



**INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY
INITIATIVE FOR ELECTRONIC SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE
ESEE**

Summary Progress Report

December 2005 – May 2006



I. THE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

It is being increasingly acknowledged that information and knowledge have become a core aspect of international socio-economic development. The remarkable developments in the fields of information and communication technologies (ICT) are a heart of this global transition. What is evolving is a fundamental change in how business is conducted and how services (including government, health and education services) are provided.

The countries of South East Europe have a common interest in advancing the growth of investments, in forming joint ventures and initiatives, in nurturing technology development and telecom market evolution. Therefore, they intend to take decisive action at a governmental level, which will facilitate the development of a unified broadband market, fully interfaced with the European and global networks. This will support the implementation of a technology and industry co-operation programme aimed at fostering business partnerships between countries of South East Europe.

The countries of South East Europe facing the same challenges: mobile and internet penetration is still low, costs of available services are high compared to the EU average, independency of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authorities has not been fully achieved and finally investment interest in the ICT sector is moderate, due to the absence of a genuinely competitive environment. Regional cooperation in this field and integration into the EU information policy framework are a driving force that will assist it in utilizing the leapfrogging potential of electronic communication services for countries under development.

II. THE ROLE OF THE STABILITY PACT'S WORKING GROUP FOR ELECTRONIC SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

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 promotes the creation of a proper institutional environment for building the Information Society for all, in line with EU policies. It also aims to co-ordinate and facilitate the introduction of ICT projects in various fields, including: business, governance, health and education.

The eSEE Working Group is composed by Appointed Senior Policy Officials who are the nominated link to government ICT policy and officials from European Commission, UNDP, other relevant international organizations and representatives of private sector.

The Working Group activities in 2005 and 2006 continue to build on the "eSEE Agenda for Development of the Information Society" that sets out a several actions required to upgrade ICT policy framework in SEE Countries. These actions include:

- Adoption of national policies and strategies for the Information Society,
- Adoption and implementation of European and other international bodies,
- Establishment of regional co-operation and national implementation mechanisms,
- Promotion of an active Information Society for Development.



The past achievements of the eSEE Initiative and its on-going efforts to meet future challenges in this field would not have been possible without continuous support of its key partners and donors: EC (DG for Information Society and Media), UNDP, US/Commercial Law Development Programme - CLDP, UNECE, World Bank, EBRD, INA – SEE Telecommunications and Research Institute, and the governments of UK, Sweden, Austria, Turkey, Hungary, Greece and Slovenia.

III. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS – DECEMBER 2005 - MAY 2006

- ***Activities of the bSEE Initiative – bSEE Agenda***

On the eSEE Working Group which was held on 20 December 2005 in Zagreb Working Group members adopted, the bSEE Terms of References. According to this document the key functions of the bSEE Task Force will include:

1. Monitoring Broadband Development in South Eastern Europe,
2. Networking all actors involved in broadband development in the region,
3. Harmonization of the region with global and EU standards,
4. Joint Development of interactive broadband multimedia content, information security and eGovernments programs and
5. Facilitating the development, interaction and exchange of know-how between countries of the region and EU in the context of i2010 program.

The bSEE Task Force was established to identify and facilitate implementation of the bSEE Action Plan. The bSEE Action Plan will be designed for implementing effective policy instruments to correct market failures and complement the action of market forces and advance competition that will ensure broadband development. First version of the bSEE Action Plan was presented on meeting, which was held on 20 May in Brussels.

The Working Group agreed to intensify activities with other Stability Pact's activities, in relation to the SP's actions on e-justice, e-government, e-health, e-customs, cross border cooperation and strengthening of human capital. The regional approach of the eSEE initiative and the bSEE initiative will produce positive reaction in the business communities, particularly if business decision makers see emerging economies of scale in the regional market as well as the clear political signal of significant regional cooperation.

The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was one of the co-organizers of the 1st South Eastern Europe Broadband Conference which was held in Belgrade on 10-12 April 2006. This was the first international conference and trade expo covering the broadband deployment and regulation in South Eastern Europe. The government officials and business leaders presented regulatory and technical conditions for development of this part of ICT sector followed by panel discussions which covered modern broadband wireless technology and services.

- ***Streamlining of eSEE Agenda***

On the meetings in Zagreb and Belgrade, the eSEE Working Group discussed on creation a new eSEE regional action plan for development of information society eSEE Agenda+, which should be signed on the next ministerial conference. ESEE Agenda+ will closely follow i2010 document and it will be fully in tune with the latest WSIS documents. First draft version on eSEE Agenda+ was presented on the WG meeting



which was held on 20 May 2006 in Brussels. In order to enhance further economic growth in SEE countries, WG activities in the next period also will be focused on creation better link with private sector.

During this period, the Working Group also discussed ideas on funding an eGovernance Centre. This concept means that the e-Government agenda in the region may be supported in some ways by the Academy for e-Governance. The creation of this centre will follow the private-public partnership model and regional ownership in the region and will be inspired by the best practices and experiences of the eGovernment Academy in Talin, Estonia.

A matrix on the status of fulfilment of the eSEE Agenda, based on research and input received from eEnvoys and Appointed Senior Policy Officials, is regularly compiled and presented by the eSEE Secretariat. The Matrix serves as an internal benchmarking for the eSEE Working Group as it outlines progress made in signatory countries in relation to the eSEE Agenda.

The Matrix is a platform for the signatories to share the update on the progress made in their respective countries. The Matrix is available on the website of the Stability Pact for the Regional table in Prague and on the web site: www.eseeinitiative.org.

A quarterly Newsletter has been published by the eSEE Secretariat since June 2004. The Newsletter indicates progress in ICT/IS related activities and provide information on external assistance to the SEE region. The Newsletter is distributed to hundreds of e-mail addresses ICT/IS agencies, governments, key players, stakeholders and donors, in the SEE Region, European Union and worldwide. It is considered an excellent promotion tool of eSEE Initiative.

- ***Cooperation with European Commission***

Intending to encourage SEE countries to apply for EC's funded FP6 Programme to stimulate ICT development, the eSEE Initiative in co-operation with DG Information Society and Media and private companies PLANET and SRC.SI organized a "Framework Six Mentoring Workshop" in Belgrade on 21 March 2006. This workshop provided an opportunity to further explore all benefits of this programme including the presentation of concrete best practices, content, guidance and applying and evaluation criteria for success in submission of project proposals. The workshop was attended by senior officials responsible for ICT policies in South Eastern Europe.

IV. FUTURE CHALLENGES

In next period the eSEE initiative will primarily focus its activities on implementing the commitments of countries under the eSEE agenda+ for Development of Information Society 2006-2010 and its further development through the bSEE initiative and bSEE Task Force.

Accepting the "i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment as general framework for Information Society development, South Eastern European countries will focus on the following specific priorities:

1. Further development of a Single SEE Information Space, which promotes an open and competitive internal market for Information Society and media, moving it toward common European Information Space in terms of interoperability;



2. Strengthening Innovation and Investment in ICT Research and Education to promote growth and more and better jobs;
3. Achieving an Inclusive Information Society that promotes growth and jobs in a manner that is consistent with sustainable development and that prioritizes better public services and quality of life.

The 'bSEE' initiative will take action on two fundamental levels related to broadband communications development in the SEE region:

- The coordination of policies, which involves evaluating and suggesting best practices gathered from international experience and tailoring the various strategic options to the SEE region's broadband environment
- The homogeneous development of regional networks for the deployment of Broadband services in a manner coherent to the European Union standards

Having in mind that legislative and regulatory frameworks are not completed, securing political support for actions and for the mobilization of domestic resources are the basic preconditions for progress in developing the Information Society in region. Secondly, the greater involvement of private sector is a strategic priority for all countries in improving competitiveness and economic development, which will make a definitive contribution to the long-term stability of the region.

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