategies for the delivery of i2010 OMC and achieving the Lisbon goals

The questions we have to bear in mind are: What now for the eEurope OMC and EU Information Society policy? How do we find and *deliver on* an optimal set of policy priorities at a Member State and EU level? What is the appropriate mix of policy instruments – legislation, RTD, other spending programmes, and open coordination – to drive delivery? And specifically:

1. How can substantial, strategic and tailored objectives and commitments be identified, designed and agreed on an ongoing basis which is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances?
2. How can best practice/worst practice exchange have more impact in terms of learning - supportive, contextualised and developmental - and critique - sense making, problem solving and recommendation?
3. How can the benchmarking indicators and annual reports aid problem identification and task definition on an ongoing basis?

### ***The new policy context: i2010***<sup>41</sup>

The revised Lisbon strategy has three key policy areas:

- Make the EU attractive for investment and work
- Knowledge and innovation including ICT
- More and better jobs

Lisbon mid-term review stresses the importance of ICT and research to achieve the knowledge society. The Commission has now announced it's plans for i2010 including goals, steps ahead, the role of the Member States and it's links to Lisbon. Under i2010 the so-called three 'i's' form the five year goals<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Priority 1: Information space

- *Delivering services anywhere, anytime over high-speed seamless networks*
- *Promoting the availability of content*
- *Increasing the security of networks*

Priority 2: Innovation and investment in research

- *Identifying emerging trends*
- *Promoting research in and deployment of ICT through partnerships*
- *Encouraging wider adoption of ICT and development of eSkills*

Priority 3: Inclusion, better public services and quality of life

- *Widening ICT accessibility and digital literacy*

Thus while i2010 is a self-standing initiative it also contributes to the renewed Lisbon agenda and also to the European strategy on growth and prosperity up to 2010 with its focus on ICT for growth and jobs.

In addition, the targets of the eEurope 2005 Action plan are not fully achieved in most EU countries. Therefore, the top priority for 2010 remains to achieve the current objectives.

Though i2010 continues to build upon eEurope, the Commission says that i2010 is different from eEurope in that it is based on<sup>43</sup>:

- Convincing evidence of the positive effects of ICT
- An ICT world which is more mature and global
- Coverage of the whole of EU Information society and media policies: regulation, research and deployment
- An emphasis on convergence, content, public services and quality of life
- New ways of implementation

As regards these new ways of implementation, the Commission understands from the Member States that the main impacts of EU initiatives at national level are:

- EU support to help national policies remain high on the political agenda
- The role of the Commission in harmonising and strengthening regulations when necessary

- 
- *Reinforcing trust and support of ICT use*
  - *Improving the quality, efficiency and availability of public services (incl. the pan-European dimension)*
  - *Improving quality of life through ICT*
  -

<sup>43</sup> According to the Commission's consultations (eEurope 2005: Final Report - Member States Consultation on the new Information Society Strategy beyond 2005 26 November – 17 January 2005) the main developments and trends to be faced in IS policy beyond 2005 are:

<b>Developments</b>	<b>Mega-Trends</b>
<i>Political</i>	Enlargement
<i>Technological</i>	Convergence
<i>Regulatory</i>	Regulatory Framework
<i>Social</i>	Ageing population
<i>Economic</i>	Global economy

While the main tasks to be addressed are:

- Content and services
- eInclusion and citizenship
- Public services
- Trust and dependability

And the main areas for action are:

- Development of good digital content and broadband for all
- The establishment of regulatory frameworks for all areas
- Promoting e-Learning and accessibility for all
- Governments promoting best practice and pilot projects
- Helping SMEs to take up ICT and more investment in R&D
- Data protection, security, and use of open standards
- Electronic ID & health cards to facilitate citizens' mobility

- EU initiatives to help make ICT more comprehensible for the public opinion, and to raise some cross-sector items

And implementation can be improved by:

- Complementing learning from best practice with learning from worst practices (mistakes)
- Rethinking the instruments and the relationships between programmes
- Strengthening and better co-ordinating the instruments
- Considering reducing the frequency for data collection
- Agreement of an ICT fund with a link to national strategies
- Avoiding duplication of initiatives and better use of existing committees
- Defining common objectives and evaluation criteria for related activities

According to the Commission to succeed i2010 will need:

- Buy-in of all stakeholders
- Partnership with the Member States
- Visibility through annual report
- Realistic actions with measurable results
- Smart indicators (quality and quantity)

The basic operation principles of i2010 will be:

- Partnership is key: with Member States, stakeholders, and other countries
- i2010 is designed as an umbrella for all DG INFSO activities (regulation, research and deployment)
- i2010 has a strong link with the renewed Lisbon agenda, through overall objectives for the 5 year period
- Focus on a certain number of actions to be reviewed on a yearly basis: through rolling action plans
- Communication and coordination: through annual reports and benchmarking, and exchange of best practice
- Policy development and coordination: through eEurope Advisory group and cooperation with stakeholders
- Financial support: through eTen, MODINIS, ICT policy support programme
- Communication of impacts and results

Further, according to the Commission, i2010 will be an initiative with teeth, with:

- An annual report supported by benchmarking report: to measure progress and identify priorities for the following year ('EU Information society report')
- Better benchmarking indicators: focus on quality and quantity, e.g. define a small set of core indicators and more relevant indicators (on demand, impact, content)
- Exchange of best practice: with ministerial conferences, best practice websites, EU level guidelines, stakeholder networks, and other measures

And including policy development and coordination through:

- Renewed commitment of Member States
- (eEurope/) i2010 Advisory group with higher visibility to the first section
- Partnerships with all actors in the information society: more flexibility, more focus, varying composition, stronger involvement, including:
  - an annual event to prepare the annual report



- greater use of existing high level groups, industry, civil society to discuss the proposals for the following year

In short, i2010 is summarised by the Commission as:

- *'A holistic approach*
- *Linked to the reviewed Lisbon strategy*
- *Different roles for the public sector*
- *Five year goals, annual actions*
- *Clear results widely communicated'*

### ***Network management: mobilising, resourcing and energising diverse contributions***

This study has established that the Open Method of Coordination has more potential to make a difference to IS policy development provided it crucially acknowledges the need to exploit and build upon national differences to achieve common European goals, and it focuses attention on influencing those things that make a difference at sub-national and sectoral levels.

A greater reliance on the open method of coordination marks a shift for Member States and the Commission from administration and project management *to network management* – from control and direction and managing risk *to mobilising, resourcing and energising the contributions of others*.

This implies that the Member States and the Commission have a common role to support and develop existing networks, put in place new ones, set terms of reference, provide resources and generally fuel (rather than lead) innovation. The key requirements are to:

- delegate to the levels where there is real commitment to innovation; and
- push responsibility and opportunity down and out to the appropriate levels and places.

Given the limited resources available under i2010 one way to maximise leverage is through focusing spending on energising, communicating and sustaining networks. The role of the Council and the Commission can be to exercise leadership in identifying tasks - and resources to perform those tasks, developing structures, and enabling action and supporting delivery.

OMC is after all an instrument that is well suited to IS policy: the deployment and marketisation of IS technologies imply diversity and varying speed of application in response to user drivers. As the Member States face a diversity of challenges – from establishing basic infrastructures to exploiting the advanced infrastructure already in place – this suggests that quite a wide variety of policy coordination measures may be appropriate, ranging from the very loose to quite tight:

Thus coordination in different areas of IS policy might legitimately range from-

A loose model of coordination – in cases where there is already a rich mix of the needed elements for IS development on the ground - based on

- Common strategies and agendas
- Exchanges of best practice and
- Peer learning

An intermediate model – where many elements exist but more need to be established  
- with additional use of

- Standard indicators of progress,
- Some additional financial resources, and
- Peer pressure

Or a tight model – where basic elements need to be put in place - based on

- Clear targets
- National action plans
- Significant additional financial resources
- Transparent monitoring of progress
- Peer review

Thus not only should there be a diversity of foci and actions across the MS the methods used to coordinate these actions may also be diverse.

## **Recommendations**

In the light of these conclusions and our exploration and elaboration of them with the actors, we would make the following set of practical recommendations:

11. In order to achieve the broader Lisbon goals, the coordination of IS policy between the Member States and the Commission under i2010 should be based on a focused set (limited number) of targets for the EU as a whole *but with a different order of priority and different expected rate of advance for different Member States depending on their needs, opportunities and circumstances.*
12. This implies a melding of general EU and country specific actions plans as part of an ongoing dialogue between the Member States and the Member States and the Commission. This implies in practice:
  - Peer review *before* planning;
  - Institutional arrangements to routinely put new tasks on the i2010 agenda;
  - More focused dialogue on specific issues;
  - Continuity from exchange event to event; and
  - 'out-of-Brussels' locations and more inclusion of the wider stakeholders in events.
13. The method of coordination should vary from loose to tight depending on the tasks and the Member States involved *but always be rooted in the broader arrangements agreed for pursuing the Lisbon Agenda and the total set of European policy instruments operating in the Member States (Structural Funds, Framework Programme, Regulation).*
14. Targets and indicators are still needed as part of the coordination mix but they need to be much more qualitative and user focused and designed to motivate and empower a broader set of stakeholders (rather than to 'name and shame').

15. More, and more targeted, stakeholder (social partners and civil society) involvement and dialogue is needed, including, where appropriate, support for capacity building in wider society. This will help i2010 define more 'real world' objectives, create more user (business and NGO) 'pull through', and wider demand from society.
16. Benchmark progress against goals not against each other (league tables). Technically it would help to have:
  - better quantification and definition of problems;
  - better indicators of policy impact;
  - qualitative indicators of progress; and
  - regional analysis and indicators.
17. Better linkage should be created between IS policy and the other policy areas of the Commission itself (enterprise, markets, employment, social inclusion, education and training) to compliment action in the Member States so that *existing* national, sectoral, regional and social innovation platforms can be utilised and exploited to best effect.
18. i2010 itself should be expressed through annually updated rolling action plans *with a peer based review mechanism to review progress and learning from the execution of such plans, perhaps supported with inputs commissioned from non-governmental experts and Commission monitoring.*
19. Action plans should explicitly seek to create new policy learning – about needs for contingency models, best practices or common rules/principles - and exchanges of good practice should focus on the experience of trying to implement elements of the action plan.
20. The key substantive foci should remain the same in the transition from eEurope to i2010 – content, access, eLearning, data protection and security, 'back office' standards, innovation and RTD – *but the mode of address should shift to being a) fundamentally user and use driven, with more qualitative and use focused indicators, and b) integral to other substantive policy areas (mainstreaming IS and 'e-proofing' other areas of social and economic policy).*

We believe these recommendations would appear to be consistent with the main thrust of the Kok Report (maintain and reinforce the focus on the existing economic growth policies and targets; but concentrate now on effective delivery). Perhaps more importantly we believe these recommendations give additional practical expression to the approach to implementing the coordination aspects of i2010 already outline by the Commission.

## Appendix I

### Mutual Learning Programme in Employment

Since 2003, 29 countries of the EU, the CC and the EFTA/EEA have been involved in the programme. Participating countries are invited to identify areas of good practices and submit these to the Commission. On the basis of these proposals, the Commission prepares a draft programme to be discussed in the EMCO Ad-hoc Group before submission to EMCO for endorsement. From now on the aim is to hold 6 such expert meetings a year involving government officials and independent employment policy experts. An encouraging development according to our informants is the fact that attendance at peer review seminars has been steadily increasing from 5-6 to 12 (at the last seminar).

The way such peer reviews are organised is as follows: one country (host country) presents/explains a particular aspect of its employment policies and programmes. Two other countries, in turn, comment formally on the host country's approach. Significantly these comments come from independent experts and not from Ministries. Up to 10 countries (peer countries) can participate. The focus is on how applicable/transferable the lessons from the host country's experience are with respect to other countries. According to our informants, although such meetings can be useful and a lot of selected subjects very interesting, sometimes the latter are too country specific, thus limiting the potential for transferability. As a result, it has been decided that the transferability element of the whole process should be reinforced, not least by making it a more integral part of the peer review event. So the new format will be for such meeting to last 1.5 days, of which half a day will be deliberately dedicated to discussing transferability issues.

In the same vein and with a view to enhancing the exchange and transfer of information and good practice between MS, a second strand of the mutual learning programme, the thematic review seminars, has been recently introduced. These seminars will, twice a year, focus on a particular policy theme, selected by the EC in conjunction with the consultants who support the process on the basis of proposed themes from MS. The way the thematic review seminars are organised is as follows: three countries present an aspect of their employment strategy but not in so detailed a manner as in the peer review strand. The theme selected for the second half of 2004 is that of adaptability (increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises). The 2005 themes are: (i) attracting more people to enter and remain on the labour market: making work a real option for all (first half 2005); and (ii) investing more and more effectively in human capital and lifelong learning (second half 2005).. The EC will try to link the themes to the priorities of the EU Presidency so as to maximise policy coherence and co-ordination. For example, the theme of adaptability has been agreed with the forthcoming Dutch presidency because this is an area of particular interest to the Dutch. The countries involved in the forthcoming September thematic review seminar are the Netherlands, Denmark and Hungary, the first two representing good practice with Hungary being there as one of the ten new MS.

The third and final strand of the mutual learning programme *National and Joint follow-up activities* enhancing the dissemination of the thematic and peer review results. These which are basically dissemination seminars are funded by the EC but are organised at MS level. All initiatives undertaken as national and joint follow-up activities to the Mutual Learning Programme are expected to contribute to an added value of employment policy co-ordination at EU level. As such proposed actions should be closely linked to the themes chosen for review through the Mutual Learning Programme. The national and joint follow-up activities should ideally be run in parallel, or could follow the other activities of the Mutual Learning Programme. They should promote the dissemination and learning from MS' experiences to a national audience and link to the other activities undertaken under the Mutual Learning

Programme. All such activities should present how to utilise the learning potential from other MS under the framework of the European Employment Strategy. Two broad categories of activities can be co-financed:

- Activities which aim to disseminate and continue the discussions undertaken on a European level to the national level (or alternatively to prepare at the national level the discussions to be held at the European level). These activities should include a broad group of stakeholders.
- Activities which aim at fostering the co-operation between groups of Member States, or further exploring the learning potential from each other and the transferability of good practices. These activities can be conducted in co-operation between public authorities, but dissemination activities should also target a broader group of stakeholders. Examples of activities which can be co-funded include the setting up of working groups for in-depth review of other Member States' good practices or working groups to find solutions to common challenges.

## Appendix II

The following synoptic summaries of Member State case studies are presented alphabetically by country name only. Summaries are based upon data provided in the MS case studies.

Although summaries are biased towards a narrative style, each case is semi-structured under the following broad thematic headings:

- Background context to MS
- Description of current national IS/eEurope activity/ and any main thematic focus
- Policy cycle development: how is policy steered, coordinated and implemented
- Relationships between national IS policy and eEurope (if any)
- Influence and impacts of eEurope on IST on member state
- Evidence of (any) operation or impacts of OMC through eEurope on MS
- Current IS/eEurope commitments and future directions
- Brief overview of thematic foci of the case study and IS activity, influence of eEurope, OMC operations (if any)

## Denmark

### General

Currently Denmark is developing and implementing IS policies in line with all the primary strands of eEurope policy actions. There has been considerable development and policy implementation in the areas of egovernment, healthcare online and ehealth. Many of the targets set by the first eEurope action plan were already achieved prior to the initial deadlines and stakeholders reported that Denmark is one of the best performing countries on IT/ICT in Europe. Denmark considers that they need to be looking outside Europe (towards US, Canada, Japan and Korea) to remain a high performer.

Importantly, data indicates that eEurope did not add significant value since Denmark developed a coherent national IT/IS strategy *prior* to the existence of the first eEurope action plan. However, subsequent policies have shifted in terms of content and which are outside of the remit of eEurope IS policy (for example there has been an IS/ICT a policy shift towards standardisation, quality and interoperability). Furthermore, a range of subsidiary policies are currently in development and implementation across areas including ehealth, egovernment and social services. Numerous regional and local action plans have also been developed based on or independently from the national action plans. National impetus for eEurope is driven by government policy.

All the relevant government ministries are involved in the strategic development of national IS action plans. The ministries are responsible for the development of national action plans and focus on the overall aims and long-term goals of the country. IS policy implementation is regionally devolved to the level of the local authority, municipality and county. Considerable autonomy appears to be given into how and what to implement in terms of national action plans. Denmark is a small country with long traditions of consensus driven policy development. This means that most relevant stakeholders expect to be part of negotiation and developing new policies and laws. The area of information society policy is no exception from this and a number of institutions are responsible for both delivering and steering information IT policies.

Whilst there is not a separate eEurope action plan at member state level there is a strong alignment to eEurope policy. Data indicates that a significant number of the current national action plans, (if not all of them) have components of the 2005 eEurope Action Plan. However, if there is a direct connection between eEurope policy and national IS policies it is not planned or clear. As one informant reported *"it would be very hard (for there not to be a relationship), because the current eEurope action plan is about almost everything."*

eEurope activities are primarily co-ordinated by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation who remits includes data gathering, collecting of national data with indicators in the eEurope context and reporting to the EU Commission on a yearly basis. Interviews with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation suggested that their role is not to manage the implementation in a traditional top down fashion but rather to coordinate and facilitate implementation. The latter has a central role in eEurope and the co-ordination of information society policies in general towards the EU. There is also high-level participation from NGO's and private sector actors in the eEurope activities.

In Denmark there exists a network of different stakeholders who are responsible of different areas in eEurope. Stakeholders undertake regular updates for their own online network, which also serves as a basis for providing eEurope benchmarking data. An informant reported that: "eEurope has been a great incentive and forum to benchmark the current state of national information society policies towards other member states." A number of the informants expressed that Denmark have a strong belief in benchmarking.

## **Implementation of eEurope**

Interviewees indicated that detailed activities in the eEurope were hard to comply with (since the plan is so broad in its remit) and that this increases the workload associated with the implementation process. Positively, it was considered that eEurope policy targets had been quite realistic up until now and Denmark has been able to comply with most of the targets. However, it was also reported that the current eEurope 2005 Action Plan is more difficult because it focuses more on changes in attitudes and awareness than the previous one. For Denmark targets such as “creating an awareness” are difficult if not impossible to measure.

## **OMC operations and Impacts**

Many of the key informants are well aware of the concept of OMC and the discussion around it. The concept is viewed in terms of three main elements: benchmarking, peer review and the exchange of best (or good) practices.

Although the decentralisation of policy and internally coordinated activity appeared to mimic “OMC type processes and mechanisms” there was not a significant level of OMC activity between Denmark and other member states. Furthermore, within the member state there is no clear evidence of OMC being employed as a strong steering mechanism. Whilst there was evidence of some best practice exchange and early peer review activities in certain sectors such as ehealth respondents’ reports were mixed as to the effectiveness of these activities for Denmark.

Whilst OMC operations have had a relatively low level of impact on Denmark, case data indicates that policy makers and politicians make routine use of the European benchmarking reports and they “enjoy finding their country in one of the top three performing countries”. As an external process, however, the OMC does not have a strong role for Denmark *other* than to map and identify changes in the national performance against eEurope benchmarks (where Denmark is regularly amongst the top three EU states).

## ***Usefulness of the European role in the Steering of Information Society Policies***

Informants in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in the area of international ICT policy are more in favour of a stronger European or international role in implementing information society policies. However, other informants, within the Ministry of Finance suggested that there are other international networks which are more effective for steering the information society in Europe and suggested that the ‘naming and shaming’ aspect of OMC through benchmarking is refined further by research conducted by the OECD. Informants reported that eEurope has a long way to go in order to gain OECDs level of expertise and sophistication in this area. For a number of informants OMC was viewed as “the OECD method”.

## **Specific eEurope priority areas and OMC themes**

### ***eHealth***

Since the mid 1990s Denmark has been active in the area of ehealth and technology innovation. Although a number of ministries have been involved coordinating and implementing ehealth through eEurope, the Ministry of Health has taken a lead in regard to specific ehealth initiatives. The Ministry are currently implementing a national action plan named: National IT strategy for Sundhedsvaesenet, (2003-2007).

Developed in 1994, a national health, multipartner project (involving both commercial and public sector partners) MedCom, has been formative in driving the Danish ehealth agenda forward. The main purpose of this co-operative project is to establish a coherent Danish healthcare data network and to harmonise communications between different actors in the



healthcare delivery system and integrate communications (EDI letters; e-mail; web look-up; telemedicine) within a single internet-based system.

Whilst a number of eHealth initiatives are directly controlled by the government, MedCom is an example of a public private partnership where the ministry of health finance around 20 % of the costs and private IT suppliers deliver the services.

In the area of eHealth there no evidence that that general policy development has been influenced by any other EU member state or eEurope. If any influence at all it was suggested that policy implementations and new technologies in the health sector were inspired by the USA.

### ***Disability***

Whilst the field researcher reported that a government decision had been recently made to set up an office to deal with information society in relation to social services, and particularly elderly and people with special needs (disability, social exclusion etc.) there were no clear Area 2 policy actions concerning IS and disability in Denmark at the time of writing.

## Estonia

### General

Estonia is a small CEE country with a strong cultural identity. Whilst resources and country size are relatively small there is considerable IS based activity and policy development in Estonia, which is broadly in line with eEurope policy development strands. Surveys carried out in 2003 in order to benchmark the development of the information society in the demonstrate that on several indicators Estonia is ahead of the EU new MS average. In addition, on several indicators (e.g. experience and intensity of online usage), Estonia takes a leading position among the CEE countries. In terms of online usage, Estonia is already reaching the average of the EU-15, surpassing the performance of several EU countries (e.g. Internet and SMS usage; broadband penetration; use of internet banking and interest in teleworking). However, on a significant number of eEurope indicators, Estonia still lags behind the EU-15 average.

### Policy Development and Actions

Whilst key decisions concerning national IS and eEurope policy and priorities are undertaken at cabinet level a number of state and governmental agencies also have responsibility for the strategic development and implementation of IS policies in Estonia. These include the Estonian Informatics Council, Department of State Information Systems (RISO) and the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Communications. The latter has a key role in coordinating Estonian IS policy development across different ministries.

Since 1998 national policy development has been largely based on the principles of a key document: the Principles of Estonian Information Policy, which concerns: "Intensifying international co-operation, shaping and forming the eEurope current and future action plans, as well as fostering participation in EU technology co-operation networks" (Principles of Estonian information policy, 2004 to 2006). This document follows principles and aims closely related to eEurope. A national policy action plan (for 2004-2006) also covers a range of IS (again taking account of eEurope policy strands) areas including egovernment, security and e-education. Relevant government agencies are charged with the responsibility for proposing policy implementation, budgeting and detailed development of national action plans and priorities.

### Relationships between IS and eEurope Policy

National impetus for eEurope implementation has come from government policy. However, policy delivery is dispersed and a form of decentralized coordination occurs nationally through a 'Coordination Framework' which involve wide range of state, NGOs and private organisations. One interviewee stated that the nature of national policy implementation consists of 3 C's: cooperation, coordination and co-financing."

Although more significant in certain policy areas general conclusion of the case study is, that almost in all areas, eEurope is reinforcing national policy but that this would have been achieved *even* without it. Whilst in the initial scan it was stated that eEurope was taking as basis of policy making, this basis is more about helping to provide a vision and target setting, rather than "tight" basis of strategy formulation and comprehensive project or program planning.

Case study data indicates specific influences of Europe / eEurope on the development of IS policies generally:

1. Fostering a vision (here 'vision' means taking the eEurope strategic documents and guidelines as basis for action and redefining current action (plans) to the corpus of eEurope.)

2. eEurope offered Estonia a way to showcase its capabilities to Europe (i.e. OMC – benchmarking)
3. The national “Coordination and implementation network is strongly motivated and eEurope has helped to provide motivation through a comprehensive European vision of the Information society.

Therefore, in Estonia, the implementation of national policies is to some extent affected by eEurope. For Estonia, a hypothesis forwarded is that the importance of eEurope is that it “brings coherence to fragmented or sometimes isolated information society development”.

### **Effects of eEurope / Operations of OMC on National Policy Development**

All informants reported that eEurope had provided a vision for national policy development as well as given direction, guidelines and targets. On the other hand informants emphasised the national implementation and coordination network and that many of information society developments would have happened without eEurope. However, case study evidence also suggests that national policies have been more affected by the EU accession processes rather than the eEurope+ initiative itself.

The OMC as a concept was unknown. One interview pointed out, that its weakness is its conceptual fuzziness. However benchmarking and exchanging good practices are recognised. Currently, however, the exchange of best practices includes learning and cooperation with Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian colleagues.

A key influence of the OMC in Estonia in every policy area its ‘argumentative power’. This means that policy developers can use benchmarking and exchange of good practices as political argument when they require resources for certain national IS development processes (or in relation to wider EU policies). By this method OMC process influences those policies, which are ‘not doing as well as in other areas’ and there exists a rhetorical “name and shame” principle. As one informant reported: “It (benchmarking) is an additional argument in domestic politics or budget negotiations.”

“Estonia’s own OMC” is a close network of Estonian experts cooperating with colleagues from different countries and exchanging information in a network. However, the ‘Official OMC’ is not helping national implementation although it has served as a vision, but in practice has been quite irrelevant, since Estonia has had its own national cooperation networks (which occur at both formal and informal levels). Furthermore, it was reported that exchanging best practices and peer review operation doesn’t have much to do with eEurope and its implementation but more with natural coordination and cooperation within different areas. Moreover, it was also reported that the structural Funds are not necessarily enhancing the use of OMC in Estonia.

### **Commitment**

In Estonia there exists high commitment towards information society issues (at least across many sectors). Overall, the political atmosphere has been Europe-driven, and involvements in European developments are seen very important. There is a high level of commitment in ‘catching-up’ with European information society which is also emphasized by the increasing cooperation between different levels of government.

### **Delivery Capacity**

The case study data indicates that the capacity for delivery IS-policy areas is quite high and this is attributed to of the efficient decentralized implementation and good cooperation with Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.

## **Case study specific eEurope priority areas and OMC foci**

### ***Ecommerce and Access***

Overall, documentary data indicates that Estonia has been leading among developing countries in the ability to support e-commerce. In this development, as well as in many other IS-policy areas, Estonia is benefiting from a close relationship with its Scandinavian neighbours. A second important dimension is relationship with other Baltic states, since a number of Estonian firms using e-Commerce operate in all Baltic states.

Increasing access and 'catching up' with providing European Internet Access, Public Internet Access Points (PIAP's) has been one of the success stories in Estonian information society development. These developments have been influenced by the benchmarking exercise and reviewing central risks in other small countries. This initiative has also been central peer review target for other countries like Latvia and Lithuania.

The most important obstacles for e-commerce in Estonia are trust and the attitudes of the customers. The culture of shopping in Estonia still favours traditional shopping behaviours and this is key re for e-Commerce development. A current challenge is how to make the whole e-commerce phenomena appear profitable for firms and customers. For businesses credit card frauds have been one of the main reasons not to enter e-commerce in Estonia.

Unofficial and informal exchange of best practices was viewed as affecting the developments of this area. However, there were clear reservations as to the utility of adopting other member states best practices: "You cannot take a system from other country, but you can understand their solutions." Data indicates that in Estonia it had proved hard to measure commitment to eCommerce policy or delivery. Although it appeared that the private sector has led the development of eCommerce in Estonia (as well as ebusiness). And also, eCommerce is not a priority in Estonian information policy (actually there is no referred term for 'ecommerce' in Estonian information policy).

## Finland

### General

Finland is considerably advanced in terms of IS policy actions, infrastructure and access and there is a diverse availability of new services and applications. Prior to eEurope IS, was facilitated by two main factors: (i) the Finnish ICT industry development in the 1990's and a concomitant high level of investment in ICT and (ii) strong public support for R&D in information technology development. The national IS policy programme is aligned to eEurope policy actions but also includes thematic areas of IS policy development which fall *outside* of eEurope actions. The (2003) IS programme consists of eight main areas of IS activity, including telecommunication infrastructure and digital television and training, working life, research and development. There is no separate national eEurope Action Plan outside of national IS policy.

A number of government and non-government actors are involved in the development, coordination and implementation of IS policy which include the various government ministries, and information society council (under the PMO where different ministries, institutions, companies and NGOs are represented). IS monitoring functions, especially the collection of indicator data and its delivery to the EU Commission are coordinated by the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

There are two distinctive characteristics of Finnish information society policy development. Firstly, a rather strong national consensus has prevailed on the objectives between the public and private actors. A wide collection of public, private and third sector actors have been represented in most of the decisive preparatory task forces and working groups. Secondly, there has been a common understanding between the representatives of the central government and regional and local actors on the necessary measures to be taken. Overall, a consensus has been attained across both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

Policy delivery is dispersed across several ministries and agencies at central government level. In relation to each other these units are relatively independent in terms of their roles. On the local level, the role of the municipalities is key for the delivery and implementation of national IS policy. The municipalities are relatively independent from the state government and have self-governing status. Municipalities are responsible for most of provision of welfare and infrastructure services. Therefore, the implementation of information society policies in the areas of (especially in areas such as eHealth and eEducation) are to a considerable extent dispersed at the local level of municipalities. As one informant reported: "Many of eEuropean goals are delivered in municipalities and if municipalities do not take actions, then you cannot find the 'implementation of eEurope'".

### Challenges to the Implementation of eEurope / IS policy

Two main challenges to the implementation of policy were reported:

- (i) Scarcity of financial resources
- (ii) The dependency of economic growth on one industry, namely the electronics industry and its exports.

## **Operations and Impacts of eEurope / OMC**

eEurope IS *policy* has provided a solid background for national strategy development and IS policy embeds central eEurope goals. However, national IS policies are viewed as more fragmented and detailed in relation to the coherent strategy of eEurope. The OMC and eEurope has also assisted in defining IS policy, especially at the stage of incipient development or early formulation of policy (e.g. eHealth or eBusiness). Whilst there is evidence of IS policy initiatives prior to eEurope, information society initiatives tended to have the status of administrative projects rather than top policy issues. eEurope has raised information society issues on the political agenda more strongly.

### **OMC**

The Open Method of Coordination as a term and a distinct procedure is not well known. Key government officials were not aware of the concept or what the procedure entails as a whole. Furthermore, connections between the elements of the method were not clear to informants: The common guidelines, common indicators, benchmarking and sharing of best practices are not seen as one method of coordination but rather as separate mechanisms of steering and monitoring. However, there is general acceptance of the utility of these types of 'soft tools'.

MS case study data indicates that one of the problems associated with the OMC may be the uneven capacity of the member states to deliver monitoring data for benchmarking purposes. In the Nordic countries the national statistics offices have traditionally held very comprehensive data of various kinds of developments, which is also the case concerning the information society issues. A number of informants reported that not all of the member states are able to deliver the data as agreed or the reliability of it is poor, the utility of the whole exercise may become undermined. In this respect, the data collected and provided by OECD has in some respects turned out to be more useful and timely than the data collected through the OMC.

A key finding is that whilst a range of policy areas may have 'inherited the logic' of OMC in their working there may have been a relatively low impact of external operations of the OMC through eEurope on national IS policy areas. Since, in the Nordic tradition of public policy and administration, similar kinds of coordination mechanisms have been widely applied – e.g. steering by common targets, exchange of best practices and benchmarking by statistical information. Therefore, the distinctiveness of the OMC is not very clear and the novelty of the method can be questioned. On the other hand, however, the 'cultural ability' for applying these kinds of soft approaches is high, since they are more or less part of routine administrative behaviour and institutional practice.

However, in some instances (policy areas such as the national information security strategy) OMC can help define actions to be taken; especially in terms of setting priorities and offering guidelines for policy development. One practical example is Public Identity Cards and their development of Finland. eEurope brought new ideas for the development and made it possible to manage the development of these cards much better.

Several informants' emphasized, however, that it would be dangerous to underestimate the importance of OMC type processes in Finland. Benchmarking has provided some priorities for development and reveals that some areas, such as eHealth, where Finland has still lot work to do to match benchmarking criteria.

### **Outcomes and Impacts of IS policy**

There were no reported policy outcomes or impacts for Finland.

## **Specific eEurope priority areas and OMC themes**

### ***Intelligent Transport, New Applications and Services***

Employing a network of government and other actors, there have been a number of development initiatives in the field of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), which have been coordinated by the Ministry of Transport and Communications (TETRA 1998-2000, FITS 2001-2004, HEILI 2001-2004, AINO 2004-2008). Some of these programmes have had more emphasis on R&D, whereas others have concentrated more on applying existing technologies. However, there is not a clear connection between this policy strand and wider eEurope policy.

In the Finnish case study, there is not an explicit analysis of new services and applications as part of IST-programmes and there is no common “policy” for new services and applications in Finland. Rather, new services and applications can be viewed more as a horizontal theme that penetrates all areas in IS as mentioned above.

## Greece

### General

In general, it is widely known that Greece has been somewhat slow to join the Internet revolution in comparison to other EU countries. This is partly because of the relatively low standard of living (about 70% of the European Union average) and high internet access fees. A number of informants also reported that Greece is behind other mature EU countries in almost all ICT / IS sectors (with the exception of mobile phones) but recently shows very significant annual growth rates. Greece is also characterised by considerable regional disparities in the use of and access to ICT.

Current IS and eEurope-related activity in Greece should be viewed within the context of the 3<sup>rd</sup> CSF [Community Support Framework] and OPIS [Operational Programme for the Information Society]. The latter is the main policy and budgetary mechanism for achieving the targets set out in the eEurope 2002 Action Plan (although it was developed before eEurope). Significantly, in Greece, eEurope was adopted as a framework for all actions related to the development of the information society.

The aim of OPIS is to implement the essential features of the 1999 White Paper of the Greek government entitled "*Greece in the Information Society: Strategy and Actions*" (final update published in 2002). OPIS is also the main policy and budgetary mechanism for achieving eEurope targets and the eEurope 2002 Action Plan and includes actions in the following primary areas: education and culture; services to citizens and an improved quality of life; the digital economy, employment and social cohesion and communications. Case study data also indicates that IS development in Greece is generally seen as a prerequisite for the convergence of the Greek economy and society (in terms of competitiveness, standard of living, and quality of life) to the EU average.

In summary, the OPIS can be described as:

- an innovative horizontal, cross-departmental programme
- the main instrument for realizing the government's IS strategy
- the tool for achieving the targets set by e-Europe
- aimed at promoting the IS in a coherent and integrated manner

As such it involves:

- overall co-ordination by the Ministries of National Economy and Public Administration
- decentralised implementation and supporting mechanisms
- a new public-private partnership

To summarise, the Greek OPIS (which includes eEurope) involves (i) overall co-ordination by the Ministries of National Economy and Interior, Public Administration; (ii) decentralised implementation and supporting mechanisms and the formation of a new public-private partnership. The OPIS Managing Authority acts as the "umbrella" for the management of all actions funded by the operational programme. Moreover, OPIS management and implementation involves a number of agencies, including a Managing Authority, with overall responsibility for the approval and monitoring of projects and an implementing organisation (the Information Society S.A.) created in order to assist government agencies and other institutions in implementing actions. Finally, another key actor foreseen (but not yet operationalised) is the Greek Information Society Observatory, whose remit is, *inter alia*, to gather data and monitor progress related to eEurope indicators.



### **Relationship Between eEurope and National IS policies**

eEurope did not feature prominently in initial developments of national IS policies. However, eEurope has increasingly become more important in determining IS policies in Greece to the extent that it now provides the main guidelines for the Greek IS policies. Indeed, when the eEurope initiative was first launched the Greek Government decided to align all its IS-related policies and actions to the eEurope aims. A number of interviewees explained that at its initial stage, the Greek IS policies were based on and steered by regional/structural funds. However, when eEurope was launched, the goals/objectives of the Greek IS policies were fully aligned to those of eEurope. As one key informant reported, - eEurope provided Greece with a methodology and a way to prioritise IS-related activities, while the structural funds gave Greece the money/funds to achieve these priorities. However, since the Special Secretariat for the Information Society oversees both the implementation of eEurope and OPIS (funded by structural funds), there is no longer a distinction between eEurope and Greek IS policy objectives.

### **Challenges and obstacles in the Formulation and Implementation of eEurope Policies and National Information Society Policies**

Case study data indicated that Greece faces the following main challenges:

- *Lack of co-ordination and skills capacity in Public Administration*
- *Monopolistic position of Greek Telecom (OTE)*
- *Limited availability and high cost of Broadband*
- *Lack of HR capacity in public administration*

### **Impacts and Operations of OMC and eEurope**

All interviewees viewed eEurope policy positively. A typical assessment of eEurope (and its impact on Greece) was that it has acted as a catalyst for mobilising all the relevant actors. Since Greece lagged so far behind regarding IS, eEurope had provided a focus and instilled a certain discipline into the Greek system in relation to pursuing IS activities. Moreover, eEurope priorities may have assisted Greece in moving more quickly to meet IS targets by mobilising support from politicians. The impact of eEurope may have also been greater because in Greece politicians tend to listen to what the EC has to say. In the informants view, before eEurope (e.g. 1997) it would have been very difficult to convince politicians that something should be done regarding IS in Greece, i.e. that Greece suffered from a lack of IS-related infrastructure.

According to several key informants, the OMC has not been particularly influential in the initial phases of eEurope. Moreover, there was a view that initially the OMC was more strongly associated with benchmarking. This has changed and other elements of OMC are now as important, e.g. peer review and exchange of best practice. Indeed, Greece has been involved in such exercises for some time, both within the current EU MS and with other countries such as Turkey. As part of the case study it was also hypothesised that the 'naming and shaming' aspect of OMC and benchmarking has assisted the development of IS policies; especially through raising political awareness of key priorities and issues.

In general, most interviewees reported that all the OMC-related elements of eEurope have made a positive contribution in moving Greece towards the goals of the IS. The only areas where they expressed concern about the methodology used was the common indicators and the benchmarking. An interviewee reported that eEurope "seems to be suffering from a large quantity of indicators when what is required is a number of fewer, in-depth indicators that could improve the quality of the information."

## **Case Study Specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci**

### ***eLiteracy and Expertise***

The need to urgently address the lack of digital literacy and related ICT skills has been recognised by the Greek Government which has been pursuing a number of relevant policies and initiatives. Actions relevant to promoting digital literacy and numeracy include: (i) *Education and Training initiatives*, where the focus is on the development of basic IT skills for the wider population through flexible procedures, and especially for socially disadvantaged groups, in relation to re-integration into the labour market; (ii) *Technology diffusion to individuals and households* which is an action aimed at: equipping all schools with the necessary IT, network and audio-visual equipment, the creation/upgrading of IT labs in universities and technical colleges; and providing public internet access points and upgrading the role of the library in the community as a focal point for access.

### **R & D**

Research and development of ICT and IT appears to be largely localised in the University sector and it is not clear that there is a consistent linkage to overarching IS policies.

### **Influence of Structural Funds**

All interviewees agreed that it has not been for the structural funds there would have been no significant progress in relation to IS in Greece. As more than one interviewee stated: "without the structural funds Greece would still be very behind regarding IS". So the structural funds have been one of the (if not the) main drivers for IS in Greece.

## Ireland

### General

The Irish Government's second Action Plan (*New Connections*, 2002) on the Information Society includes seven major strands of activity:

- The delivery of a robust telecommunications infrastructure;
- Promoting universal engagement and participation, in particular through eInclusion initiatives;
- further developing the potential of eGovernment, i.e. the online delivery of public services;
- Furthering Irish competitiveness through the development of enhanced eBusiness capacity;
- Promoting and facilitating Lifelong Learning in the knowledge economy;
- stimulating R&D;
- Lifelong Learning and eInclusion

In Ireland the co-ordination and monitoring of the implementation of the IS/eEurope Action Plan is undertaken by a central government body: The Information Society Policy unit (ISPU) – part of the Department of the Taoiseach. ISPU has overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving implementation of the Information Society agenda. The Unit has predominantly a policy development and advisory, monitoring and co-ordination role and is not concerned with the implementation of policy *per se*. For the different areas of the IS programme and IS action plan the informants role is to ensure that someone / or a government departmental team takes ownership of the policy or policy area (e.g. e-commerce, e-learning, e-government).

The policy or action planning development cycle appears to be quite 'organic' for IS/eEurope in Ireland. The ISPU have a key role (amongst a several other information society groups detailed previously in the case study) in coordinating, facilitating and monitoring the implementation of IS and eEurope based objectives. In particular, the policy unit focuses on the seven key areas set out in the Government's Action Plan on the Information Society: *New Connections*. The eEurope "team" (through a very small team of four) also monitors and reports on the implementation of the eEurope action plan (currently the eEurope 2005 plan).

Data analysis reveals that national IS policy developments are "passed through this team and EU checked". The Information Society Commission (ISC) also acts as an independent body providing advice, recommendations, constructive criticism and input into national policy or action planning. However, the Action Plans constitute the main policy national documents for the IS programme in Ireland and there is no set of heavy policy or strategy documents which sit behind these plans as such.

Initial interviews and research data indicates that there is not a separate eEurope action plan. At a government and policy unit level eEurope action plans/objectives are *aligned and congruent* with national IS actions plans and in a sense the eEurope Ireland action plan is instantiated in and through the Government IS Action Plans rather than separate from it (1999, *New Connections*, 2002, 2004). There are various hierarchical government structures which coordinate and develop IS strategy. Therefore, there appears to be no physical separation of eEurope and national IS action plans. Rather, the eEurope team *ensures that* IS action plans are informed and aligned with broad eEurope objectives at the European level.

### eEurope and Ireland's IS Action Plans

As a member of the ISPU team pointed out that they effectively 'cherry pick' appropriate actions, principles or broad objectives from the European eEurope action plan and

incorporate it or align it with the broad objectives for the national IS action plans. Interviews reinforced the importance of considering the wider policy context and influence for the development of IS actions and priority areas (not just eEurope). The Irish government has three main areas of focus: Economic and Social Policy; European and Social Affairs, and Information Society policy. IS policy is shaped by these wider national policy agendas and imperatives as well as other European and global agendas (e.g. the Lisbon Strategy, 2000 in particular). And historically the Irish government has always been strongly European facing in its economic and market trading activities as well as its core government policy priorities. The IS government action plans exhibit a congruency with eEurope objectives at the European level but not a slavish mapping of objectives.

Individual government departments have responsibility for key areas of the IS action plans. E.g. ehealth – Department of Health and Children, Procurement – Department of Finance, e-business – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry. Each department is charged with developing particular strategies following the broad policy objectives driven down from government. However, these strategies for IS are not all publicly available and in some cases they are not actually formally written as such.

Respective government Departments also have responsibility with implementing IS action plans or initiatives. Whilst the ISPU will help support and coordinate actions (for example across departments) they are not directly involved in implementation. However, there appears to be a recursive loop – departments can decide how and what to develop in terms of actions, projects and initiatives which realise the broad policy directives from government. Specific strategies that may be developed within a department are also fed back to the government via the ISPU. There is an underlying level of decentralisation which is based on the assumption that “each department knows its customer base and their needs best”. Therefore central government devolves responsibility for implementation to that level. However, initial fieldwork indicates that strategic development is also devolved to this level. Strategic developments are also subsequently fed back to central government and realignments or adjustments to policy or action can then be effected. The policy cycle appears to be both top-down and bottom-up in the manner it evolves. However, the emphasis, as one informant remarked “is about getting on with the job” and “not reinventing the wheel by writing more policy documents at departmental or government level”. In order to implement initiatives, departments can also liaise at county board level and with non government actors/agencies in order to actually implement the IS actions and projects.

## **Impact and Operations of OMC and eEurope**

Interview and documentary review data *tentatively* indicate that the operations and effects of OMC type processes in the context of eEurope were both small-scale, informal and have tended to be localised around particular interfaces of *central* government.

Data suggests that the OMC operates mainly through an interface of central government. As part of the remit of the (very small) eEurope / IS team within the Information Society Policy Unit team attends regular eEurope meetings in Brussels. However, participation in any associated eEurope programme events/activities appeared to be more informal – on an ‘as and when basis’ (presumably related to the sheer constraints of human resources within the ISPU).

The main thrust of the operation of the OMC as it related to IS and eEurope appears to be that it provides both an *opportunity and a space for informal networking and communications generally* (enabling individuals to build portfolios of contacts who can be contacted on an as and when basis for discussions outside of any formal eEurope type activity). Furthermore, the existence of the OMC provides opportunities for learning and access to information: An interview respondent from the ISPU indicated that having access to early European benchmarking and peer review data had proved to be useful both politically, providing more evidence to back up necessary policy actions and functionally in terms of “seeing where you are in relation to others”. (However, apart from limited e-government data, Ireland has not formally submitted any eEurope benchmarking data to the DG INFSO since 2001.)

## **Extent to which Policy Delivery has been Influenced by OMC Mechanisms at the European level**

Although there is a small amount of evidence suggesting that OMC type processes have operated on or two policy areas to a limited extent (e.g. e-commerce) there has been a negligible direct or indirect influence of OMC mechanisms on policy across the board. And downstream impacts on individual IS policy areas are even less clear from either interview data or document review. Furthermore, main Government Action Plans (which provide the basis for policy and action) do not tend to reference eEurope or OMC explicitly. (See also Part 4: eHealth and Disability)

## **Impact and Outcome of IS / eEurope**

Importantly, data from informant’s reports and research indicated a lack of robust or systematic evaluation or evaluation evidence across the IS programme in Ireland which would effectively address outcome and impact effectiveness type questions.

As previously stated whilst there is both alignment, congruence and complementarity between general national IS policies and eEurope. However, this must be viewed in the context of wider (including European) policy initiatives and national government agendas/drivers. Overall we hypothesise that eEurope has had a somewhat limited and dilute *overall* effect in directly shaping or framing national IS policies.

## Case study specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci

### eHealth

At present there is a National Health Service reform programme underway in the Irish health service which is engendering considerable structural and cultural change. However, the overall reform programme is underpinned and directed by a national health strategy and vision (2001). Definitions of ehealth in Ireland are broad – ehealth is viewed as utilising ICT to “e-enable” the health service across all areas – both administrative and public.

In terms of eHealth in Ireland, evidence suggests that there is (i) a limited number of national IS ehealth activities/actions operating which are currently *aligned and congruent* with eEurope policy at a European level (as are the majority of IS policy areas). However, a number of interconnected agendas, including:

(i) Widespread National Health Service reform; the modernization public services; and the recognition of the efficiency/resource gains which an ICT enabled health services can bring about have also been key influences on developing eHealth and ICT policy.

(ii) In the past there has been a considerable amount of disaggregated activity in ehealth and ICT (which has also tended to focus on a range of internal facing, administrative system developments) which appears to have lacked any significant coordination or policy coherence and cohesion at national levels. Where these activities have involved IST and health informatics / telematics there may have been pockets of European MS partnership working but this tended to be on an independent project-by-project basis rather than through nationally coordinated networks.

(iii) The commitment of the government to ehealth appears mixed – on the one hand stakeholders reported that ICT based health services and systems were viewed as a key element in the delivery and ongoing modernization of the health service, whilst on the other hand, ehealth and ICT is not viewed as being strongly on the political agenda – which may be more concerned with issues of accountability around the use of ehealth based services rather than their development *per se*.

(iv) there was little evidence of the ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ operation of OMC type processes through eEurope in the past history or current approach to ehealth in Ireland.

Previously, ehealth has been very under-resourced in the health service. According to documentary and interview data there needs to be a 6-8 fold increase in order to meet the objectives of the new national ICT /information strategy in the health service. Whilst there may be a reinvigorated commitment to ehealth and the role of ICT in health, interviews suggest that the future funding of ehealth and ICT in health could well be dependent on the demonstration of *evidence based outcomes* within that sector. However, whilst national information and ICT/ehealth strategies have been recently developed, national policies and actions in the area of ehealth remain at various stages of development and progress. At present there does not appear to have been any systematic evaluation (formative or summative) of ehealth impacts or outcomes at a national level.

## Italy

### General

The objectives of Government Guidelines for the Development of the Information Society and the National Plans are strongly aligned with the European Union's strategy and strategic programmes: eEurope 2002 and eEurope 2005. The Ministry for Innovation and Technology has the institutional role of steering, coordinating and encouraging actions by other actors. National impetus for eEurope implementation essentially came from central government policy.

### Relationship between National IS and eEurope

Whilst there is not a separate eEurope national action plan in Italy it effectively 'operates in the background', - assisting in defining the general framework for the development of national IS policy. However, IS issues and themes were already in the political arena before the launch of the eEurope initiative. eEurope and European policies have assisted in defining shared objectives and strategic guidelines that may act as minimum qualitative standards for information society policies and measures. Overall, it was reported that eEurope has *not* substantially influenced IS policy development.

Whilst national IS action plans cover areas in line with main eEurope policy actions, national efforts have been mainly focused on e-government and less on other themes and policies. Although, this shift of emphasis may change, at present the main actors involved in IS policy formulation have been drawn from the public administration sector. Until now, only government actors (at a national and local level) are involved in eEurope at a European level and non-governmental actors are only involved as internal experts.

The nature of IS policy implementation is mainly based on legislation and coordination. The nature of policy delivery is both centralized and decentralized: information society strategies and projects are implemented at both at a national and local level. Country regions are involved in identifying specific objectives for the development of the information society as well as holding responsibility for the management of programmes and the implementation of interventions (i.e. in the area of e-government this has, *inter alia*, involved the development interoperability standards and telecommunications infrastructures.)

### Challenges to eEurope and IS policy

Italy reported that there were two main challenges to the implementation of IS action plans: (i) Financial resources required to develop ICT / IT infrastructures; and (ii) coordinating and activating relationships between national and local level actors for both the formulation and implementation of policy actions and measures.

### Operations and Impacts of OMC and eEurope

eEurope can be considered as a natural extension of national policy as well as reinforcing national policy. The "soft approach" that is being used for eEurope is viewed as particularly effective for information society policies. Informants did not consider that it would be useful to change this approach to use a more restrictive and regulative approach.

Policy formulation has been affected by eEurope (even if only at a formal level) but not through OMC. However, policy implementation has not been affected both by either eEurope or OMC. There is no familiarity with the concept of OMC and components such as peer review and benchmarking are well known and used, but not recognized as associated with the OMC. However, the connection of eEurope to the benchmarking exercises (with an orientation to 'naming and shaming') and common indicators has stimulated Italy to develop global strategies on Information Society field.

However, generally speaking at a national level, internal co-ordination is at the basis of the model of formulating and implementing policies in field of the Information Society. In order to ensure the conditions necessary for the construction and implementation of the policies, several bodies have been created in order to cooperate with the government departments most directly involved, - distinguishing between initiatives aimed at the transformation of the public administration and actions to transform the country as a whole.

### **Case study specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci**

#### ***IS and Structural Funds***

Italy is the first large country to receive EU structural funds in order to implement a regional strategy in the information society field: the Community Support Framework (CSF) was prepared with the extensive participation of local actors along the guidelines established by the European Commission. It involves the targeted use of funds to support demand, encourage access and use of new technology in public administration, services (culture, transport, education, health) and commercial firms through an intensive awareness-raising campaign with the groups involved (students, entrepreneurs, the public sector, citizens).



## The Netherlands

### General

The Netherlands is a small country in relation to other European countries and national policy developments for the information society are centralised. The Netherlands is considered an advanced country in the development and implementation of information society policies and has a supportive attitude towards OMC as a steering mechanism for Europe. Furthermore, the Dutch Cabinet considers ICT developments essential to the national prosperity and well being of the country and it sees an active role for itself with regards to the further strengthening of the ICT base in the Netherlands.

A key characteristic of the national strategy is that there is recognition that an increase in innovative ICT applications is needed in order to capitalise on and reinforce the Dutch competitive position. Market agencies and research institutes are themselves responsible for creating and utilising the possibilities and choices that must be made in that regard. The government has its own essential responsibilities and this involves considerable international policy competition.

The Netherlands is involved in significant number of the main policy initiatives which mirror thematic coverage in the eEurope action plan, but also relate directly to the Dutch national IS context. The main initiatives identified in the national action plan can be thematically grouped under: eGovernment; eHealth; eCommerce and eAccessibility.

In terms of responsibilities for eEurope and IS policy, the following ministries are all involved with the delivery and implementation of eEurope / IS in the Netherlands:

- Ministry of Economic Affairs, a main actor in the implementation of eEurope.
- Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, involved with the implementation of eGovernment.
- Ministry of Finance, involved with a number of initiatives including eCommerce.
- Ministry of Justice has been engaged in a number of initiatives such as Digitisation Policies and opening up the market for different actors in the ICT industry.
- Ministry of Culture, have been involved in a number of initiatives including eEducation (eLearning) and a policy framework and agenda for the digitisation of cultural heritage. A steering group has been established for the digitization of cultural heritage initiative.
- Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management.

### ***Challenges and Obstacles in the Formulation and Implementation of eEurope Policies and Information Society Policies***

According to an interviewee one of the main successes of eEurope/ IS implementation in the Netherlands has been the rollout of a broadband infrastructure and intranet. Currently, there are very few regional areas which do not have coverage of broadband technology in the Netherlands. Another success for the country has been the general turnover of eCommerce.

One of a number of identified obstacles to the implementation of eEurope / IS policy is the slow dissemination and exploitation of ICT 'know-how'. There are major variations in the extent to which different sectors apply ICT. Although this can be explained in part by the nature of the activities, the underperformance in sectors such as health care, manufacturing and the transport and distribution industry appears to be slower than in other sectors. However, growth does now appear to be accelerating in the latter two sectors.

### ***Improving the Formulation and Implementation of eEurope policies***

Amongst a range of issues, informants reported the following:

(i) There is a need for guidelines on a European level to identify what works best and under which circumstances; (ii) The second eEurope Action Plan is too wide and almost impossible to measure in terms of implementation.

### **Impacts and Operations of OMC / eEurope**

Case study data indicates that eEurope policy has not added much value directly in the Netherlands. In terms of the first eEurope action plan, most of the policies were already in place. National action plans are annually updated and informants considered that they probably would have had the same content even in the absence of the eEurope initiatives. However, a key informant reported that it would be useful to reinforce the European role in the steering of information society policies: "European policy is important and the interaction on a European level should be strengthened".

The OMC was viewed as a potential steering mechanism for Europe as well as "a policy tool for coordination...forcing people to develop policy in different areas". Another informant mentioned that their main source for benchmarking is in OECD, and not eEurope. The informant's understanding of OMC is: "A community method of coordination".

Data indicates that the OMC was seen as a 'giving mechanism' rather than a 'receiving mechanism' for more advanced IS countries like the Netherlands. However, as an informant mentioned the Netherlands could also benefit from learning from other less advanced countries: "It helps us to understand what is being debated in countries that are far behind us in the implementation of information society."

Furthermore, whilst informants claim that the OMC can be viewed as a steering mechanism, the OMC has mainly been used for comparing national achievements and not achievements between regions or sectors in the member state. The Netherlands would like the OMC mechanism to help them develop further in the area of IS policy.

### **Benchmarks**

The Netherlands usually scores highly in European benchmarking studies, particularly on broadband implementation. Politically and institutionally the Dutch take benchmarking seriously and that they are aware of how they stand in relation to other countries.

Whilst there are clear concerns that the appropriate types of indicator are employed, data indicates that benchmarking has had huge impact on development of information society policy in the Netherlands. Informants reported that when the Netherlands did not perform as well in previous years, ministers were quick at asking why this was the case and it became one of the main items on the political agenda.

### **Case study specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci**

#### ***eCommerce and eBusiness and Market Delivery***

In terms of eCommerce and eBusiness the first action plans were more concerned about internet trading and shopping, the new national policies are more concerned with business and technologies more generally.

Although the government may have invested considerable funds in the area of eCommerce and SMEs there may have been some stagnation in development of these sectors in recent years which were in part attributed to the end of the "dot.com era." Businesses and banks especially, were more cautious in investing in new technologies and in ecommerce. A reported lesson learned from the Netherlands following the implementation of a number of

initiative is that have been implemented is that it is not necessarily central funding that inhibits eCommerce and eBusiness development. At the Ministry of Economic affairs it was mentioned that a number of initiatives have been taken on national level, but that the process had taken longer than expected because the commercial market did not see the benefits.

Overall, it was not clear whether policy development in this area had been influenced by eEurope European policy actions (although this particular policy action would also be concordant with e-inclusion and e-participation strands of both eEurope and National IS policy).

# Slovakia

## General

Slovakia is a newly acceded EU country. Although facing some challenges around IS policy implementation, and given its initial starting point in terms of IS development, there has recently been considerable progress in policy development and 'baseline catch-up' in comparison to other EU member state's IS policy actions. The Slovak Government declares that the development of the information society is a priority task and adheres to the common initiative eEurope+.

In 2001, the government, in the framework of pre-accession negotiations, adopted the document - Policy for the Information Society in the Slovak Republic, which was derived from the eEurope+ Initiative and Action Plan. In early 2004 a second national action plan, the Strategy for Building an Information Society has also been adopted and has been derived from the action points in the initiatives of eEurope+ and eEurope 2005, whilst being simultaneously aimed at developing IS aspects which are more relevant to the specific situation of Slovakia. In particular, the objectives of the Strategy are to set the base line in the area of Information Society according to European criteria and aims. This is particularly the case in terms of e-Learning; e-Commerce and e-Government. The Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications has responsibilities for informatics and ICT and the Department of Information Society has now the role of coordinator for the development of information society strategy and delivery on national level. Policy delivery is currently centralised at the level of government and national information society policy is based on three main pillars:

1. Content development – information and services
2. Human capacities – development of relevant skills and digital literacy
3. Infrastructure – for access and connectivity

Specific ministries are responsible for relevant areas of the IS action plan e.g.: Ministry of Culture – digitalization and access to internet in libraries; Ministry of Economy – development of eCommerce services and the Ministry of Education – eLearning.

Whilst policy delivery mechanisms for eEurope occur at a national level several NGOs work in Slovakia in the area of information society development. Some of these represent civic initiatives, while others are commercially oriented to promote business in the field of IT. The national IS strategy covers the entire territory of the Slovak Republic and there are not regional/local strategies or action plans. However, with regards to IS policy implementation it was also reported that there could be a blurring of jurisdictions and fragmentation of coordination between state and public organizations in the area of information society.

## Relationship between eEurope and IS policies

Europe and European policies have had the role of 'pushing' Slovakia to start building the base conditions for the Information Society in the country. Without the necessity to adhere to eEurope initiative in 2000, it was reported that there may have been no IS initiatives or activities in the country. Nevertheless, it was reported that this "push" may not have been enough to induce policy makers at an higher level to understand the priority topics in the IS field and to create effective institutional support in terms of legislative, administrative and professional levels, which would divide and coordinate jurisdictions in the field. A suggestion was offered that sanctions or strict recommendations from Europe could help to achieve these aims.

In relation to all national IS strategic plans policy formulation has been influenced by eEurope+ and eEurope 2005 but not through OMC processes. eEurope guidelines have been followed but this was viewed as more attributable to accession negotiations and the *acquis communautaire* – rather than on a voluntary basis. However, policy *implementation* does not appear to have been influenced by eEurope or by the OMC. Data also indicates that no part of Information Society policy falls outside of current eEurope policies.

### **Impacts and Operations of the OMC and eEurope**

Informants had no general familiarity with the Open Method of Co-ordination or the concept itself. Apart from this “formal definition” there is no real familiarity as to what constitutes OMC processes. However, concepts such as guidelines, benchmarking, and best practice were all well known but not in relation to OMC.

Common indicators and the use of benchmarking have been considered useful for Slovakia, but informants underlined the fact that these tools should not be used for ‘naming and shaming’ especially new member states or countries that has not reached yet complete European standards. (Since the principle does not consider an individual country’s ‘starting points’). The sharing of best practice is considered important even if the informants believe that it is really difficult to adopt solutions or models created in other legislative and economic context. However, target setting and benchmarking exercises in the context of eEurope do not appear to have had a significant influence on accelerating the implementation of IS activities. Only the presence of guidelines (vis-à-vis the eEurope initiative) has directly influenced policy planning, even if it has to be underlined that eEurope guidelines are seen as a requirement in relation to pre-accession negotiations and *acquis communautaire*.

### **Case study specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci**

#### ***E-literacy and Expertise, e-Government and Institutional Capacity***

##### ***Infovek Project***

Since the Infovek Project was initiated in 1998 it has demonstrated the effectiveness of co-operation between both the state and non-state sector. The project vision would not have become a reality without the support of the state – the Ministry of Education, Parliament as well as the Central Government. Currently, the private sector is becoming increasingly more involved in the project through commercial companies, who understand the need to educate young people in ICT and IT and the necessity of these skills for a the prosperous knowledge based economy. Amongst many activities, the project involves creating ICT infrastructures in schools, developing curricula projects and content and ICT training for teachers. By end of 2001 project had extended into 500 schools

##### ***MESTO Project***

In 2003, MESTO ([www.mesto.sk](http://www.mesto.sk)) became the leading project of Slovak eGovernment, playing the role of the main public local government’s information portal. Currently, the site the most frequently visited website of eGovernment in Slovakia.

MESTO offers to its visitors the following types of virtual information services: Websites Catalogue, News (press agency, governments, citizens), WhereToGo (events, attractions), Sport, Legislation, eJob (job market in cooperation with [www.profesia.sk](http://www.profesia.sk)), EU news, Corporations, Accommodation, Chat, Free email, Maps and Postcards.

The project is also considered as the first undisputed success of eGovernment in Slovakia. The success achieved by both the Infovek and Mesto Projects demonstrates that that the steering conducted at a national level (especially as concern Infovek project) is able to take advantages of the opportunities provided by decentralized structures. In the case of Infovek project, for example, the practice of creating competition between schools offers a method of achieving central objectives (e-literacy increasing).

***Institutional Capacity***

Although the country seems to have great opportunities to implement interesting and innovative projects through a participation of both private and public sector organisations a lack of institutional capacity may be the biggest obstacle in implementing and delivering Information society issues and activities in the Slovak republic.

## **Spain**

### **General**

Spain is one of the most decentralised countries in Europe with 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities, each with their own Statute of Autonomy which defines political organisation and responsibilities for public services.

### **Description of Current National IS/eEurope Activity**

The first national strategy for information society was produced in 1999 and revised in 2001 to be more in line with the eEurope 2002 Action Plan. A new action plan, Espana.es was published in 2003 and is more in line with the eEurope 2005 Action Plan. This latest plan focuses on:

- Strengthening the offer of contest and services
- Improving digital literacy and information society communications
- Increasing productivity and competitiveness through e-commerce

Activities are divided into e-government, e-learning, e-commerce, digital literacy, e-security and communication.

The 2004 elections saw a change in government which indicates a review of existing information society policies with an increased European emphasis. The reason would seem to be a non-existent government structure for progressing on the issue, responsibility to be devolved to the very diverse regions that each concentrate on their own priorities.

### **Policy development: Coordination and Implementation**

The Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Commerce – specifically the Office of Telecommunication, Science and Technology within that ministry – co-ordinates the information society strategy and, through a public company Red.es, develops common services, technical support for telecommunications and information society more generally. The Red.es Observatory in particular has been charged with the development of benchmarks and the creation of a national database for a better overview of information society activities across the autonomous regions of Spain.

The Ministry of Public Administration leads on activities related to e-government. The Ministry is helped in this task by the Superior Board of Informatics, which has the specific task of monitoring tools and activities in addition to more generally implement information society policies. The Ministry is also helped by a co-operation body with the specific aim of creating relationships between and aid communication between local government and the employment sector.

### **Relationships between National IS Policy and eEurope**

There is a close relationship between national information society policy and eEurope in the documentation but evidence from the field indicate that Spain has taken aboard the eEurope 2002 Action Plan while they are some way off addressing the implications of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan.

### **Influence and Impacts of eEurope on IST in Member State**

The eEurope Action Plans have had an effect on policy making in Spain but it is proving more difficult to actually implement them on the ground. There is great regional variation in IST and relative wealth of regions and the availability of structural funds have a great deal of impact.

### **Evidence of Operation or Impacts of OMC through eEurope**

There is little if any awareness of OMC and no formal structure in place to enforce it.

### **Commitments and Future Directions**

With the change in government in 2004 a more Europe focused information society policy is expected although this is yet to manifest itself. Political issues as a left-of-centre government tries to implement policies in right-of-centre regions would seem to be an impediment. There is low awareness and suspicion of electronic transactions more generally and PC penetration remains low across Spain.

### **Case Study Specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci**

OMC has a very low profile in Spain. However, the creation of the Red.es Observatory, with the particular remit of creating databases and coordinating information society activities nationally is a major step towards peer review and best practice learning. Coordination activities tend to be focused at the national level rather than European level.

eInclusion and youth were the foci of this case study. There has been a great drive towards broadband and ICT access for all. This push has focused to a great extent on schools. While continuing with this development the emphasis has shifted somewhat from simple access to including skills training for increased uptake of ICT as this remains one of the lowest in Europe.



## United Kingdom

### General

The most visible areas of IS activity are in e-government and e-commerce. E-government is an issue that has been at the forefront of the IS agenda and is now moving into a more complex stage with the more widespread use of Smartcards. Whilst e-commerce has been a more neglected it is also being more strongly developed.

There is also considerable activity in the areas of e-learning and e-health. In recent years funding has been made available to the National Health Service (NHS) to improve and co-ordinate their use of IT, providing online health information and advice 24 hours a day on NHDirect. Furthermore, there have also been developments in electronic patient records and use of Health Smartcards.

### Description of Current National IS/eEurope Activity

eEurope has a rather low formal profile in the UK but the 2005 Action Plan – as well as the 2002 Action Plan before it – are implicit in Information Society related documentation.

E-government has had a high profile since the Modernising Government White Paper (March 1999) document of new Labour Government was passed through Parliament. The objective was to have all government services available online in the year 2005. Key services are predominantly available online. E-government taps into another big topic in UK society, - that of the devolution to the regions, with Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland all having a certain level of autonomy. Leading the way with regards to e-government is Scotland.

Smartcards are considered the logical next step in the co-ordination between government departments in dealing with citizens and simplifying access. The issue of Smartcards, however, is a far more sensitive issue politically than e-government more generally as there are data protection and security issues to manage.

With broadband access fairly widely available and the majority of government services available online, the focus has recently moved toward e-commerce with the publication of 'Competing in the Global Economy: the Innovation Challenge' by the Department of Trade and Industry in December 2003.

### Policy development: Coordination and Implementation

There is a great deal of political commitment to Information Society policy making, including the Prime Minister's Office and the Treasury. Information Society policy development in the UK has taken place in various departments and units since 1997 when a new Labour Government came to power. Initially, three new offices to oversee the UK's online strategy were created: the Office of the e-Minister - based within the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Office of the eEnvoy (OeE) and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). Since September 2004, the OeE has been disbanded and replaced by the Cabinet Office e-Government Unit. The OGC was set up in April 2000 and is in general considered to have made good headway in buying IT services and managing large technology projects. The Gershon Efficiency Review published by the department has had reverberations across all UK government departments. The Gershon Efficiency Review is important because Information Society policy making in the UK is not merely driven by the objective of more effective service delivery but also by efficiency savings for government.

The delivery of eEurope is shared between the Cabinet Office e-Government Unit who works closely with the Treasury, the ODPM (local e-government) and the DTI (security and broadband). The DTI also takes the lead on eEurope in the UK. There is a designated "e-champion", a senior civil servant in each government department. There may be some

changes in the role of the e-champions with more technical expertise being required of those who are in that role.

### **Relationships between National IS Policy and eEurope**

There is little explicit relationship between UK Information Society policy and eEurope. Although the eEurope 2005 Action Plan is covered in policy documents the main point of reference is the Modernising Government White Paper (March 1999).

### **Influence and Impacts of eEurope on IST on Member State**

eEurope “focuses minds” to use two interviewees’ terms, but the UK feels that in terms of Information Society policy they are following a plan of their own which exceeds the eEurope Action Plan.

### **Evidence of Operation or Impacts of OMC through eEurope**

Academics interviewed in the UK were well aware of OMC and its pros and cons. Other interviewees, however, at best knew vaguely of OMC’s existence. However, there is a great deal of interest in targeting and benchmarking, in particular about what is chosen as a benchmark and what does that benchmark then actually measure.

### **Commitments and Future Directions**

Interviewees did not present a coherent front on this issue. Some were cynical and felt they would be doing what they were doing with or without eEurope. Most participants, however, were positive towards eEurope and the opportunity it afforded for mutual learning from European colleagues. As for future directions then Smartcards and interoperability surfaced as crucial issues.

### **Case Study Specific eEurope Priority Areas and OMC Foci**

With regards to the focus of the UK case study on Smartcards and e-government then eEurope is implicit in the UK but OMC in its formal guise hardly figures at all. There is some indication, however, that a closer co-operation with the eEurope Action Plan may be on the horizon due to the key issues facing the Information Society brought out clearly by interviewees in government departments, namely that of security and interoperability, which by nature will require more co-ordination with other member states and the world at large.

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