



Telecommunications for Development

**South Eastern Europe
Conference on Policy and
Cooperation in Telecommunications**

Belgrade
28-29 October, 2002

CONFERENCE SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

The South Eastern Europe
Cooperation Process

and

Electronic South Eastern Europe
Initiative of the Stability Pact

with support of

the Government of the
United States of America
through its Commercial Law
Development Program

and

the Government of the
Republic of Serbia
through its Information Technology
and Internet Agency

Introduction

This conference was organized as a vehicle for the countries of the South Eastern Europe participating in the Stability pact eSEE Initiative: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia, to formally associate themselves with the eEurope and eEurope+ processes by signing an international agreement "eSEEurope Agenda for the Development of the Information Society".

This conference was also the second in a series of conferences to be organized under the auspices of the South Eastern Europe Cooperation Process: trade liberalization, telecommunications, energy, and fight against organized crime.

This can also be considered a preparatory conference, since both the signed "eSEEurope Agenda for the Development of the Information Society" and the general conclusions of this conference are to be endorsed by the Heads of States and Governments of the South Eastern Europe Cooperation Process at their summit in March 2003 in Belgrade.

In addition, this conference, with its topics, aims and participants, can also be considered as a part of the World Summit on Information Society process, although not formally within its framework.

The conference brought together over 300 participants, including ministers, heads of international and regional organizations, government officials, Non-Governmental Organizations, businesses and media to review the impact of policy, regulatory framework and infrastructure on the development of the Information Society, economic growth and European integration in the South Eastern Europe.

General Conclusions

Conference concluded that the world is facing a fundamental change in the economic model, moving from the industrial society and the production of goods towards the information society and the knowledge based economy, and that South Eastern European countries have a unique opportunity to quickly catch-up with the more developed nations if they act:

- immediately; advancement in the information society is much faster than in the industrial society and the gap between developed and underdeveloped will widen at a faster pace than in the past;
- decisively; change of thinking and attitudes that is required demands bold steps on the part of the governments; and,
- cooperatively; advantages are multiplied when they are available for all, and any sharing of experiences and successes is a win-win proposition.

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Conference emphasized that proper policy and regulation are fundamental to make sure new technologies do not become a source of exclusion, but an instrument of growth and integration. Continuous, strong, public support are needed from the top political leaders in order to secure the support across the society and involve all the stakeholders in the process.

Conference concluded that the most fundamental prerequisite for the success in the Information Society is universal and inexpensive access to the broadband network infrastructure. Without competition, there will be no innovation and innovation is the fundamental for growth in the knowledge-based economy.

More specifically, the conference concluded that:

- Governments must immediately take steps to demonopolize their telecommunications sector, promote easy firm creation, create tax incentives for the investment in ICT, accelerate changes in education to support creation of knowledge workers, and create institutional framework to include all the stakeholders in the process of transition to the Information Society;
- Harmonization of the national legal framework with the European model, in particular with the "eEurope 2005" goals, must be pursued immediately and decisively;
- Full independence of regulatory bodies must be ensured.

Ministerial Conclusions and Declarations

Ministers in charge of the development of the Information Society and Heads of Delegations:

Welcomed the adoption of the "eSEEurope Agenda for the Development of the Information Society" (eSEE Agenda) underlining the importance of the process launched at the conference;

Reaffirmed that the objectives of the eEurope and eEurope+ and their commitments to specific concrete actions have created a framework and a unique opportunity for the countries of the SEE region to build the Information Society and to reduce significantly the digital divide inside the region and with the rest of the world via the implementation of the eSEE Agenda;

Recognized that the eSEE Agenda contributes to the region's overall integration process with the European Union;

Appreciated the valuable support provided throughout the development of the eSEE Agenda by interested outside countries and institutions, including the European Commission, Greece, Hungary, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States and Turkey. Particular appreciation is expressed towards:

- The European Commission DG Enterprise and DG Information Society for their guidance and advice for the implementation of the eSEE Agenda;
- Southeastern Europe Research Telecommunications and Informatics Institute activities, network and facilities in Telecommunications and IT will be utilized by the eSEEurope Initiative for the implementation of the Agenda issues regarding policy and regulation in the Southeast Europe Region;
- UNDP for its role in the SP eSEE Initiative, enhancing capacity of the countries of the region to address issues related to building an Information Society and expanding opportunities of networking among UNDP country offices relevant staff and their national counterparts in support of the implementation process;

- Commercial Law Development Program of the United States Department of Commerce for their support for the office of the eSEE Chair and this conference, and continued support through the workshop on implementation of the eSEE Agenda that is to be held in Washington D.C. from 2nd to 6th December, 2002;
- UNECE overall support pledged in the conference and its assistance in terms of guidance, handing over experiences and making available databases for the eSEE Working Group

Reinforced their determination to seek a broad platform for the implementation of the commitments of the eSEE agenda not only in the respective governments of the Signatories of the eSEE Agenda but also in the framework of other regional processes, including Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEEC) and within the larger international context;

Recognized that Greece, as the only SEE country that is also a member of the European Union, has a special role to guide and lead other SEE countries in their efforts to approximate the eEurope process;

Acknowledged the important commitments of support from Bulgaria and Romania, which are already members of the eEurope+ initiative, recognizing that as Southeast European nations their participation will serve as a crucial link for the region to larger efforts underway throughout the Continent;

Undertook to provide political support and technical assistance together with the efforts of the Signatory countries to create a critical mass effect for the success of the process;

Pledged to urge Heads of States and Governments at the March 2003 SEEC Summit in Belgrade, in view of the comprehensive nature of the issue, to fully endorse the eSEE Agenda;

Invited members of the International Community to join their efforts in providing necessary political support and technical assistance for the implementation of commitments embedded in the eSEE Agenda.+++