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EUROPE'S SKILLS GAP: INDUSTRY IS TAKING ACTION

Brussels 4 March 2008: Over 40% of Europeans have no basic ICT skills, and while demand for higher level e-skills is growing, the supply is declining. The consequences not only weigh on European competitiveness, but also lead to greater social exclusion and lower employability. Grasping the challenge of changing this gloomy perspective, members of the e-Skills Industry Leadership Board today committed in discussion with VP Verheugen of the European Commission to concrete Priority Actions focused on competitiveness and inclusion. Taking up on the recommendations of the Competitiveness Council in November 2007, the e-Skills ILB announced that industry will work closely with key stakeholders like the European Schoolnet, and support the pilot phase of the "European e-Skills Career Portal". Together with the e-Competence Framework currently being developed by the CEN/ISSS at European level, these two initiatives will help foster the mobility, competitiveness and employability of Europe's workforce.

"Fostering inclusion skills of today's ICT practitioners is as important as training and education of future generations," says Jan Muehlfeit, Chairman Microsoft Europe and e-Skills ILB co-chair. "This is not only reflected in our priority projects for 2008 but also in our Policy Declaration which we submitted to the Spring Council today where we highlight the importance of maximising the contribution of every worker through investments in digital inclusion and life-long learning."

The e-Skills ILB's resolve to be a leading player in ICT skills training for practitioners and basic digital literacy for all users was reinforced by new research discussed at today's meeting. In just one example, a CEPIS study revealed that the ICT industry could be facing shortages of up to 70,000 practitioners per year in Europe. CEPIS pointed out that with ICT now the cornerstone of the European economy, it was vital to build up and maintain a supply of creative, skilled workers to support it.

A White Paper on the "Skills Gaps in the World's IT Workforce", prepared and presented by CompTIA, and insight of an upcoming article to appear on the WEF Global Information Technology Report on the topic of the e-skills crunch by Professor Bruno Lanvin of INSEAD further underscored the urgency of the situation.

"All policy actions and recommendations from the e-Skills ILB are built on best practices and seek to promote a greater role for multi-stakeholder partnerships with the goal to achieve larger scale and impact," says Yvon Le Roux, VP Public

Sector, European Markets, Cisco Systems, and e-Skills ILB co-chair. "The presence of European Commission VP Verheugen at today's meeting demonstrated the strong spirit of partnership and cooperation that has infused the e-Skills ILB since its launch in June 2007."

About the e-skills ILB:

*The e-Skills Industry Leadership Board works in partnership with public authorities across Europe, other industry sectors, SMEs and all relevant stakeholders, building upon the European Commission recommendations and other reference initiatives on e-Skills. Current e-Skills ILB members include: **CEPIS, Cisco Systems, CompTIA, Econet, EITO, ECDL Foundation, EXIN, Global Knowledge Network, Hewlett Packard, Inlea Foundation, Microsoft, Oracle, Prometric and Siemens Enterprise Communications.** For more information see www.e-skills-ILB.org or contact the secretariat at: +32-2/234.78.23 or info@e-skills.org*