

COM-7/032

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 14 November 2001

on the

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:

Creating a Safer Information Society by Improving the Security of Information Infrastructures and Combating Computer-related Crime: eEurope 2002

COM(2000) 890 final

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *Creating a safer information society by improving the security of information infrastructures and combating computer-related crime* (COM(2000) 890 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Decision taken by the European Commission on 31 January 2001 to ask the Committee of the Regions for an opinion on this matter under Article 265, 1st paragraph of the EC Treaty;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by its Bureau on 13 June to draw up an opinion on this matter and to instruct Commission 7 for Education, Vocational Training, Culture, Youth, Sport and Citizens' Rights to undertake the preparatory work;

HAVING REGARD TO the Draft Opinion (CdR 88/2001 rev. 3) adopted by Commission 7 on 1 October 2001 (Rapporteur: **Mr Duppré**);

HAVING REGARD TO the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on *A European initiative in electronic commerce* (CdR 350/1997 fin)¹;

HAVING REGARD TO the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on *A Common framework for electronic signatures* (CdR 332/1998 fin)²;

HAVING REGARD TO the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on *Cohesion and the information society* (CdR 270/1997 fin)³;

HAVING REGARD TO the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on *Local and regional cooperation to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect in the European Union* (CdR 225/1999 fin)⁴) and the recommendations of the Committee of the Regions' seminar on *Local and regional cooperation to protect children from abuse* 4 December 1998 (CdR 326/98 fin)

adopted unanimously the following opinion at its 41st plenary session on 14-15 November 2001 (meeting of 14 November):

The Committee of the Regions' views and recommendations concerning the Commission's communication:

The Committee of the Regions

1. concurs with the Commission Communication that Europe's transition to the information society could be seriously hindered by new forms of crime, making use of the new information and communication technologies;
2. shares the view of the European Council and the Commission that cybercrime is a threat which must be countered by multinational measures, as it does not stop at national frontiers and moves from country to country to escape pursuit;
3. welcomes the fact that in its Communication the Commission has for the first time drawn the outlines of a work programme covering the main problem areas, which both describes the need for action in detail and includes an action programme;
4. notes that the Commission is thus fleshing out the tasks related to network safety and the combating of cybercrime (eEurope) agreed at the Feira European Council, whilst making a distinction between legislative and non-legislative measures;
5. stresses that the framework of countermeasures must be broad, as new forms and techniques of cybercrime are constantly emerging and doing ever more damage and thus undermining public acceptance and use of the information society;
6. observes, in line with the opinion of the European Parliament and the views expressed by the European Commission, that in the fight against computer-related crime, it is essential to maintain a balance between the security aspects, on the one hand, and the freedom of opinion and information, on the other;
7. points out that the regions and localities are affected by cybercrime in two ways: as the victims of criminal attacks and as regional and local authorities which are participants in the combating of such crime;
8. notes in this context that regional and local authorities often collect and administer particularly sensitive personal data (e.g. in the social and health-care sectors), are involved in the protection of local and other copyrights (cultural sector) and run public service bodies which are able to communicate with citizens more easily using information networks;

9. therefore concludes that regional and local authorities have a major interest in the effective combating of cybercrime;
10. draws attention to the fact that regional and local authorities are responsible for educational establishments and are at present spending considerable sums on preparing the ground for the extension of IT teaching in education (connection of schools to the Internet); and therefore proposes that measures be taken (provision of software, cross-border exchange of information, chat-rooms) to inform schoolchildren of both the security aspects of the information society and the consequences of computer-related crime;
11. also notes that the information society makes possible new forms of civil society and regional and local democracy and that these citizens' networks, which often enjoy a high level of participation, are particularly at risk of criminal attack and external manipulation, in some cases of a racist or extremist kind; there is therefore a danger that confidence in the services (and, in future, also in electronic voting in elections) may be undermined;
12. points out moreover that some regions and local authorities are responsible for law enforcement and that - even when this is not the case - apprehending suspects and - as in the case of child pornography - users of criminal content requires local action, and that it must therefore be ensured that staff of the law enforcement authorities are sufficiently prepared for this task and consequently are also given appropriate training, where necessary;
13. draws attention in this connection to the opinions which the Committee of the Regions has drawn up on the combating of child pornography (CdR 225/1999 fin);
14. calls for campaigns (software, chat rooms) to foster awareness of illegal activity and to show users how they can protect themselves against criminal attack;
15. points out that increasing connection to networks strengthens territorial cohesion in the Community and the interconnection of regions and localities, and that it must be ensured that this effect, which is very important for European integration, is not hindered by cybercrime;
16. expresses its agreement with the views and proposals contained in the Communication;
17. calls for specific arguments from the regional and local perspective to be taken into account in implementing the action programme and for representatives of regional and local authorities to be involved in fleshing them out;
18. welcomes the proposal for the establishment of a European forum to combat computer-related crime;
19. calls for representatives of the regional and local authorities to be involved;
20. finally, announces the intention of the Committee of the Regions to monitor closely the implementation of the individual proposals contained in the Communication.

Brussels, 14 November 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 19

² OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p.33

³ OJ C 64, 27.2.1998, p. 20

⁴ OJ C 57, 29.2.2000, p.46

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