I work in Brussels at the Information Society General Directorate and especially on the regional aspects and on the development of the International Cooperation of the Information Society.

Yesterday, Mr de Sampaio Nunes, Director, reminded us of the e-Europe strategic initiative which targets all the European Union Member States. It is important to remember that the Information Society keeps on developing especially at the local and regional levels, the citizens being at the center of our concerns.

e-Europe has 3 objectives :

- to bring each citizen, each household, each school, each company, each administration to the digital era by developing administrative services, distance services, healthcare services...and creating a favorable context for businesses and e-commerce.

- To provide broadband access with a secured infrastructure,

- To give access to the Information Society to all including the remote areas (mountains...).

Our general Directorate created by Michel Carpentier who is with us today has to achieve 3 goals :

- to achieve the regulatory framework in liberalising the telecommunications sector,

- to sustain the research with the IST program, the major one in the Information Society projects,

- to promote and sustain the different projects which have been developed such as the Global Cities Dialog, the World Summit of Cities which will be held soon in Lyon... and mainly to coordinate our efforts with the other policies such as the structural funds.

Over 12 billion Euros have been distributed in the first phase with the support of the different EU countries.

The priorities are to help reducing the digital divide including everyone in the Information Society, and to help developing the electronic commerce especially for SMEs.

However, the last report of the European Commission on the economic and social cohesion shows that there is gap in the development of the different regions which is widening. The different regions have to be aware of the fact that the Information Society is the key to their development.

The European Commission can only raise awareness about the fact that the development of the Information Society is very important for the regions, it requires public/private partnerships focused on their specific needs.

In the remote regions, where the development of Broadband is very expensive and not profitable for the companies to develop, there should be not only commercial objectives but obviously political objectives.

Thts is why in the e-Europe project it is clear that the Member States and the European Commission should support the development of the Information Society when necessary with structural funds and financial incentives, including the ultra-peripheric regions. As you know there are seven regions which are outside the European territory which are : The Reunion, the Martinique, the Guadeloupe, the Canaries, the Acores, Madeira, the Guyane which are part of the European Union and should be integrated completely to this process.

It is a mater of balance which has to overcome various obstacles (economic, social, societal...).

To conclude, the socio-economical development of the remote areas is an absolute priority of the European Commission.

The Information Society is a radical change in our ways of thinking and living.

This requires the mobilisation of the politics and the administrations which should be the driver to achieve those goals.

The European Commission can help but can not be a substitute to politicians and administrations.

The regions have to make the choice to get involved in that unavoidable revolution by defining their appropriate strategy.