**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Council Conclusions on
accessible information society

*2935th TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS and ENERGY Council meeting
Brussels, 31 March 200*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council of the European Union,

1. WELCOMES

a) The Commission Communication of 1 December 2008 entitled *"Towards an accessible information Society"*[1].
b) The results of the e-inclusion Ministerial conference and exhibition held in Vienna from 30 November to 2 December 2008 and the conclusions from this event.

2. RECALLS

a) The Ministerial Declaration *"ICT for an Inclusive Society"*, adopted on 11 June 2006 at the conference on e-inclusion held in Riga.
b) The Council resolutions of 2002 on *"e-Accessibility for people with disabilities"* and on *"Accessibility of public web sites - access for people with disabilities"*, the Council resolution of 2003 on *"eAccessibility - improving the access of people with disabilities to the knowledge based society", the Council conclusions of 2005 on "e-accessibility",* the Council Conclusion of 2007 on *"Ageing well in the Information Society", and* the Council resolution of 2008 on *"the situation of persons with disabilities in the European Union".*

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[1]   COM(2008) 804

P R E S S

c) The European initiative on Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) under Article 169 of the EU Treaty.

d) The Commission Communication of 8 November 2007 entitled *"European i2010 initiative on e-Inclusion; To be part of the information society"*[2] and the Commission Communication of 2 July 2008 entitled "*Renewed social agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe*"[3].

e) The United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, notably its provisions on access to technologies and information.

3. ACKNOWLEDGES THAT

a) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are crucial in today's society and economy and they can greatly improve personal autonomy and quality of life, particularly for people with disabilities or elderly. E-accessibility is a necessary prerequisite for a widespread use of ICT, and its cost can be greatly reduced through "design for all" approaches and better interoperability between services and devices.

b) Better e-accessibility entails major social and economic gains for several groups of people and for public and commercial service providers. For example, people with disabilities and elderly, people living in remote areas and people who are disadvantaged for economic or educational reasons can be more active as workers or consumers. Public and commercial service providers can reach a larger customer base.

c) Initiatives carried forward by certain governments brought improvements in e-accessibility. In recent years authorities at all levels and many stakeholders increasingly committed in improving e-accessibility. Nevertheless, e-accessibility remains overall poor in Europe.

d) Many people in Europe still make little or no use of ICT partially due to poor accessibility. Several goals of the Riga Ministerial Declaration are still to be met. Therefore, further efforts by all those concerned are required to prevent fragmentation from divergent approaches. These efforts should include coordinated European action.

4. UNDERLINES THAT

a) Everyone should have the possibility of accessing services provided by public administrations. This includes users with disabilities and elderly users as well as all those who have particular difficulties in becoming part of the digital society. The possibility of accessing services provided by public administrations should exist regardless of the software, communication channel, or technological device used.

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[2]   COM(2007) 694
[3]   COM(2008) 412

b) Public authorities have a particular responsibility in promoting social cohesion, and thus e-accessibility, using various instruments at their disposal, such as legislation, standardisation and certification as well as public procurement.

c) The ministerial representatives of many European countries committed in the Riga Declaration to deliver significant progress by 2010.

d) The adoption of the second version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides the necessary technical specifications.

e) The contribution of European standardisation organisations with their work on accessibility requirements for public procurement of products and services in the ICT domain remains important[4].

5. WELCOMES THE INTENTION OF THE COMMISSION TO

a) Continue the activities on e-accessibility in the framework of the i2010 High-Level Group.

b) Stimulate dialogue with and between stakeholders at European level, coordinating efforts as appropriate.

c) Continue monitoring and assessing through various reports the status and evolution of e-accessibility in Europe.

d) Improve the accessibility of Commission websites.

6. INVITES THE COMMISSION TO

a) Uphold e-inclusion in general, and e-accessibility in particular, as a main concern in order to encourage the Council to maintain this priority in EU information society policy following up on the i2010 initiative, and in the next European disability action plan.

b) Continue providing financial support for e-accessibility through relevant EU programmes, such as the framework programme for research, the structural and social funds, and the Competitiveness and Innovation ICT policy support programme (CIP-ICT PSP).

c) Support efforts on guidance and exchange of good practice at European level for improving web accessibility, including technical guidance for implementing modern web accessibility specifications and practical accompanying measures.

d) Report to the Council on progress made in context of the objectives of the Riga declaration.

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[4] Through Commission standardisation mandate 376 to CEN, CENELEC and ETSI.

7. INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO

a) Support multi-channel delivery of public services and free access to public information.

b) Contribute to the affordability of ICT products and services to final users, utilising relevant public funding schemes.

c) Apply accessibility criteria in their public procurement of ICT goods and services, including web accessibility requirements in public tenders for creating or redesigning websites financed from public funds.

d) Join or consider increasing their support of the *Ambient Assisted Living* European research programme.

e) Implement the provisions of the Convention of the United Nations on persons with disabilities, including the provisions on access to technology and information.

f) Make full use of provisions in current Community legislation which address ICT and disability either directly or indirectly.

g) Adopt, and better implement measures, to promote e-accessibility, and particularly to implement the WCAG 2.0 guidelines. A common approach could be expressed through a Recommendation from the Commission in order to avoid a fragmented European market. Moreover, as WCAG 1.0 is becoming outdated a recommendation from the Commission could avoid that some Member states still apply different certification standards than recommended by the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

h) Promote cooperation and dialogue between national and regional authorities as well as other stakeholders to implement the above actions.

i) Enlarge the scope of application and to promote not only e-accessibility but to include also other services of the future. First of all, accessibility of digital television, electronic communications (including the accessibility of the single European emergency number), mobile TV and other m-services. Secondly, self-service terminals and electronic banking systems.

8. INVITES ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO

a) Cooperate with the Commission in supporting stakeholders' dialogue and progress monitoring.

b) Optimise their websites and web services in compliance with accessibility requirements.

c) Improve the availability, interoperability, affordability and awareness of accessible ICT solutions, following as close as possible a 'design for all' approach, and focusing on widespread technologies such as the internet, fixed and mobile telephones, television, and self-service terminals, as well as on ICT-enabled domestic and work-office equipment.

d) Provide information, training and support to relevant ICT developers, implementers and deciders in the public, private and non-profit sector.

e) Improve the employment and working conditions of people with disabilities and elderly, providing ICT products and services adapted to their capacities and working patters.

f) Improve the accessibility and usability of ICT-supported education material and methods, thus ameliorating the learning chances of persons less familiar with ICT as well as persons with disabilities.

g) Promote the accessibility and usability of online services, public and commercial, particularly relevant to social participation, such as social care and healthcare, social assistance, emergency services, education, transport, and banking.

h) Engage in concrete action related to access to digital television and access to bank terminals which were identified as priorities by the population in the framework of the public consultation that took place in the European Union in 2008.

i) Support European standardisation efforts by encouraging European Standardisation Organisations to quickly deliver on mandate 376 on accessible procurement of ICT. "

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