IT & IS: IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
The Idea of "Virtual" Partnership

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Table of Contents

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1. Introduction

Internet is the issue of the day. Whether you look in newspapers, books or magazines, or you watch television, the Superhighway is always there. Leading journals have their special Cyberspace column, and none of the daily press escape Internet's popularity. But governments and international organizations also seem to have discovered the Net. Not only do they try to regulate this seemingly uncontrollable entity, they are also increasingly eager to conquer their place on the Web.

In this paper, we will try to identify the needs of international organizations regarding the Internet, using NATO as our prior example. We will furthermore focus on some initiatives aiming at using the Internet as a tool for enhancing partnership and co-operation.

2. Internet as an Actor in International Relations

The Internet gains more and more attention, not only from computer freaks and eager businesses, but also from actors in the international politics sphere. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization hosted a conference called "Internationals on the Net" in June 1995, while the Assembly of the Western European Union organized a conference "Parli@ments.on.the.net" on May 2 & 3 of this year. Soon afterwards, the latter's committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations urged its Council to

"develop and implement a communications policy directed towards the public at large, taking account of (...) the development of computerised communications systems such as the Internet" *and further wanted to implement a system* "in conjunction with the Assembly & NATO, making permanent use of the Internet as a communications tool, by setting up a site on the WWW, managed by the organization" .

The academic world also devoted a work-group on Internet and International Relations in the Joint Sessions of Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research in Oslo last April. Numerous other conferences and workshops were held elsewhere on the same topic.

The growing importance of the Internet in international relations, both in practical as in academic respect, urges further in-depth research. The hype of Internet lets us to believe that the Net is something new, unseen and uncompared. However, even a preliminary investigation leads to the conclusion that Internet is but a communications tool, just as we know our telephone, our radio and our television. Just as with radio and television, phone and fax, one can use the services on Internet to communicate with other people. As such, the tool is new, but it does not re-invent the communication-process.

What, then, makes the Internet so special ? Four main characteristics can give a possible explanation:

First of all, the Internet is cost-efficient. Compared to the fax, the Internet has various advantages. One can, for instance, send a message to the other side of the world at the cost of a local phone call. Information dissemination to a broad public on Internet is, compared to radio or television, equally cheap. Through the Internet, one can reach a potential of millions of readers at an extremely low cost.

Secondly, due to the fact that information is sent electronically, it can be re-distributed to various recipients without difficulty. Digital information also travels fast, so that a large number of people can be reached simultaneously by a speed which is incomparable to ordinary mail, phone or even fax.

The number of Internet users is a third reason why the Internet "stands out". One would not be using the phone if telephone usage was not widely spread. Similarly, one would not use the Internet if nobody else would be using it. With millions of users, however, the Internet has become a very dynamical entity.

The tools on Internet have also become very simple and easy to use. Especially the past few years, actually since the creation of the World Wide Web, Internet traffic has boomed. Though the invention of Internet dates back to the late 1960s, the Net has only become successful since the beginning of the 90s, when the service of the World Wide Web was born. Enabling text and pictures to be transmitted simultaneously via the Net, an unprecedented achievement, the CERN-invented World Wide Web could attract the attention of businesses and the broad public. Through its system of hypertext, it also allowed "linking" of information stored in the same, but also in different databases. To take up the example of our telephone again, we would not be calling so much if the phone system were difficult to use. By just pressing some digits, we can call virtually anybody in the world. Equally so, services on the Internet are easy to use; hence its popularity.

As a result, the Internet becomes a dynamic tool. The ease of use combined with the speed through which messages can travel from one place to another stimulate interaction. That interaction is further invigorated through psychological factors: in various circumstances, one would rather send an e-mail than an ordinary letter. The e-mail on the internet has the advantage of combining the advantages of phone and ordinary mail. It is as formal and fast as the telephone, and yet it is less direct: it offers people the necessary time to think things over before sending them. The programs and tools that one can use on the Internet make interaction possible. However, it is the users' attitude towards these tools which renders it dynamic.

As an actor, the Internet does not exist. It is a functional tool in the hands of the people behind it. As we can identify both media and governments, researchers and pupils, novices and experts - in short, almost everyone - the Net represents a sample of society, or better: a sample of society. Indeed, research has shown that people on the Internet are, in general, both wealthier and more educated than average. Its

usage is also more widely spread in Western Europe and in the United States than in any other part of the world. Advocating that the Net is a reflection of society as a whole would thus be an exaggeration, although the cheaper hardware and "netware" are becoming, the more true this statement becomes. The Internet, however, primarily is a Western tool. It is based and lives on the assumption that information needs to be disseminated, and people want to be informed. As we will see further on, this works out extremely well in our Western society where the exchange of information (and non-information ...) is common, but it is debatable whether the Internet would be as successful in states where such mentality and traditions do not exist.

Internet as an Anarchic Entity: an Overview

One of the Internet's key features is its decentralized design. For historical and technical reasons, the Internet is not governed by an overarching body. It consists of various smaller autonomously operated networks but has no ruling board or hierarchical superior. As such, Internet is a "network of networks".

The basis of Internet's anarchic structure lies within its roots. Originally designed by the US Military as ARPANET, the network of the late 1960s needed to ensure communication under the worst of conditions, i.e. a nuclear attack. Whereas the military normally prefer centralized structures, they now opted for an alternative and effective way of communication through decentralization. Much the same as the street-network where drivers can use alternative routes when the main road is blocked, "traffic" on the Internet can use various "routes" to reach its destination. When part of the network is down, the rest can still function, which would not be the case with a centrally governed system. Disconnecting the main workstation in that event would indeed completely cut off the whole system.

fig. 1 : a schematic "network of networks"

This "anarchic" structure, however, is the Internet's key advantage. Not only does it ensure communication, it also makes it possible to access thousands of information databases and networks all over the world. For governments who want to inform their public, and even more for large international organizations, the "electronic highway" (as the Internet is often called) is an important additional tool for information dissemination.

3. Making the Benefit : the Use of Internet by International Organizations

Most governments and international organizations have the public duty to inform citizens and third parties of their actions and decisions. They need to spend a lot of their budget to information dissemination. They often give news briefings, hand out special press releases or have some of their prominent speakers give interviews. Thus, through the media, they reach the public. As an intermediate,

the media has quite some power over the originators of the information they are to redistribute. In states where the media is in private hands, governments may see their statements changed, countered or refused. The media can indeed refuse to spread statements if they have no or limited "news value", or they can - and often do - amend and/or comment them. Conversely, they can also take a stand, give **but** the official information, take one view only. States who have a strong hand over their (nationalized) media frequently do so.

The Internet brings a dramatic change in this. No organization, media or government has a monopoly on Internet information-redistribution. Once hooked on the Internet, one can read the information from any information provider, whether official, semi-official or unofficial. It is the user who decides on the information inflow.

Critical analysts rejoice in comparing - on the spot - official statements with corresponding press releases from the media. Others, however, find it difficult to navigate through this "information overload".

Whereas the media play a selective role in disseminating information reaching them by conventional means, the Internet has no gatekeepers. Information can be disseminated directly without reprocessing. It is therefore vital that the originator knows how to present information and how to make it accessible to his audience.

In addition, he can structure his communications in a way that permits him to receive reactions and to engage in a two-way information exchange. This is particularly the case of international organizations which have to overcome the problem of being one or more stages removed from direct contact with their audiences. To them, the Internet becomes an ideal tool of reaching the public in a direct way, as they have seldom the opportunity to do this using classical media. Likewise, governments find themselves in a similar position. The Clinton administration, for example, has taken up the effort of exploiting the Internet in what it refers to as a far-reaching "democracy programme", and has been accused of bypassing the conventional media in the process.

A direct presence on the Internet, however, requires a re-evaluation of the information functions of international organizations and governments. Due to the direct contact, their public relations and media services need to re-orient, sometimes even expand, or at least have their common practices amended.

Most international organizations have realized the Internet's advantages, and started disseminating their information electronically. Amongst others, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, already have an extensive Web or gopher site. Further interest has been shown by the Assembly of the Western European Union, the North Atlantic Assembly and the Assembly of the OSCE to expand their (still small) Internet presence.

Note, however, that not all international organizations can be treated alike. Some only have to inform states whereas others also need to inform the broad public. Their press and information offices will thus differ, as will the presentation of their documents.

4. A working example : NATO on the Net

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization started its Internet adventure some 4 to 5 years ago. Within the crisis management cell of NATO's Executive Secretariat, efforts were made to experiment with the - then *virtually* unknown - Internet services. It is then that the NATO Integrated Data Service (NIDS) came into being. Initially meant as an experiment, the NIDS quickly developed into a vital information exchange project.

With the changing world in which NATO found itself after the demise of the Soviet Union, the Alliance had to find an effective way to spread its message of peace and stability to both its allies as to the emerging partner countries. Conversely, the newly independent states of Central and Eastern Europe wanted to obtain more information about the alliance and its Partnership for Peace programme and needed a simple tool to obtain it. The choice for the Internet as a thuslike medium was obvious.

At present, NATO disseminates information through the Internet by three possible means:

(a) first of all, it sends information by e-mail to interested parties which subscribe to one of NATO's e-mail distribution lists. At present, more than 3.500 addresses are reached, of which 30 are redistributors of information. Actually, it is close to impossible to know the exact amount of people that are reached by NATO's e-mail dispatcher, just because of the re-distributors. Each of them can have another thousand subscribers, or ten thousand subscribers, or only fifty ... who on their turn can re-distribute the mail to others. This means of Internet communication is by far the simplest, but has the disadvantage of being contemporary and "too complete". Indeed, not all news is interesting to the parties receiving it, and it becomes cumbersome to search for an old piece of information when you do not save it on your proper hard disk upon receipt. The biggest advantage, however, is that it is current: one receives the latest information from the organization on the spot. Whereas fax-machines need to dial numbers one after another, the e-mail dispatcher can distribute a message to numerous subscribers simultaneously. The 3.500 subscribers of NATO's e-mail distribution list receive NATO's latest within minutes. Needless to say that ordinary mail becomes superfluous in time ...

(b) secondly, NATO maintains a gopher-site. This menu-driven system allows people to guide themselves through the information, taking only those things they really want. The gopher, however, is an older system, which disseminates textual information in ASCII code only. Special characters (i.e. accents or Cyrillic alphabet) are not transmittable through this system. In addition, search tools on gopher are very cumbersome and hardly effective. NATO will, however, continue to support the gopher, as this means of information processing can be read by less powerful computers using low-speed modems and bad connection lines. This is the case in some countries with economies in transition that NATO also wants to reach.

(c) last but not least, the NIDS maintains a Web-site. The Web-site was specifically designed to enhance communications with Central and Eastern Europe, and to facilitate the dissemination of information on the IFOR operation in Yugoslavia. For the latter purpose, the Internet could assume its role as quick and effective information disseminator, which could help circumvent the traditional media. Lessons were drawn from the media dependence in the operation Desert Storm, where CNN dominated the information theatre.

fig 2 : NATO's homepage

Since its first appearance on January 2nd 1996, the NATO Web access has grown tremendously. At present, it receives over 89.000 hits per 24 hours.

With the design of NATO's World Wide Web site, three target groups were envisaged and treated as equally important:

(1) government officials from Partner countries

(2) researchers world-wide

(3) the media

NATO's Web-site is thus designed to meet the requirements of these groups. It is designed so that researchers would easily find their required documents while it contains a quick reference for media officers with updates of latest news and specific press items.

Interactive search tools would further enhance NATO's Web-site capabilities and allow easier access to information. However, information on NATO-related topics is not a NATO monopoly. The security and defense documents which the Alliance brings on-line can not be taken out of a broader international context. This is why co-operation with other international organizations and with specific research institutes worldwide on the topic of information management & dissemination is of extreme importance.

Before setting up its World Wide Web-site, these information management problems had to be addressed first. Creating the basic on-line information structure was one of the NIDS' prior operations. A feasibility study preceded the creation of the Web-site, as the latter needed to be both flexible and dependable. The lasting information on the World Wide Web needed to be stored at a specific Internet-address. Changing this address too often would put a burden on the reliability of NATO's Web, so that the Alliance needed to set up a durable structure beforehand.

The advantages NATO has gained from its Internet presence are many. First of all, it allows a cost-effective and fast communication with some 3,000 people worldwide on a daily base. Furthermore, the Alliance can update its information at a minimal cost. The NATO Handbook, for instance, needs constant updating, something which can not be done with the printed version. The printed book is only rarely amended, whereas its electronic counterpart can be changed every minute. The NATO Review, to state another example, holds articles referring to communiqués and other NATO texts. Whereas not all of the latter are printed, they can be easily referred to on-line. Though the Alliance has not yet fully taken advantage of the Internet medium, it has used it for the past months as an effective additional tool for mass-dissemination.

Partnership for Peace in Cyberspace

Partnership for Peace (PFP) is a major initiative introduced by NATO at the January 1994 Brussels Summit. According to NATO official publications, the Partnership is working to expand and intensify political and military co-operation throughout Europe, increase stability, diminish threats to peace, and build strengthened relationships by promoting the spirit of practical co-operation and commitment to democratic principles that underpin the Alliance.

Concrete objectives of the Partnership include:

facilitation of transparency in national defense planning and budgeting processes;

ensuring democratic control of defense forces;

maintenance of the capability and readiness to contribute, subject to constitutional considerations, to operations under the authority of the UN and/or the responsibility of the OSCE;

the development of co-operative military relations with NATO, for the purpose of joint planning, training and exercises in order to strengthen the ability of PFP participants to undertake missions in the fields of peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian operations, and others as may subsequently be agreed;

the development, over the longer term, of forces that are better able to operate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance.

The key element in all the above is communications. Co-operation starts with the exchange of information. Without mutual communication, no better understanding of one's views is possible. Partnership for Peace then becomes a far wider process, having more to do with socio-economic co-operation than with mere joint military exercises.

One example specifically comes up to mind, i.e. that of civil-military relations. In the former Warsaw Pact countries, virtually no civilian expertise in military affairs was developed. There were no civil servants, journalists, politicians or academics who knew either the technical or the managerial issues of defense affairs. In addition, their armies and officer corps lacked individually the staff to develop an independent defense or national security doctrine. This was due to the old Soviet system, where the Central European countries were to fit Soviet defense requirements, and not to pursue their national interests.

This lack of qualified personnel, both military and civilian, forms one of the main problems to be addressed by NATO under the Partnership for Peace programme. Intensive courses to train personnel

are highly appreciated by the countries' governments, but due to financial restrictions or other priorities, training sessions are organized at a low pace and lack follow-up and feedback.

It is specifically here where the Internet becomes useful. Provided they have the necessary equipment, civil servants in MoD or MFA, or military staff personnel in Central European countries can be given follow-up data or can be requested vital feedback information using the computer as a means of communication. In a further stage, the Internet can even become a tool for giving distance learning packages, though it is debatable whether Internet-mediated courses alone are sufficient as training instruments, and whether it is NATO's role to organize them. As an additional tool, however, Internet can play an important role in simplifying course documentation, interactive training and, in general, two-way exchange of information.

The presentation of information will contribute to the expertise of civilians within MoD and MFA, as the reliability of democratic control over armed forces is dependent on civilian expertise in both security and defense matters,

Timely dissemination of information could be an important factor in confidence building and in the overall success [of the programme]. Whenever possible, appropriate measures for getting timely and objective information to the local population should be an integral part [of any operation].

Note, however, that not all Central European countries have easy Internet access. Though its use is rapidly growing, the connection can not yet be compared to that of its West European counterparts. Financial and technical assistance in this is needed.

As stated above, enhancing co-operation with Central and Eastern Europe is one of the reasons why the NATO Integrated Data Service was created. At the time, it appeared that a lot of the - then still future - Partner Countries, through their academic network, already had Internet access. Very quickly, a network of research institutes (the Academic Defense & Security Network -ADSN) was established, facilitating access to information and research documents of countries on either side of the former Wall. Lacking, however, were "official" documents. Hence the efforts of NATO to link governments and parliaments of the nearby "East" to the Internet. As the Alliance is a regional organization in the security field, emphasis was laid on exchanging information on security and defense relating issues. NATO's Gopher server was used extensively by a number of country governments wishing to disseminate official communiqués and research papers. The following Partner Countries disseminate some of their public information electronically through the NIDS:

Country	President	Parliament	MFA	MOD
Czech Republic		X	X	
Estonia	X	X	X	X
Finland			X	
Hungary			X	

Latvia		X
Lithuania		X
Romania		X
Slovakia		X
Ukraine	(X) (parl.advisors)	
Uzbekistan		X

In the framework of Partnership for Peace, the NIDS tried to obtain information from Partner countries, which by other means did not reach the Alliance. Conversely, it issued information to institutes in "the East" who up until then had had a hard time waiting for documents by classic means of communication.

The Internet also allowed other people to access NATO's public information and, through its extensive use, tried to initiate interaction and dialogue on a broader scale. Though this is far from achieved, discussions and feedback are growing. The feedback which arrives at NATO electronically is growing, and more than 50 e-mails must be replied to daily. Further investigation on who is responsive to dialogue-initiatives has to be done, yet we can intuitively suppose that feedback will more often come from these countries where a debate culture already exists (i.e. Western countries) than from those where this is not the case.

5. The Research Dimension

The official information, disseminated by governments and international organizations, are a resource for researchers. However, the "information overload" on the Internet lays heavy demands onto the user, who has to differentiate and sift data and has to be critical at all times. The researcher will be specifically interested in adequate search tools and navigation in his quest for relevant documents. He or she will furthermore be interested in a reliable source.

The International Relations and Security Network (ISN), which is maintained by ETH, constitutes a first clearinghouse function in this respect. As outlined in the previous article, the ISN is extensively used by the academic world. The ISN, which originated from the academic network initiated by the NIDS and the Swiss Federal Military Department and is further supported by the 1994 Zürich Conference, fulfills the role of information manager in the above stated fields. It has been legally constituted by the Euro-Atlantic Foundation, an issue we will further discuss below.

As more governments and international organizations become "Internet-available", collaboration in this area seems a reasonable objective. Especially in the field of structuring and presenting information, co-operation is strongly recommended. It will be in the interest of the researcher, whether independent or related to government/international organization, that the documents that can be retrieved electronically are consistent throughout the "virtual" governmental and international world. This question of information management is not a recent one. However, the Internet makes the need for an answer more apparent and thus more urgent than before. Because of the sheer volume of information which can be retrieved "at our fingertips", structuring and presentation become vital.

6. Security and Defense on the Net:

the Euro-Atlantic Foundation and its Initiatives

The Euro-Atlantic Foundation is a non-profit organization founded under the auspices of the North Atlantic Assembly. Its overall purpose is to encourage the dissemination and use of information on international relations, defense and security, and to promote the exchange of information and research on these topics between parliaments, governments, international organizations and the academic community.

The Foundation has two initial goals. The first is to expand the International Relations and Security Network (ISN) already established by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in conjunction with NATO's Integrated Data Service. To that end, it will provide equipment and training to institutes in nations with economies in transition. This equipment will be used to provide mirror sites for the ISN and for the Foundation's server which is used - among other things - by NATO's Integrated Data Service. It will also be used to facilitate the addition of information on defense and security matters as it relates to the recipient nation. In this way, all users of the International Relations & Security Network will benefit from more comprehensive source material and increased accessibility to this material.

The second goal will be to assist parliaments in nations with economies in transition to exploit the communications and research resources available on the Internet. In these nations, Internet access by parliaments frequently poses particular problems. The Foundation will provide material assistance and staff training to overcome these problems and facilitate Internet use.

More specifically, the Foundation will provide assistance to the sections of parliamentary international relations departments that deal with delegations to international parliamentary organizations such as the North Atlantic Assembly, the Assembly of the Western European Union, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE Assembly. Support will be provided to ensure that the administrative and research branches of these departments have effective access to Internet resources. If sufficient resources are available, the Foundation will provide similar assistance to policy institutions, think tanks, etc. that inform or initiate pluralistic debate in nations with economies in transition.

The Foundation will also establish a small secretariat based at the headquarters of the North Atlantic Assembly. This will co-ordinate the Foundation's work and will ensure that information provided by inter-parliamentary organizations, national parliaments and bodies participating in the International Relations & Security Network is posted on the Internet in a coherent manner. It will also develop search and retrieval tools to ensure efficiency and ease of use.

The purpose of the Foundation is as follows :

to disseminate and encourage the spread of information on International Relations, Defense and Security ;

to structure and disseminate this information by any means of electronic communication systems, through developing and maintaining the **International Relations & Security Net (ISN)**;

to promote the exchange of information and research on the above related topics between the media, governments, international, governmental and parliamentary organizations, the academic world, and any other entity;

to foster the development of educational and communications tools relating to democratization processes and their link to security, defense and international relations;

to participate in, organize and sponsor educational programs, conferences and consultations that bring together East and West specialists in social, economic, political, military or environmental fields;

to co-ordinate all efforts in the field of its above stated goals;

to establish a research component to support its activities;

to encourage, organize, co-ordinate, engage or participate in every activity to realize those purposes.

This purpose can be realized everywhere in the world.

The Euro-Atlantic Foundation has been registered as a non-profit making organization (ASBL) in Brussels, Belgium. Its server is being operated and maintained by staff at NATO as part of NATO's contribution to the Foundation. This server is currently used by NATO, the North Atlantic Assembly and the Assembly of Western European Union, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and various partner country parliaments.

The North Atlantic Assembly has agreed to host a small secretariat for the Foundation and the Swiss Federal Military Department has agreed to provide initial manpower and funding for the secretariat. The Board of Governors are investigating opportunities for co-operation and co-ordination with a variety of national schemes intended to improve Internet access in nations with economies in transition.

Using the Internet as its main tool for communication, the Euro-Atlantic Foundation wants to be a clearing house for information on defense, security and international relations issues. Hosting a database containing the information from various international actors, the Foundation aims at stimulating research on these topics. Through its expertise, it will be a body that can be used by these organizations to consult for their electronic communications questions.

Through its promise of hardware contributions, it can furthermore become a bridge between governments - especially those in Central and Eastern Europe - international organizations and the broad public and enhance the communications process between these actors. As an independent body, the Foundation can furthermore initiate debate on various politico-academic topics and could even start distant learning packages. Whether the Foundation will be able to assume all these functions will largely depend on its funding and on the willingness of its partners to co-operate.

7. Conclusions & Recommendations

"the problem ... is that people must sit and keep their eyes glued on a screen; the average American family hasn't time for it." *The New York Times* on televisions, back in 1939)

The misconceptions people tend to have about new technology is an age-old problem. The success of the Internet will largely depend on the attitude of people towards this new medium. However, given its advantages, it already is a communication tool of growing importance. Its characteristics especially favor large information disseminators, such as governments and international organizations, but the Internet also charms the individual user. Though it will never fully replace other communication instruments, its importance can not be denied.

That the Internet brings benefits to international organizations and other players in the international relations sphere is clear. Every entity that needs to communicate with a broad or distant audience can gain from the fast and cost-effective tools on Internet. These tools also allow two-way communications, which can lead to feedback and dialogue. Note that, though the Internet contains the potential to unite its users, interaction is only obtained through the willingness of its users.

The *new* communications tool also brings forward *old* problems of information management. A clear information structure and an understandable information presentation are the basis of Internet dissemination. These do not come overnight, and the management of an electronic information site that can be consulted from all over the world is not an easy task. The efforts by NATO in this respect are illustrative.

An additional problem is that of uniformity. Documents on international relations are stored all over the world and are diverse by nature. The various bodies that disseminate official documents (governments, parliaments, international organizations) have an interest in co-operating putting their archived information on-line. The newborn Euro-Atlantic Foundation could play a role in this. Linking initially parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations to the Internet, the resulting information increase could be processed through the International Relations and Security Network, rendering the latter to become the official reference site *par excellence*.

In the framework of Partnership for Peace, numerous efforts have been taken to initiate more dialogue and co-operation. As a communication tool, the Internet has played a vast role in this. However, a true "cyber-partnership" will only be obtained if all partners are able and willing to co-operate. This starts with involving all partners in the project and with connecting all involved to the Internet. It also implies the willingness to share information. Yet, the preparedness of exchanging documents is not always that obvious on either side of the former Iron Curtain. These next few years will determine the dialogue and co-operation-stimulating capabilities of the Internet. The international information highway promises to be very exciting !

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