

Address by

H.E. Mr Arnold Rüütel

President of the Republic of Estonia

**At the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
in Geneva**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Information Society development is the call of the day but also a global, national and individual challenge.

In order to ensure economic growth, competitiveness and - most importantly - an increase in the quality of lives of our people - it is essential for governments to keep Information Society development constantly high on the agenda.

I am pleased that Estonia, being one of the smallest countries in Europe, has clearly defined this goal for itself as a priority. Consistency in policy and practice has ensured a strong move towards information society in Estonia. In relatively short time we have reached the forefront of advanced ICT usage.

How was such development possible for a country with limited resources? The answer is simple: creating an enabling environment, opening markets, including all stakeholders and prioritising ICT in education have been the steps producing results. Perhaps the most important factor for ICT development has been the liberalisation of the telecommunications market.

Developing of the enabling environment and fruitful cooperation with the third and private sectors has put in place ICT infrastructure, which provides access to Information Society services also for the people of Estonia who are not so affluent.

The use of IT has rendered the public sector more efficient. This has created possibilities to use more public funds for handling other important issues in society. In rebuilding our public sector we have strongly relied on the Internet. Today, most of the information in public and private sector is exchanged utilizing public Internet possibilities. In addition, ICT solutions have enabled us to increase democracy by increasing citizen participation in decision-making processes.

However, it is necessary to follow democratic principles and to ensure freedom of speech and free press. Definitely generally recognized principles of human dignity and protection of minors apply also to the new media.

In the summer of 2002, the Government of the Republic of Estonia, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Information Program of Open Society Institute (OSI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to set up an eGovernance Academy in Estonia.

The main purpose of the academy is to increase the level of information and communication technology coordination among the public sector leaders, specialists and third sector representatives of the former Soviet Union republics, Central and Eastern Europe, and Asian countries.

The training project combines the practical knowledge and experiences of the Estonian public sector, the know-how of the European Union experts, and the experiences of the target countries who participate in the training. So far the eGovernance Academy has successfully carried out training for the ICT senior officials of Kyrgystan, Sri Lanka, Albania, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan and many other countries. It is foreseen to provide training for altogether 400 people within three years.

We expect the training programs and knowledge sharing to be a significant contribution to the global process of Information Society development. Estonia's experience confirms that IT development and cohesive implementation is cost saving and effective for the society. And this approach is what we are willing to share with everybody in order to make a complimentary contribution to building Information Society.

Thank you for your attention.