**Introduction
of the Report on the Pan-European Ministerial Conference of Bucharest**
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General Rapporteur of the Conference

Mr. President,

1. It is indeed a great pleasure and a special privilege for me to introduce the General Report from the Pan-European Ministerial Conference, held in Bucharest from 7 to 9 November 2002.

2. The general report is an attempt to summarize the extremely rich debates that took place in Bucharest. There were fifteen distinct sessions, aiming at reflecting the complexity and the abundant variety of the issues related to the Information Society. The General Report is the fruit of the combined efforts of **eighteen rapporteurs** to whom I express, on behalf of the Romanian authorities, full gratitude for their voluntary, enthusiastic and competent work.

3. Besides the political document, two essential messages emerged from the Pan-European Conference, which are relevant for the remaining preparatory work and for the Summit itself. These messages capture basically the following key ideas:
   ❑ a **new paradigm of partnership** should be pursued, one in which all stakeholders (governments, private companies, civil society) act jointly, based on newly defined roles and responsibilities. This new partnership should be built in the preparatory process and further developed.
   ❑ there is a need of **extra vision**, one that does not stick to entrenched prejudices, but fights against inertia in all its forms.

4. I will start by making **our own assessment** of the Conference:
   ❑ The Bucharest Declaration is a consistent step ahead in stating the most significant **principles** to be followed in building the Information Society, as well as in identifying the main areas where **priority action** is required.
   ❑ The Declaration gives to the Information Society a proper **human rights perspective** and also a **developmental dimension**.
   ❑ The language of the Declaration contains expressions of compromise on some themes that have proved to be difficult to harmonize during the first session of the Preparatory Committee, like for instance that of information and network security.

- The thematic debates offered the occasion for a deeper discussion on the new **terminology** related to the Information Society, thus bringing a useful contribution to a **common understanding** of the main themes.
- The Conference facilitated and encouraged **subregional** contributions (like the Moscow-Bishkek Declaration) or **sectoral** ones (like the agreement concluded among mass-media organizations).
- For the first time in a non-academic environment, an exclusive debate on the **definition of the Information Society** took place, which resulted in a first attempt of a definition *per se*.
- The events devoted to **youth** and **women** were a good opportunity for a focused debate and a proper reflection, in the General Report of the Conference, of the views of these two categories of protagonists.
- A productive thematic innovation was the event on the role of **new technologies** that offered a very useful complement to the discussion on principles and policies.
- An additional illustration of that integrated approach was the **exhibition of ICT applications**, which offered convincing perspectives not only on issues like *e*-government and *e*-learning, but also on broader notions like *e*-inclusion.
- The organization of work allowed for an active involvement of **non-governmental participants**, in particular non-governmental organizations, business entities, academia and media representatives. They had the possibility to **interact** in all 15 sections, but the ministerial debate; they had their **own events** to organize and chair. They also benefited from a special **triangular debate** with the participation of governments, civil society and business as coordinated groups.
- For all official proceedings similar treatment was given to all participants: governments, civil society, business: **representation in the Bureau** of the Conference, possibility to presents **their own conclusions** in the plenary session and the **inclusion of their reports in the General Report** of the Conference. Moreover, language coming from the women and media reports *was included in the text of the Declaration* that came out from a prior intergovernmental negotiation process.
- A few figures might also be relevant: the Bucharest Conference was attended by approximately fifteen hundred participants from fifty-seven countries. The notion of inclusion and participation is illustrated by the fact that about 34% represented the governments and intergovernmental organizations, 31% the business community, 35% the civil society, media included.

Mr. President,

5. Since the governments will continue to have full credentials and negotiating power in the preparatory process, the best we can do as a host country is to try to be the mouthpiece of non-governmental participants. I would select a few excerpts from their own reports to indicate their expectations from the Summit, and their notions of partnership and participation.

6. One of the guiding conclusions from the **interactive triangular dialogue** among governments, business sector and civil society, alludes to the dimensions of a balanced partnership: "*In the triangle of regulation, markets and values, the value aspect has been underrepresented until now and should be strengthened with the help of NGOs.*"

7. The message coming from the **business** round-table is clear: "*the inclusion of business as a true vector and partner in the development of the information society is important to the success of this Summit and (...) for the implementation of its goals* ". The business community " *would welcome a real and intensive integration of business from across the globe (...) in the work of this Summit*".

8. The **Civil Society Forum** brought in a substantial and coherent contribution to the description of a comprehensive and action-oriented partnership: "*New types of partnerships between community groups, local governments and the private sector are playing a key role (...) in implementing and shaping Information Society development at the local level in terms of governance, sustainable development, local democracy, education, employment and community enterprise. Community has become an important integrative and inclusive mechanism for effecting successful multi-stakeholder partnerships and approaches at the local level. This needs to be more explicitly acknowledged and reflected in the WSIS processes and outcomes.*"

9. The sense of concreteness goes hand in hand with the sought of vision in an exposé on the **Nordic experience**: "*When we build the new production infrastructure, we need vision and concrete pictures of how we want the health services, transport systems, the school situation and everyday life to be, say, ten to fifteen years from now. We need to invite broad groupings of citizens, business people and organizations to discuss the future and what we want from it*".

10. The **media** representatives described their own vision on the principles and objectives that should lead us in preparing the Summit:
   - Providing quality content for the information society should be a priority;
   - Fundamental freedoms and values should be respected and promoted;
   - Radio and television are important means of fostering development and social cohesion in the digital world.

11. Other protagonists in the Conference also firmly stressed the **human rights perspective**. The World Blind Union asserted that**:** "*In the information age, access to information is a human right with associated responsibilities that must be enjoyed by all as a pre-condition for participation in society*".

12. The event devoted to a **gender** sensitive Information Society contributed with adequate representation of genuinely inclusive course of action: "*Governments and other stakeholders should provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge as well as their equal role as producers and decision makers in all aspects related to the shaping of IT policies and frameworks*".

From the same source allow me to quote an evaluation of the women's participation: "*the ministerial Conference in Bucharest was the first regional preparatory conference, where gender aspects of IS were an integral part of the meeting and were reflected in the final document*".

13. A most qualified opinion came from the scientists and researchers that participated in the workshop on the **role of new technologies**, those learned people who may sometime ignore tight rules of procedure while daring to create and innovate: *"The Cornerstone of the Information Society is education and research. Universities and colleges are the key to providing the "human infrastructure" necessary for any country to participate in the global information society. (...) they provide the basis for innovation and entrepreneurship"*. And also: *"Creating a sustainable process of innovation (...) will lay a solid foundation for an Information Society with lasting benefits for the world's population. This "creative process", where rapid new developments in IT infrastructure and software systems enable new classes of applications, which in turn drive new demands and further infrastructure advances - should be a central theme at the World Summit"*.

14. An excellent document produced for the Bucharest Conference is a Declaration not negotiated by Member States, but discussed and endorsed in the workshop entitled "**Youth as users and creators in the Information Society**". Nothing of what is of concern for governments and meaningful for the international agenda is missing from that declaration. Any international Conference could be proud to produce such a document. Time constraints compel me, however, to limit myself to the basic message the youth conveyed to the Summit: *"The world's largest untapped resource in creating an information society is not technology, but young people. Youth are a huge and growing demographic, making up more than two-thirds of the population of some developing nations. Yet, young people have too often been seen as a burden, rather than an asset, a group to be taught but not to teach, and to receive but not to give. We commit to working with youth to change this paradigm."*

15. Finally, Mr. President, a workshop in Bucharest discussed the content and the meaning of the Information Society. They agreed upon the following **definition**: *"Information society – a sustainable development process of humanity that is conducted by evolving knowledge management, where society develops as a community of highly educated individuals and where the knowledge economy promotes a growing welfare level of the society and every individual."*

This is rather vision than definition, but it certainly offers a broad horizon for us to aspire to, starting with this Preparatory Committee.

Thank you.