

Brussels, 27 June 2001

DRAFT OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 13 June 2001

on the

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

"An evaluation of the Bridge Phase of TIDE

(Technological Initiative for Disabled and Elderly people)"

(COM(2000) 727 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 - An Evaluation of the Bridge Phase of TIDE (Technology Initiative for Disabled and Elderly People) (COM(2000) 727 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the European Commission Decision of 20 November 2000 to consult it under Article 265(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

HAVING REGARD TO its President's decision of 7 February 2001 to instruct Commission 5 (Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism) to prepare the Committee's work on the subject;

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion (CdR 65/2001 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 5 on 19 April 2001 (rapporteur: **Mr Pella** (I/EPP))

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 39th plenary session of 13 and 14 June 2001 (meeting of 13 June).

1. General comments

1. The technology initiative for disabled and elderly people (TIDE) was a Community technology promotion and application initiative with the main objective of stimulating the creation of an internal market in rehabilitation technology in Europe to facilitate the socio-economic integration of disabled and elderly people.
2. The part of the initiative known as the "Bridge phase" covered the period 1993-1994. It was intended to act as a link between the pilot action of TIDE which began in 1991, and the research and development activities that were anticipated in the Telematics Applications Programme which started in 1994.
3. Fifty-five projects were selected by the Commission in November 1993 and in April 1994, following a call for proposals which was published in the Official Journal on 21 April 1993.
4. When the projects were completed, an evaluation of the whole initiative took place in 1999-2000.
5. A team of independent experts carried out an evaluation of the Bridge phase of TIDE, based specifically on an evaluation of the outputs, results and impacts of the activities, in accordance with the provisions of the Council Decision of 21 September 1993, which constitutes the legal basis for the initiative.

2. Evaluation of the results of the Bridge phase of TIDE

1. The 55 projects taken into consideration concern the following technology application areas:
 - a. Access to technology and related services
 - b. Life at home and remote care
 - c. Mobility and transport
 - d. Control and manipulation
 - e. Restoration and enhancement of function
 - f. User and market issues.
2. The evaluation paid particular attention to the five principles to which the project work had to conform, in accordance with the Council Decision:
 - User-focused principle
 - Market-oriented principle
 - Innovation and technology adaptation principle
 - Multi-disciplinary approach principle
 - Technology verification principle.
3. In examining the results, the evaluation panel found wide variations in the output of the projects and the degree to which they conformed to the five principles.
4. There were considerable differences between the six application areas in the overall success of their achievements in terms of exploitation and market take-up.

3. Overall recommendations of the evaluation panel

1. The evaluation panel for the Bridge phase of Tide concluded its assessment with three overall recommendations:

- "The European Union should continue to support a broad and integrated range of measures addressing older people and people with disabilities, in order to promote the development and take-up of rehabilitation technology products and services for different kinds of users."
- "As an integral part of this, there ought to be convincing and well-funded research and technological development activities for the benefit of elderly and disabled people, both within the Information Society Technologies area and in other research areas."
- "These research and technological development activities should be complemented by a strong European Union social policy framework allowing the dissemination and take-up of new Information Society Technologies systems and services to meet the needs of elderly and disabled persons in the spirit of 'access for all'."

4. **Specific recommendations of the evaluation panel**

1. The evaluation panel also made thirteen specific recommendations (c.f. Commission Communication).
2. The Commission has responded in detail to all the recommendations made by the evaluation panel experts, and explained that many of them have been acted upon in specific Commission programmes in the years following the Bridge phase of TIDE.

5. **Implementation of the recommendations made by the evaluation panel**

1. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's responses to the recommendations made by the evaluation panel experts.
2. The Committee is particularly pleased to see that a significant number of these recommendations - not least the three overall recommendations - which provide important guidelines for all later initiatives in this area, were taken up in Commission projects and initiatives which were launched before the TIDE Bridge phase report was drafted.
3. The first of the overall recommendations ("The European Union should continue to support a broad and integrated range of measures addressing older people and people with disabilities, in order to promote the development and take-up of rehabilitation technology products and services for different kinds of users") was followed up in the Fourth Framework Programme (1994-1998) and continues to be taken into account in the Fifth Framework Programme (1998-2002).
4. The second overall recommendation ("As an integral part of this, there ought to be convincing and well-funded research and technological development activities for the benefit of elderly and disabled people, both within the Information Society Technologies area and in other research areas") was taken on board in the parallel activities of the Fifth Community Research, Technological Development and

Demonstration Framework Programme (RTD) (1998-2000).

5. The third overall recommendation ("These research and technological development activities should be complemented by a strong European Union social policy framework allowing the dissemination and take-up of new Information Society Technologies systems and services to meet the needs of elderly and disabled persons in the spirit of 'access for all'") was incorporated directly into the Commission initiative "eEurope - An Information Society for All", and the Commission Communication "Towards a Barrier Free Europe for People with Disabilities".
6. The thirteen specific recommendations are also being implemented under the Fifth Framework Programme.
7. The Committee concurs with the Commission's observation that the recommendation on the multi-disciplinary approach principle has not been followed up in any current initiatives, and calls on the Commission to take effective action to remedy this.

6. Final comments

The Committee of the Regions:

1. reiterates the stance it took in its recent draft opinion on "Towards a Barrier Free Europe for People with Disabilities" (COM(2000) 284 final)¹, and would extend it to cover the elderly: the pursuit of synergies in the fields of employment, education and vocational training, transport, the internal market, the information society, new technologies and consumer policy, will help to promote equal opportunities;
2. appreciates the emphasis on the importance of the modern mass media in disseminating information on all the initiatives intended to promote and apply the technologies to stimulate "the creation of an internal market in rehabilitation technology in Europe to facilitate the socio-economic integration of disabled and elderly people";
3. notes, however, that if this information is to reach elderly people, traditional media (radio, press) must continue to be used, given the small percentage of people from this age group who are familiar with the new information media (Internet);
4. hopes accordingly that this will be taken into account when determining the strategies for disseminating the results of the projects, as these must be tailored to each target audience;
5. notes moreover that stress should be placed on the importance of technology to secure social and housing conditions tailored to the specific needs of the elderly and people with disabilities;
6. believes it is essential to envisage financial aid for those wishing to obtain such equipment, as well as co-funding arrangements for production activities involving innovative products which are expected to draw on the new technologies resulting from Community projects and research;
7. hopes the Commission will encourage all initiatives to develop synergies between

Community actions, university research and stakeholder involvement, drawing on the cooperation of local and regional authorities, the Member States, NGOs and all other players in the sector;

8. notes that the evaluation report on the TIDE Bridge phase brings to light shortcomings in the specific programmes for technologies intended for elderly people; calls therefore on the Commission to prepare for the implementation of specific initiatives in this area, while recognising the inevitable difficulties in attempting to familiarise elderly people with new technology and win them over to it; in view of this difficulty, efforts must not just focus on the provision of new technology, but particularly on improving services for elderly people;
9. underlines that the local and regional authorities are vital intermediaries in any attempt to familiarise elderly people with new technology, since they are able to offer local initiatives suited to the task, building on the relationship of trust which small-scale local institutions often manage to establish with people in this age group;

points out that, because of their grassroots contacts and their responsibilities in the social field, local and regional authorities are the best placed to provide essential support to elderly people since they normally finance a large share of assistance to elderly people.

10. calls on the Commission to take on board the TIDE Bridge phase evaluation panel's recommendations on the modernisation and integration of passenger transport within the Union, particularly as regards air transport, which still has to fully address the needs of people with disabilities, and the issue of free access to some forms of public transport for elderly people;
11. notes that local and regional authorities in attractive areas from the point of view of geography and climate, implement specific policies in order to respond as fully as possible to the needs of this type of population;
12. returning to initiatives to enable people with disabilities and elderly people to move more freely within the EU, underlines the crucial role of the local and regional authorities in modernising services in old town centres and suburbs, particularly as regards removing architectural obstacles;
13. stresses, finally, the need for building design to take into account the requirements of elderly people or people with disabilities, not just in public building projects - which are already subject to effective regulation - but especially in the private construction industry.

Brussels, 13 June 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ CdR 301/2000 fin - OJ C 144, 16.5.2001, p. 67

--

--

CdR 65/2001 rev. 1 FR-IT/KH/OU/ht .../...

CdR 65/2001 fin FR-IT/KH/OU/ym

CdR 65/2001 fin FR-IT/KH/OU/ym .../...

CdR 65/2001 fin FR-IT/KH/OU/ym .../...