Presidency Conclusions

10 November 2009

**Creating impact for an eUnion 2015
– "The Visby Declaration"**

The Information Society Conference "Visby Agenda – Creating Impact for an eUnion 2015", held in Visby, Sweden, on 9-10 November 2009, was arranged by the Swedish Presidency of the European Council with the participation of the European Commission, the Member States of the EU, candidate and potential candidate countries as well as industry representatives and other relevant stakeholders.

The conference was chaired by Mr Leif Zetterberg, State Secretary at the Swedish Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, in the presence of the Swedish Minister for Communications Ms Åsa Torstensson and the European Commissioner for Information Society and Media, Mrs Viviane Reding.

The main purpose of the conference was to seek a common understanding of which relevant and pressing policy issues a new ICT agenda for the EU will need to address.

A green knowledge based society

ICTs continue to contribute substantially to economic growth, new jobs and the development of European social, cultural and democratic life. Much of this contribution depends on the continued innovative development of software and services, and on improvements in hardware. Value creation is driven by information flows between different societal domains and enabled by technology take-up and demand, entrepreneurship as well as professional and everyday use. The collective value of the Internet grows exponentially as more people, functions and endpoints are connected to it through wired and wireless connections.

The Internet itself should remain a tool for democracy, open debate and freedom of expression in accordance with international human rights standards. It should contribute to democracy and to media diversity, make businesses and governments more efficient and able to provide better services to the citizens as well as be a key component in development policy.

As Europeans, we should jointly embrace the transformation to a knowledge-based society enabled by ICTs and particularly by the Internet. Our ambition should be to make Europe the world's most dynamic and competitive knowledge based economy which employs also ICT to fulfil our environmental responsibilities.

To succeed we will need to find ways to promote Europe's talent and foster a European eco-system for creativity that can generate the ICT services for the future. We need to ensure we refocus from an infrastructural supply side perspective to a service-generating demand side perspective with a strong global outlook. Production and use of such services could contribute substantially to continued creation of economic growth and jobs throughout the EU.

In light of the above, the following areas should guide our thinking in setting out Europe's future ICT agenda:

1. There is a need for a holistic, integrated and horizontal approach to ICT policy with clear, visionary leadership.

2. The EU must make use of the comparative advantage that a well functioning European digital single market can bring by creating business opportunities and capitalising on Europe's diversity.

3. A prerequisite for the creation of a European knowledge society is that all users can have access to resilient and reliable wired and wireless broadband and network technologies.

4. The EU and its Member States should promote Internet take-up by building broad skills and improving user confidence for personal and professional use of the Internet. Steps should be taken to ensure that ICT skills are enhanced in the educational sector by promoting ICT in schools, in the education of teachers, and in the workplace by providing incentives for businesses to further implement ICTs in their business processes and skill their workers in the use of ICT.

5. The EU also needs to strengthen its efforts to stimulate digital take-up and seek to narrow digital divides taking measures to increase social digital inclusion through information, education, enhanced participation and other available means.

6. Upholding an open Internet and establishing transparent guidelines on net neutrality are important safeguards for building a European knowledge society at the forefront of innovation.

7. By further reducing transaction costs, ICTs hold significant further potential for the building of a single market for new products and services, to the benefit and competitiveness for European businesses including SMEs and consumers.

8. The EU and its Member States should examine the Intellectual Property Rights system with a view to ensure robust solutions that are balanced and attractive for users and rights holders alike.

9. The EU should set an ambitious agenda for research, development and innovation, capitalising on a user-centric perspective to make the EU a world-leader in ICT and particularly in usability, which will be essential in further bridging the digital divide.

10. EU member states and community institutions should seek to make data freely accessible in open machine-readable formats, for the benefit of entrepreneurship, research and transparency.

11. Access to and reuse of public sector information and data should be improved among EU Member States. The domains of data targeted by the Directive on the re-use of public sector information should be enlarged.

12. Open platforms for innovation and the development of services for public and commercial use should be fostered. This should include commercially neutral promotion of open solutions in public procurement to ensure that interoperability rests on a non-proprietary basis. In this context, standardised interfaces between process steps are one key element.

13. ICTs play a crucial role regarding general efficiency improvements in the public sector. However, going beyond purely administrative benefits, the Member States of the EU should also find ways to deliver on eHealth and eGovernment expectations and provide visible added value for all European citizens. Steps should be taken to support Member States ambitions to ensure continuity of care within and between countries, examining multilateral arrangements, with a clear mandate for openness of innovation.

14. The forthcoming Malmö Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment will provide an important foundation for increased collaboration in order to increase the potential of eGovernment and support Europe's transition into a leading knowledge-based economy. It will also provide important input to the discussion on the post-i2010-agenda.

15. The EU must rapidly respond to environmental targets by establishing measurable action plans for greener solutions in the field of ICT as well as in non-ICT areas, supported by ICT policy institutions where relevant. Such measures could include contributions from ICT to develop greener solutions for energy, transports, industry production and process, housing etc.

16. A green perspective on ICT policy is necessary but will not suffice. There is also a need to review the use and management of ICT policy throughout and between policy areas and EU institutions in order to promote effective and efficient development and implementation of policies that support a European knowledge-based society with a green perspective.

17. The EU and its Member States should expect and prepare for structural changes. In doing so they should systematically benchmark, evaluate and report on progress made towards the higher-level objectives of creating growth and jobs, and meeting the social and environmental targets of the EU.