



SPECIAL CO-ORDINATOR OF THE
STABILITY PACT
FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

**WORKING TABLE II - ECONOMIC
RECONSTRUCTION, DEVELOPMENT AND
CO-OPERATION**

eSEE WORKING GROUP

PROGRESS REPORT

DECEMBER 2002

1. OBJECTIVES

General objective: The aim of eSEE Europe is to better integrate SEE countries into the global, knowledge-based economy by supporting the countries of the region in the development of the Information Society, including benchmarking, best practices and the transfer of knowledge. The initiative is to promote the creation of a proper institutional environment for building the Information Society for all, in line with EU policies. It also aims at the co-ordination and facilitation of the introduction of ICT projects in various fields among others business, governance and education.

Specific objective: To monitor, facilitate and coordinate the implementation of the eSEE Agenda for the Development of the Information Society, signed by the ICT ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the 29th of October 2002 in Belgrade.

2. eSEE WORKING GROUP

Participants of the Initiative: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). **Supporting countries and organisations:** Austria, Hungary, Greece, Slovenia, Sweden, UK, US /Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP), Turkey, EC (DG Enterprise and Information Society), EBRD, INA (South Eastern European Telecommunications and Research Institute), UN ECE, UNDP, WB, GIPI (Central Eastern Europe Global Internet Policy Initiative), CRS (Catholic Relief Services). The Initiative is open to all countries, organisations and enterprises who wish to support the regional efforts in this area.

The Stability Pact e-Southeast Europe (eSEE) initiative was launched at the WT II Meeting in Istanbul in October 2000 and it was constituted in January 2001. Regional ownership was reinforced by the FRY taking over chairmanship from Sweden in March 2002 and by a Secretariat based in Sarajevo office of UNDP.

The European Union launched the **eEurope process** in Lisbon in May 2000. It was extended to also include candidate countries in Goteburg in June 2001. The countries of SEE wished to engage themselves in a similar process. In this respect Bulgaria and Romania, while as candidate countries already participating in **eEurope+**, support the eSEE Initiative and are ready to share their experiences and best practices which gives a true regional dimension to the initiative. Yugoslavia as chair called upon the International Community, especially the EU and its member states, to support the development of information society in SEE and to provide the necessary support and guidance.

3. ACTIVITIES IN 2002

The eSEE Working Group Meeting held in Belgrade on the 17th of May 2002 decided to refocus the activities of the Initiative, putting more emphasis on the legislative framework and institutional issues with a view of creating the right institutional environment, which would boost private investments in the ICT sector as well as in the broader economy.

Recognising the specific responsibility of governments to establish a transparent, effective and pro-competitive regulatory and institutional environment and the positive experiences of the eEurope and eEurope+, it was decided that the initiative is to pursue:

- Rapid introduction of a new legislative and policy framework for the Information Society, in particular in the area of telecommunications;
- Improvement of the capability of the region to apply Information and Communication Technology for better governance, economic development, social cohesion and cultural diversity;
- Cooperation at the regional level and internationally with the aim to integrate the countries of the region into the European structures and the global knowledge-based economy.

The **signing of the Statement of Intent** organised under the SP umbrella by the eSEE Working Group on the occasion of the Ministerial Conference on Information Society held in Ljubljana on the 3rd and 4th of June 2002 gave an important political signal and expressed a common will to build the Information Society. The ICT Ministers of the SEE countries (Albania, BiH, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, FR Yugoslavia) reaffirmed their intention to develop the Information Society in their respective countries by initiating regional actions, which follow the successful model of the eEurope and eEurope+ processes.

The SoI contained a commitment of the SEE ICT Ministers to identify and implement strategic objectives and to establish new institutional frameworks by preparing a regional agenda. Bulgaria and Romania, being equally members of eEurope+ and eSEE, attended the signing and supported the Statement of Intent. The Ministers agreed to rapidly introduce a new legislative and policy framework and to improve the capability of their countries to apply information technologies. The eSEE Working Group was mandated to prepare the document called eSEE Agenda for the development of the Information Society. The ministers appointed senior policy officials to ensure government level contacts for the preparation and implementation.

Two drafting sessions of the eSEE Working Group were held in Sarajevo and in Budva in July 25 and September 27 2002 respectively, with the active participation of the senior policy officials, e-envoys and members of the working group from the

countries of the region and from the supporting countries and organisations. These concluded with the preparation of the text of the eSEE Agenda for the Development of Information Society.

The eSEE Agenda for the Development of the Information Society was signed by ICT ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the occasion of the Conference on Policy and Cooperation on Telecommunications held on the 28-29 October 2002 in Belgrade organized by the FRY government, with the support of the eSEE Working Group of the Stability Pact and with the sponsorship of the US Commercial Law Development Program.

By signing the eSEE Agenda for the Development of the Information Society, the Signatories formally associated themselves with the objectives of the relevant eEurope and eEurope+ processes and agreed to concrete actions to close the digital divide.

Such actions would offer a unique opportunity to catch up with the more advanced states in this field, ensuring wide range benefits for the economy, for social cohesion and for better governance.

On the occasion of the Belgrade Conference on Policy and Cooperation on Telecommunications held on the 28-29 October 2002, the new focus of the eSEE Working Group was endorsed, placing emphasis on the improvement of the legislative framework. It was confirmed that the initiative could count on the further support from the European Commission, the World Bank, the EBRD, the UNECE, the Southeast European Telecommunications and Research Institute (INA) the Commercial Law and Development Program of the US Department of Commerce and other bilateral donors.

4. ACTION PLAN FOR 2003

The implementation of the eSEE Agenda for the Development of Information Society will be the focus of the eSEE Working Group activities in 2003. Through benchmarking and peer pressure, the Group will aim at making dates count.

The next meeting of the eSEE Working Group in January 2003 in Skopje will review the initial steps for the implementation of the Agenda. These steps include:

- Preparation of Guidelines for the formulation of National Information Society Policies (NISP) that have to be worked out by 30th of March 2003 ; the NISPs themselves are to be adopted by the 30 of October 2003 according to the Agenda. They will serve as a basis for legislative and regulatory actions.
- Unified TOR for setting up in each country a Cabinet Level State Agency for the development of the Information Society are to be worked out by the 31st of March 200. The agencies themselves are to be set up by 30th of October 2003.

- Report on the capacity of national statistical bodies to follow-up benchmarks on progress of Information Society.
- Review of a matrix on the ongoing regional and national IT related programs and events as a coordination tool prepared, updated and managed by the Secretariat of the eSEE Working Group.

The eSEE Working Group remains open to all partners including private sector that wish to support the implementation of the eSEE Agenda for the Development of Information Society.

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