

Check against delivery



Republic of Macedonia
President

Address of H.E. Mr. Boris Trajkovski at
World Summit on the Information Society

11 December 2003, Geneva

Dear Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to first express my sincere thanks to the hosts and coorganizers of this eminent Summit, the Government of Swiss Confederation and the UN. We are all here to declare a vision of the future, to declare a dream for a better society for our children aided by the use of Information and Communication Technologies.

We are not here only to set a destination, however, but also to lay down a path. We are here – representatives of the political, business and civil societies, representatives of all over the world – to better develop each of our societies along with our global society. To develop on a global scale not only the Information Society, but also the good society.

Communication is the glue that holds any community, and anything that can enhance the quality of communication should be embraced. Governments can communicate better with their citizens; businesses with the government and their clients; citizens with government and the world.

Information and Communication Technologies can assist that process. Nevertheless we must all be aware that though technologies represent a driving energy, they are but an instrument.

Those of us here present from the governmental sector must constantly remember that in order to do this we must improve the way the government functions in all its aspects. We must fine-tune our hearing toward the whispers and cries of our citizens and then equip our administrative capacities to make those words reality.

We must think of that first and then figure out how the application of ICTs can assist the process. It is useless to speak of the use of ICTs if basic educational needs are not met; groundless to speak of e-democracy if democracy is ungrounded; inadequate to speak of e-participation if participation is not allowed.

A vision must be aimed at specific targets, grounded in a strategy and continuously tested by properly set benchmarks. The strategy itself cannot be the product of a solitary mind. We are entering the age of the networked citizen, the age when many minds contribute toward the construction of any given item.

This was the reason I invited members from almost all areas of society – from the business community, the educational sector, from governmental institutions, banks, the civil society – to participate in a Committee that helped prepare Macedonia's strategy for creation of information society. Our list of members was both comprehensive and selective at the same time.

"E-Macedonia for all" Committee paved the way in a very short period to several very important laws. Members of this committee, as well as other experts, prepared a strategic document "e-Declaration 2002", recommendations for enhanced growth of information society and creation of digital economy as priority in Macedonia. This Declaration was adopted by Parliament by consensus.

The information society is dependent on a well-established information and communication infrastructure. The excellent telecommunications infrastructure that is currently in place in

Macedonia. We believe that this will serve us well in the future as Macedonia moves closer towards the information society.

ICTs can play an indispensable role in creating a global knowledge-based economy, accelerating growth, raising competitiveness, promoting sustainable development, facilitating the effect of integration of all countries into the global economy, and, finally, eradicating poverty. We are living with the strains of massive changes in our economies, which are no longer based on land and industry. The race to be the locus of the world's knowledge revolution is now on. We need work to play its strengths.

Such technologies offer a huge opportunity in helping marginalized regions to connect to the world economy by overcoming many of the disadvantages of distance. Macedonia, for instance, is a landlocked country. We do not see this as a disadvantage, but rather as an opportunity. Along with its central position in the region, Macedonia has a comparative advantage in the production of ICT-based service exports.

Recently, the Government of Macedonia signed a strategic partnership agreement with largest software company, Microsoft. This shows Macedonian commitment to protect intellectual and property rights. Macedonia invites world-wide ICT leaders to come to Macedonia and invest in ICT projects, solutions and services.

What are the next steps for rapid growth of information society? To prioritize several initiatives including computerization of all primary and secondary schools, increased percentage of ICT graduates, and increased use of wireless technologies to bypass weaknesses in the wireline infrastructure.

Technology allows us to have a conversation with those who have come before us and gives us a chance to seek their council. We can have a converse along with Plato and Confucius, pray along and meditate with Abraham and Moses, with Buddha and Jesus and Mohamed, dream along with Martin Luther King and Gandhi.

We are here because we have a dream. We are here to declare that we have a dream and we are working to deserve that dream. Thus the Declaration of Principles; thus the Plan of Action.

The aim here is the Information Society, the knowledge economy, the networked citizen. But these are only points of reference. The ultimate aim is a better world.