



## **“THE ATHENS DECLARATION”**

### **CONTINUING ACTIONS TO BRIDGE THE *e*SKILLS GAP IN THE EU**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE “EUROPEAN *e*SKILLS SUMMIT”,  
COPENHAGEN, 17-18 OCTOBER 2002**

*INTRODUCED AT THE COMPTIA STRATEGIES 2002 EMEA CONFERENCE  
“THE CATALYST FOR TECHNOLOGY LEARNING”  
ATHENS, 3-5 OCTOBER 2002*

<http://www.comptia.org>

# “THE ATHENS DECLARATION”

## CONTINUING ACTIONS TO BRIDGE THE *e*SKILLS GAP IN THE EU

The success of the European Union (EU) in leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to promote productivity and competitiveness depends on the availability of an adequately trained, ICT literate workforce. A year after the [Barcelona Declaration](#)<sup>1</sup>, the shortage of ICT skills continues to burden companies everywhere, obliging them to invest substantial money in often basic ICT training and education.

The ICT industry recognises the role it has to play in training and educating the workforce and supporting innovation, but believes that public policies should seek to maximise their competence and contribution to growth and employment. For this reason, the European ICT training industry calls upon EU Heads of State and Government to enhance existing and to introduce major new policy schemes:

### **Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)**

The “Go-Digital Initiative”<sup>2</sup> recognised the important role SMEs have to play in maintaining high employment levels and in encouraging technical innovation in Europe. A range of supporting measures are needed to ensure that they can continue to do so:

- Facilitate access for SME’s to risk capital to promote innovation
- Introduce targeted financial and other incentives for SME’s to reduce the burden of high ICT investment and/or training costs
- Stimulate programmes to develop the knowledge of all SMEs on e-skills competence management and implementation tools.

### **Generalised tax credits for commercial ICT training**

Enhancing the existing tax regimes<sup>3</sup> in support of commercial ICT training offers a balanced and widely applicable mechanism for realising the necessary structural changes in the labour market. Tax incentives for e-skills training will:

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<sup>1</sup> The “Barcelona Declaration” was introduced at the CompTIA “Strategies for Success” Conference in Barcelona, 21-24 October 2001 see: [http://www.comptia.com/publicpolicy/eupublicpolicy/htw\\_barcelona.htm](http://www.comptia.com/publicpolicy/eupublicpolicy/htw_barcelona.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/ict/policy/godigital.htm>

<sup>3</sup> See the examples of EU Member States tax regulations for ICT training and the Political Recommendations for improvement (“Synthesis Report of the EU ICT Skills Monitoring Group”): <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/ict/policy/ict-skills/wshop/synthesis-report-v1.pdf> (report) and <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/ict/policy/ict-skills/wshop/synthesis-report-annex-v1.pdf> (annex)

- Offer business a predictable and accessible mechanism to aid the planning of investment in e-skills and training
- Increase the overall volume of companies contributing to the development of a highly-trained ICT workforce, to achieve a marked upgrade in workforce e-skill levels
- Provide a mechanism for the public sector to align training resources with current needs, using the experience of the private sector to define e-skills development priorities.

### **Public Recognition of Industry ICT Training Certifications**

The conclusions of the European Commission “ICT Skills Monitoring Group” and the Commission’s “Strategy for Jobs in the Information Society” underlined the need to develop new public-private partnerships to promote industry-certified training schemes and formal accreditation from national bodies<sup>4</sup>. The European ICT training industry believes it is time to develop a major public private partnership on this issue to:

- Allow commercial ICT training qualifications to be properly benchmarked, providing a framework to assess and categorise industry ICT qualifications
- Offer employers and employees greater certainty about the real value of industry ICT training certifications
- Unlock public sector funds to institutions or employers who choose to provide recognized courses.

The European ICT training industry calls upon public and private actors concerned (governments, business and cultural institutions) to establish a political framework to allow full recognition of the important role and competence of the commercial ICT training industry in bridging the e-skills gap in the EU.

The provision of ICT training and education is not solely a public task under the exclusive responsibility of governments. The provision of professional e-skills also should be provided by non-governmental and commercial institutions acting in the public interest.

Without the recognition of the importance of the independent role of social partners, companies, and private training in their own field of competence (horizontal subsidiarity), in particular in commercial ICT training, it will be impossible for European human resources to reach the levels of training - specially in e-skills - that present times demand<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See the “[ICT Skills Monitoring Group Synthesis Final Report](#)” (see FN 3), p. 51 and “[Strategies for Jobs in the Information Society](#)”, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Initiatives to develop such a political project are e.g. undertaken within the context of the “European High-Tech Workforce Coalition” (HTW), see: <http://www.comptia.com/publicpolicy/eupublicpolicy/htw.htm>

**Summary Conclusions:****Recommendations for the “European e-Skills Summit” Declaration**

- To facilitate access for commercial ICT training channels to risk capital to reduce the burden of high ICT investment and/or training costs
  - To stimulate programmes to further the knowledge on e-competence management and implementation tools
  - To enhance fiscal and other incentives to promote e-Skills and e-training, targeting companies, in particular SMEs, as well as individuals
  - To develop a framework and mechanisms to facilitate the public recognition of industry e-Skills certifications
  - To establish, in co-operation with the European Commission and EU Member States, industry and social partners, a “European eSkills Forum” to monitor the implementation of these recommendations and to undertake required actions.
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