

**Supporting Strategic Partnerships
across the Cultural Divide:
eLearning Solutions for the Digital Age**

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Abstract

The prospective extension of the European community to include the thirteen so-called Accession Countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey) has, within Europe, highlighted the potentially important role of eBusiness in the development of international trade and, more generally, a strong modern economy. Of course, this problem extends far beyond Europe – for example, a recently announced collaborative venture by the United Nations and the Merkle Foundation will focus on fortifying the IT infrastructure and, using state-of-the-art technology, improve the educational systems, health care, and business development of, initially, Bolivia, Mozambique, Tanzania, and nine other countries.

It would, of course, be insufficient – even naïve – simply to argue for the development of an economy which takes advantage of eBusiness. EBusiness clearly relies upon the existence of an extensive and broadband telecommunications infrastructure together with appropriate information technology. It is also now generally accepted that the development of trade (whether eBusiness-mediated or not) requires significant attention to partnership building.

In this workshop, we explore – through a series of presentations and panel-mediated discussions – an additional prerequisite for the development of an effective economy through eBusiness-based national and international trade: the development of an educated and skilled workforce. Issues which will be addressed during the workshop include:

- The role of eBusiness in economic development for geographically disadvantaged regions
- The context in which the education initiative must take place
- Inter-cultural aspects of eBusiness education, especially, for adults
- eLearning as a delivery mechanism for appropriate educational initiatives
- Technological infrastructure required to support eLearning
- Corporate, governmental and socio-economic perspectives

The workshop is intended to act as the springboard for a submission to the European Commission's Sixth Framework. The opportunity exists for an 'integrated project' under the terms of the IST (Information Society Technology) Sixth Framework (ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/rt2002/docs/fp6sp_amended_0102.pdf) 'Research and Technology Development beyond 2000. Information on the Call for Expressions of Interest may be found at www.cordis.lu/fp6/eoi-instruments. Of particular interest is the Thematic Priorities document for the IST programme (<http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/eoi-instruments/infosoc.htm>), and on the 'Research addressing work and business challenges', which states (inter alia) 'Work on **eLearning** will focus on personalised access to, and delivery of, learning as well as on advanced learning environments at school, university, in the **workplace** and in lifelong learning in general, taking advantage of the development of ambient intelligence.'

This workshop therefore offers the opportunity to participate in the initial stages of a potentially long-term research stream in the field of cross-cultural integration and eLearning.