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Note by the WSIS Executive Secretariat

REPORT OF THE PANEUROPEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR WSIS
(Bucharest, 7-9 November 2002)

The attached report, received by the WSIS Executive Secretariat, is hereby transmitted to the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society.

Annex: 1

THE BUCHAREST DECLARATION

THE BUCHAREST PAN-EUROPEAN CONFERENCE IN PREPARATION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY:

TOWARDS AN INFORMATION SOCIETY: PRINCIPLES, STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION - 9 November 2002

The Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe met in Bucharest at the Pan-European Conference on the Information Society (7-9 November 2002) and agreed on the following set of principles and priorities:

Vision of an Information Society beneficial to all (E-inclusion)

The European regional conference proposes the vision of an Information Society, where all persons, without distinction of any kind, exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The Information Society offers great potential in promoting sustainable development, democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance. Full exploitation of the new opportunities provided by information and communication technologies (ICTs) and of their combination with traditional media, as well as an adequate response to the challenge of the digital divide, should be important parts in any strategy, national and international, aimed at achieving the development goals set by the Millennium Declaration. There is also a need for a people - centered approach, one that emphasizes social, cultural, economic and governance goals. This approach must ensure that the knowledge and experience of citizens is integrated into this process as the driving force behind the new information society.

The Information Society is based on broad dissemination and sharing of information and genuine participation of all stakeholders - Governments, private sector and civil society. Their contribution is vital in the efforts to bring full benefits of the Information Society to all. Governments and other stakeholders should also provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge, as well as equal opportunities as participants and decision-makers in all aspects, related to the shaping of ICT policies and frameworks. Global and regional initiatives should build upon previous and current initiatives by Governments, regional and international organizations as well as from the contribution of the private sector and civil society. Member States welcomed the active participation of these stakeholders and their contribution to the overall work.

The following fundamental principles aim at defining the main directions for e-strategies for developing an information society. A number of priority themes of e-strategies can already be identified.

Principle 1. Securing access to information and knowledge

Individuals and organisations should benefit from access to information, knowledge and ideas. Notably, information in the public domain should be easily accessible. Information is the basis of a well-functioning and transparent decision-making process and a prerequisite for any democracy. Knowledge is the key agent for transforming both our global society and local communities. Public policy should broaden opportunities in providing information for all, including disabled, inter alia by creating content, and thereby redressing inequalities. ICTs have the potential not only to strengthen the effectiveness of public service delivery, but also to involve individuals in shaping government policies. Moreover, communications technology is not an end in itself, but a means of supplying quality content in the information society. In this regard, mass media - in their various forms - are recognized as important means of fostering public information, societal development and social cohesion.

Principle 2. Promoting universal access at affordable cost

An adequately developed infrastructure is the precondition for secure, reliable and affordable access to information by all stakeholders, and for the upgrading of relevant services. The improvement of connectivity is of special importance in this respect, and it is undertaken by the public and the private sectors, acting in partnership. Community-led development is a critical element in the strategy for achieving universal access to information and knowledge. Community access centers and public services (such as post offices, libraries, schools) can provide effective means for promoting universal access in particular in remote areas, as an important factor of their development. Moreover, in order to ensure greater affordability, policy action should aim at setting up an appropriate open and competitive environment.

Principle 3. Promoting linguistic diversity and cultural identity

The Information Society is founded on respect for, and enjoyment of, cultural expression. New ICTs should stimulate cultural diversity and plurilinguism and enhance the capacity of governments to develop active policies to that end. Access and contribution to knowledge and information broaden the contents of the public domain and foster mutual understanding and respect for diversity.

Principle 4. Developing human capacity through education and training

It is important for Governments to develop comprehensive and forward-looking education strategies. People should be enabled to acquire the necessary skills in order to actively participate in and understand the Information Society and fully benefit from the possibilities it offers. Individuals should be engaged in defining their own needs and in the development of programs to meet those needs.

These skills integrate ICT - related specific notions with broader knowledge, and are generally obtained through primary, secondary and higher education, on-the-job training, but also increasingly through distance learning. Technological change will progressively require life-long learning and continuous training by all. Public policy should take into account inequalities in access to quality education and training, particularly in the case of vulnerable groups and underserved or remote areas. Specific attention has to be paid to training of trainers. ICTs open completely new opportunities for e-learning. New forms of partnership between public and private sectors are needed in this field.

Principle 5. Setting up an enabling environment, including legal, regulatory and policy frameworks

To maximise the economic and social benefits of the Information Society, governments need to create a trustworthy, transparent, and non-discriminatory legal, regulatory and policy environment, capable of promoting technological innovation and competition, thus favouring the necessary investments, mainly from the private sector, in the deployment of infrastructures and development of new services.

The Information Society is, by nature, a global phenomenon and issues such as privacy protection, consumer trust, management of domain names, facilitation of e-commerce, protection of intellectual property rights, open source solutions etc. should be addressed with the active participation of all stakeholders.

Principle 6. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

To realise fully the benefits of ICTs, networks and information systems should be sufficiently robust to prevent, detect and to respond appropriately to security incidents. However, effective security of information systems is not merely a matter of government and law enforcement practices, nor of technology. A global culture of cyber-security needs to be developed - security must be addressed through prevention and supported throughout society, and be consistent with the need to preserve free flow of information.

ICTs can potentially be used for purposes that are inconsistent with the objectives of maintaining international stability and security and may adversely affect the integrity of the infrastructure within States, to the detriment of their security in both civil and military fields, as well as in relation to the functioning of their economies. It is also necessary to prevent the use of information resources or technologies for criminal or terrorist purposes.

In order to build confidence and security in the use of ICTs, Governments should promote awareness in their societies of cyber security risks and seek to strengthen international co-operation, including with the private sector.

Principle 7. Addressing global issues

International policy dialogue on Information Society at global, regional and sub-regional levels should promote the exchange of experience, the identification and application of compatible norms and standards, the transfer of know-how and the provision of technical assistance with a view to bridging capacity gaps and setting up international cooperation programmes, in particular in the field of creation of content. Sharing success stories and best practice experiences will also pave the way for new forms of international co-operation.

E-Strategies

It is important for the Governments to promote comprehensive and forward-looking national strategies for the development of the Information Society, involving private sector and civil society. Private sector involvement is crucial for a sound and sustainable development of infrastructures, content and application. National e-strategies need to be adapted to the specific requirements of varied communities and reflect the stage of development and the structural characteristics of the national economy. Such strategies can benefit from existing knowledge and experience and exchanges notably on best practices would play a key role, allowing countries to learn from one another through peer dialogue.

To be effective, beyond the identification of goals, the strategies should include timeframes, indicators and mechanisms for monitoring performance based not only on quantitative but also qualitative criteria.

In the case of smaller countries, regional strategies can contribute to the emergence of larger markets, offering more attractive conditions for private sector investment as well as for a competitive environment. Furthermore ICTs could be of particular relevance in the development context, because they offer opportunities to Public Administrations, help attract private investments and allow for leapfrogging using new and advanced technologies.

Based on these principles the following priority themes for e-strategies were identified to develop future strategies.

PRIORITY THEMES

E-Government: More Efficient and Accountable

ICT tools will make policies more accountable and transparent and will enable better monitoring, evaluation and control of public services and allow for greater efficiency in their delivery. Public administration can make use of ICT tools to enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency in the delivery of public services to citizens (education, health, transportation etc.) and to enterprises.

E-Business: More Competitiveness and Better Jobs

Enterprises both large and small can use ICTs to foster innovation, realize gains in productivity, reduce transaction costs and benefit from network externalities. In support of this process, Governments need to stimulate, through the adoption of an enabling environment services, regulatory framework for the promotion of private investment applications and content, based on a widely available broadband infrastructure, and foster public - private partnerships. Use of digital technologies can enhance the role of enterprises in promoting entrepreneurship, the accumulation of knowledge, the upgrading of skills, and thereby increasing productivity, incomes and jobs and promoting qualitative improvement of working life. Special attention should be given to small and medium enterprises both as beneficiaries and promoters of e-business.

E-Society: Broader Local Content and Applications

In the Information Society, the involvement and participation of all, irrespective of gender or economic status, as well as the facilitation of ICT use in daily life and work, is a major objective.

Governments should actively promote the involvement of different stakeholders in the development of applications that improve overall quality of life, particularly in key areas such as education and health, both globally and at the local community level. Public policy should also foster the creation of varied information content, which helps to preserve and disseminate local and national culture, language and heritage. Local authorities have an important role to play, because for citizens they represent the first level of contact with the administrations and they could also foster the development of local communities. Promotion of cultural diversity and identity, including the creation of varied information content and the digitalisation of the educational, scientific and cultural heritage is an important priority in the development of the Information Society. Research on the social and cultural impact of ICTs should be continued.

E-learning and E-Education: Empowering people

E-learning is about development of skills to access knowledge, which addresses numerous issues such as local content, multi-lingual and cultural diversity and intellectual property rights. Access to knowledge is an essential tool in economic, cultural and social development. The potential exists for all those still outside the reach of the formal educational system to be offered education and information tailored to their need and culture. Education empowers people to overcome poverty, therefore e-learning is one of the most important issues in the bridging of the digital divide.

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FOLLOW-UP

The abovementioned principles and priorities should be submitted as a regional contribution to the WSIS process and its follow-up, and should assist Governments to shape policies and to take necessary action, with a view to developing the Information Society.
