

Brussels, 5 October 2000

Commission supports upgrade of Trans-European Internet research network through 80 million euro GÉANT project

The European Commission has agreed to sign a 80 million euro contract with the GÉANT Consortium, to put in place a 2,5Gbit/s trans-European Internet backbone for research purposes. This represents a major step in the practical implementation of the eEurope action plan and marks an important move in Europe's evolution towards Internet II. With GÉANT having already launched its tendering process to procure the necessary capacity and points of presence in 30 countries, all is now in place for network operations to begin early in 2001. Additional moves to extend these high-speed links from Europe to the research backbones of the USA and Asian regions are foreseen at later stages of the project.

Mr Erkki Liikanen, Commissioner responsible for Enterprise and the Information Society, said: "The adoption of GÉANT by the Commission is a clear demonstration that implementation of e-Europe is running to schedule. The ambition of the Feira European Council to evolve European research networks to 100 Gbit/s or more in the near future represents a further 40-fold increase in capacity: the real issue will be the impetus that this can bring to the research community of Europe in a cost efficient way."

GÉANT will increase the geographic coverage of Europe's internet backbone from 24 to 30 countries, and increase its capacity by a factor of 16 times to that provided by the previous 155Mbit/s technology. Such a European development will be in a position to match, and to complement developments taking place at national levels. By offering a guaranteed quality of service, GÉANT seeks to encourage the emergence of new applications amongst the research community. This will also enlarge the scope of research disciplines that can rely on such a network, to support their own needs and goals.

In Europe, state of the art Internet connections amongst leading centres of research (including those of the accession countries) is seen as a pre-requisite for increased scientific collaboration and as such, is considered to be an essential foundation for the creation of a European Research Area.

In recognising GÉANT as an important step forward, Europe's Research Council meeting in Luxembourg on 15th June 2000 has underlined the importance of continuing to upgrade the European Internet backbone. With this in mind the Council has already invited the Commission to present initiatives for further upgrades of capacity to the order of 100Gbit/s.

Research co-operation is becoming an increasingly global activity. There are equivalent Internet II initiatives to GÉANT in North America (Abilene and CANet) and in the Asia Pacific region (e.g. SINET in Japan, KOREN in Korea and SingAREN in Singapore). GÉANT will optimise its interconnection with other world regions by focussing on the management of Global connectivity.