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ASSEMBLY OF SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO AT THE  
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Esteemed Secretary General,  
Excellencies,  
Members of the High Organizing Committee of the Summit,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in leading the delegation of Serbia and Montenegro today at the World Summit on Information Society and in addressing this highly important conference on behalf of Serbia and Montenegro.

The implementation of information society affects many relationships in society as well as its economic and political systems. The time distance between scientific and technological discoveries and their wide application in practice is getting shorter and shorter at an accelerated pace and the impact of technological innovations on social changes is becoming increasingly apparent. At the same time, the rapid development of technology makes social development trends less and less predictable.

The accelerated development of IT systems has opened up numerous opportunities for further social developments. Since the civil society and the democratic parliamentary system has been a globally accepted or imposed social and political order the acceptance of which is a pre-condition of survival in the international community, we may pose the question of how the latest development of IT systems affects civil society and democracy.

On the one hand, IT development, as demonstrated by the example of Internet, makes it impossible or difficult to practice discrimination as these ITs give access to numerous individuals, to a variety of ideas and to political groups. This phenomenon democratizes the global public opinion and favors democratization as a global process. In addition, the exchange of information and insights narrows the gap in the level of information between the developed and undeveloped countries, reduces provincialization and isolation.

On the other hand, state-of-the-art IT systems make it possible for the most developed to be dominant and for the English language to become linguistically supreme with all the consequences it has for the cultures of other linguistic groups. It is necessary to identify the forms to maintain the cultural identity and languages of others.

The most controversial are the effects of the new IT systems in terms of infringement of human rights through encroachment on the privacy of individuals and secrecy of many personal data. The ambitions of state administrations to control all personal data in order to prevent money laundering or fight the drug mafia and terrorism may become excuses for dangerous transformation of democratic systems into police systems where the citizen, as a fundamental value, would be lost before the omniscient and all-seeing state or global society.

We in Serbia and Montenegro understand quite well that the implementation of information society poses a global challenge to the new Millennium. The potentials for the development of information society and digital economy have been recognized in Serbia and Montenegro and, I am convinced, throughout the region of South-East Europe, as an opportunity for a timely integration into European and global economic processes. For that reason, the national development programs in the field of information society are important to all the countries in the region and there is need for a synchronized appearance of South-East European countries. In that regard, I wish to point out to the importance of the regional initiative "Agenda for the Development of Information Society" in the framework of which the Statement of Intent was signed in Ljubljana in June 2002 to the effect that the countries of the region would implement their information societies in cooperation with the European Union' .

Serbia and Montenegro is a state in social and economic transition. Following the democratic changes in 2000 our country has been clearly committed to moving towards European structures. I have to point out that in the ten-year period preceding the democratic changes when our country was internationally isolated and under sanctions that, for highly incomprehensible reasons, included sanctions in the field of scientific and

<sup>1</sup> This plan was signed at the Regional Ministerial Conference "Telecommunications for Development" held in Belgrade at the end of October 2002. The plan is fully in harmony with the existing EU plans, namely "eEurope 2002" and "eEurope 2005 Action Plan".

cultural development and cooperation, Serbia and Montenegro regressed to a considerable extent in introducing new technologies and implementing its information society. It is up to us now to work at an accelerated pace to make up for lost time. Since 2000 a great deal has already been done. Dismantling of monopolies on the market of telecommunications services is quite certainly a pre-requisite that will be achieved in the period ahead. Our intention is to continue to invest in the education of professionals in this field for which our country has been traditionally known worldwide.

Our common path towards implementing information society calls for new and faster forms of communications and cooperation. I sincerely hope that this Summit will largely contribute to such aspirations. Allow me, in conclusion, to wish all participants fruitful deliberations at this Summit.

Thank you.