



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

Summary Progress Report

May – November 2005



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

Grasping the opportunities afforded by the Information Age and developing communications infrastructure and services is essential, in order to attract and retain inward investment, stimulate job creation and ensure a fully inclusive society.

The creation and nurturing of a knowledge-based society in SEE will to enhance and maintain the region's international competitiveness. A key factor of realizing this auspicious venture is the provision of competitive, high-quality infrastructure and services.

Despite different starting points and the country specific dynamics of each member state, nearly all the countries of the region under the eSee Working Group have so far formulated and adopted National ICT Strategies and formed State Cabinet Level Bodies responsible for their implementation. Legislation reform is taking place in a synchronized manner in all eSEE member states, with the main focus on the area of telecommunications, e-commerce, e-signature, laws on cyber-crime and personal protection data. In addition, important web based applications and a number of information systems for civil and document registry, custom and border service are in the process of implementation, or have been successfully implemented.

I. 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 Working Group activities in 2005 continue to build on the " eSEE Agenda for Development of the Information Society». By signing this Agenda, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Moldova associated themselves unilaterally with the objectives of the EU's eEurope and eEurope+ processes and agreed on specific actions. The eSEE Agenda draws from the experiences of agreements already signed within the framework of the Stability Pact (trade, investment, anti-corruption) and from the eEurope+ Action Plan.

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.



II. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS – MAY – NOVEMBER 2005

ESEE Working Group Meeting, 20 May 2005, Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro

The eSEE Working Group met in Belgrade to prepare eSEE Ministerial Conference in Thessaloniki. The preparatory meeting was devoted to obtaining consensus on the three main aspects of the ministerial conference, namely the finalization of the signing of the bSEE MoU, endorsing the new set of eSEE agenda deadlines and addressing the preparatory process for the World Summit on Information Society.

Workshop “ICT Development Strategies for Transition Economies” 21 May 2005, Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in co-operation with the eSEE Initiative organized a workshop on “ICT Development Strategies for Transition Economies” in Belgrade on 21 May 2005, as part of the EBRD Annual Meeting. This workshop provided an opportunity to further explore the ground for cooperation and added an important political dimension by drawing the attention of eSEE Governments to the importance of coordinating of activities in the field of ICT on a regional level.

The workshop was attended by Ministers and senior officials, responsible for ICT policies from Western Balkans, Central Asia and Caucasus countries (under the EBRD’s Early Transition Country Initiative) and Estonia as well as resource persons from Japan, Taiwan and EU.

ESEE Ministerial Conference on Information Society 1 July 2005, Thessaloniki, Greece

The key event for the eSEE initiative in this period was the Ministerial conference on 1 July. At the invitation of the Hellenic Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, UNDP, UNECE and INA Research Institute, ministers and representatives from eSEE Initiative member states, UNMIK, Greece, Romania, and representatives from private sector and research organizations, met in Thessaloniki.

ICT Ministers of eSEE Member States signed the joint conference conclusions. These reiterate their intention to “underline the importance of the Information Society in facilitating co-operation in SEE, in establishing greater economic and democratic stability in the region, and promotion social and cultural cohesion and strengthening economic integration.”

In the context of this Ministerial Conference, countries of the region acknowledged the importance of the eSEE Initiative and reaffirmed their commitment to the eSEE Agenda, particularly to the need to align national policies for the development of Information Society and to establish the legal framework for the development of Information Society harmonised with the EU *Acquis Communautaire*. In addition to this, the ministers recognised the complexity of some tasks included in the eSEE Agenda and agreed to modify their deadlines.

Deploying broadband communications infrastructure and services in SEE countries could allow the region to fully realise the leapfrogging effect, which is needed to



achieve the much desired convergence of the region to the European socio-economic standards. Therefore Ministers also signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Unified Broadband Initiative for SEE (bSEE).

Ministers recognized the need to align the eSEE Agenda with the new targets set up by EC's i2010 Initiative and WSIS documents taking into account regional and national circumstances and priorities. Importantly, by signing the conference conclusions, the Ministers agreed that the eSEE Initiative Working Group shall prepare an updated eSEE Agenda+ to be adopted at the next South Eastern Europe Ministerial Conference on the Information Society.

ESEE Working Group Meeting, 20 October, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The eSEE Working Group held its third meeting in 2005 in Ljubljana. This meeting served to follow up on commitment made at the Ministerial. Progress made towards implementing the eSEE Agenda was reviewed as well as a more detailed presentation of findings of the Interim Impact Assessment: "Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the eSEE Agenda in the Western Balkans countries from the information society policy change perspective", prepared by UNDP's Bratislava Regional Centre.

Working Group members discussed the composition of the bSEE Task Force and the development of the bSEE Terms of Reference. According to the MoU on the development of a unified market of broadband networks, fully interconnected to the European and global networks – signatory countries should draft and adopt bSEE Terms of Reference at the latest by 31 December 2005. To facilitate this, the Special Co-ordinator Dr Busek in a letter addressed to ICT Ministers and relevant authorities for ICT matters asked them to designate representatives to the bSEE Task Force and encouraged activities to implement the commitments signed in Thessaloniki.

The Matrix on status of fulfilment of eSEE Agenda

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.

eSEE Initiative Newsletter

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.



III. CHALLENGES AHEAD

According to the Thessaloniki documents, in 2006 the eSEE initiative will primarily focus its activities on implementing the commitments of countries under the eSEE agenda and its further development through the bSEE initiative and bSEE Task Force.

Significant challenges still remain. Legislative and structural frameworks are not completed, with resources (human, financial, etc.) often insufficient to carry through ambitious reforms. Exchange of experiences and knowledge in this area is an essential part of this process. It is a strategic priority for the Stability Pact to facilitate an increase of information flows and to encourage dialogue between countries of the Region and the supporting organizations.

It is hoped that the European Union will invest politically and economically in this process, since it will also benefit from the establishment of a gradually unified ICT environment in SEE, which is geographically surrounded by EU member states.

It is absolutely necessary that the countries of the region mobilise their own resources to the greatest extent possible. The issue needs to be highlighted among all government ministers. Based on the experience of new EU member states such as Estonia, pressure and support should be provided from the top, i.e. from Prime Ministers offices in the countries of the regions. To achieve its objectives the eSEE WG will need all the assistance and support from the organisations and countries listed above. Only through the joint effort of the Signatories of the eSEE Agenda and the supporting countries and organisations significant progress can be achieved in developing the Information Society in the countries of the region. This progress will make a definitive contribution to the long-term stability of the region.

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