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Europe's Strategic Approach on e-Skills

**E-SKILLS INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP BOARD
HIGH-LEVEL EVENT**

4 MARCH 2008

HOTEL SOFITEL, BRUSSELS

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to participate in this event organised by the e-Skills Industry Leadership Board. Our aim is to discuss how we can collectively **develop actions towards implementation and sustainability in order to address the e-skills challenge in Europe**. It is time for "**actions, not words**".

E-skills will make an ever-growing contribution to growth, jobs and social cohesion. **A highly skilled workforce is the necessary foundation for Europe's competitiveness and prosperity**.

Since we met in June 2007 at the launch event of your group, **several important steps have been taken at the EU and Member State level** to advance a long-term e-skills strategy in Europe.

Together with Commissioners Figel' and Reding, who are respectively responsible for Education & Culture and for the Information Society & Media, I put forward a **Communication on "e-Skills for the 21st Century: Fostering Competitiveness, Growth and Jobs"**.

This was adopted by the European Commission in September last year. It includes a long-term e-skills agenda for Europe and five key action lines at the EU level. These action lines are:

- 1) Promoting long-term co-operation between public authorities, industry, academia, trade unions and associations;
- 2) Developing EU-wide solutions and tools such as a European e-competence framework, European quality

criteria for e-skills certifications, and a European e-skills and career portal;

- 3) Raising awareness and promoting science, maths and ICT as well as role models, ICT job profiles and career perspectives;
- 4) Fostering digital literacy, employability and social inclusion;
- 5) And lastly, making better and greater use of e-learning with a view to promote life-long learning and acquisition of skills;

We also defined clear deliverables, milestones and a regular monitoring process. In addition, in November 2007 **the Commission proposed a European e-Inclusion initiative** that sets out a strategic framework for action to enable the conditions for everyone to take part in the Information Society. These efforts have been welcomed by Member States and stakeholders.

The Portuguese Presidency and the Member States emphasised the need to rapidly implement a long-term e-skills agenda. They agreed to include their e-skills strategy in their national reform programmes. This was reflected in the Conclusions of the Competitiveness Council of November 2007.

I said at the beginning of my remarks that it is time for "**actions, not words**".

It is very gratifying indeed to see that the e-Skills Industry Leadership Board and its members have already played a key role in contributing to the mobilisation of the ICT industry. This was clearly demonstrated by January's conference, organised by EICTA and my services, to discuss flagship projects and exchange best practices.

Already, thanks to our joint efforts, there is a strong and broad agreement on the importance and the urgency of the issue. These were useful and necessary steps — but now we must move towards real implementation.

This is at the heart of our discussions today. It is not about theoretical issues. It is about concrete actions.

On our side we have already made **several moves to facilitate the implementation of the five action lines that I referred to.** Let me briefly describe them.

- Last year we contracted the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) to develop a European e-Competence Framework and European quality criteria for e-skills industry-based training and certifications. Good progress is being made, and the European e-Competence Framework should be presented in October 2008.
- We funded a feasibility study on the European e-skills and career portal. The results were widely discussed at the end of 2007, and promising cooperation opportunities between the ICT industry and education ministries have emerged.
- Also in 2007, we launched an exercise to benchmark multi-stakeholder partnerships in Europe. The results, released last month, provide the first comprehensive coverage of the topic, and include detailed case-studies. The brochure summarising the main findings will be widely disseminated to help promote best practices.
- In January this year, we started a study to assess the impact of global sourcing on e-skills. This work is being done in cooperation with leading experts from industry and academia as well as the OECD. Results will be available this September. We will also deliver at the end of the year a report on the evolution of the supply and demand for e-

skills. The study and this report will together contribute to providing a solid base of evidence.

- Last but not least, in December my services will release a report on e-learning for enterprises with recommendations on the promotion of successful strategies. It will be based, in particular, on the conclusions of the e-Learning Conference organised by the Portuguese Presidency in Lisbon in October last year.

In addition, we are already committed to support in 2008 the development of new ICT curriculum guidelines and the promotion of efficient financial and fiscal incentives.

Furthermore, we are planning to make a significant effort in 2009 to promote awareness-raising activities and dissemination of best practices. We will particularly target young people and SMEs.

Progress and results on all these activities will be presented at the European e-Skills 2008 Conference in Thessaloniki on 9-10 October 2008. The Commission will organise this major event with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in cooperation with stakeholders. It will offer an excellent and highly visible platform for all these activities.

In conclusion, I would like to underline **my conviction that the ICT industry can bring a very important contribution to the long-term e-skills agenda.**

- ✓ You are very well placed to provide information on trends concerning the evolution of the demand of e-skills. This would contribute to reduce skills mismatches and to improve ICT curricula.
- ✓ You can also play a key role in the development and the promotion of the European e-Competence Framework, as

well as in highlighting the professionalism and attractiveness of ICT jobs and careers.

- ✓ You can help enterprises, especially SMEs, to better assess their e-skills needs and foster their access to better training and to e-learning platforms.
- ✓ Moreover, and this is my final point, you can also play an important role in fostering scalable and sustainable public private partnerships as well as reaching critical mass by pooling resources, expertises and experiences. This has already been demonstrated in initiatives such as the European Alliance on Skills for Employability.

It is clear from today's agenda that these ideas are very much at the centre of your thinking and proposals for action. You will present them today. They are very welcome, **and I warmly congratulate you for offering us this opportunity for dialogue.**

Thank you for your attention.