

**Pan-European Ministerial Preparatory Conference for
the World Summit on the Information Society
(Bucharest, 7-9 November 2002)**

1. Presentation

The World Summit on the Information Society is meant to provide a global platform where governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector and the civil society will meet, in order to develop a common vision and understanding of the information society and to adopt a **Declaration** and a **Plan of action**. The Summit was initiated by ITU and approved by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 56/183. The highest possible level of representation is invited at governmental level, with an active presence of the private sector and civil society.

2. Participation

Governments are key actors for bringing the benefits of the Information Society to the citizens, through the development of national and global policy frameworks aimed at meeting the challenges of the Information Society. In their pursuit of the public interest, governments can raise awareness, facilitate access to information for the public, and they can lay the foundations for all the citizens to benefit from the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in terms of improved quality of life, social services and economic growth.

The United Nations family of organizations serves as a catalyst for change by bringing together governments, as well as the private sector, international institutions and civil society in pursuit of common goals. The UN System and its specialized agencies will be deeply involved in the organization and holding of the Summit. As far as the European preparatory conference is concerned, we count on a leading role to be played by ITU in partnership with the UN/ECE, with the contribution of other key partners - WIPO, UNESCO, the European Commission.

The Private Sector must play an active role by offering an economically viable model to achieve the development objectives of the world agenda. The contribution of the private sector is instrumental in creating the material conditions for universal access to information and value-added ICT services.

Civil Society and NGOs also play an active role in identifying the social and cultural consequences of current trends and in drawing attention to the need to introduce democratic accountability on the strategic options taken at all levels. From this perspective, particular attention will be paid to a substantive and interactive input from the part of the civil society and NGO's.

3. Regional preparation

Resolution 56/83 provides for an important role to be played by the regional preparatory meetings.

The initiative of holding a **pan-European format of the ministerial meeting** is, as we have seen throughout the consultations held, broadly embraced. The reasons are financial and logistic, but also political. It is crucially important that all European countries work together on issues of such importance and which are fundamentally of common interest, both in regional and global terms. The existence of historic links and cultural commonalities as well as in many cases, areas of economic integration will facilitate the identification of common challenges the countries have to face, offer concrete example of pioneers and their achievements, and could facilitate pairing activities as well as benchmarking for the review of the progress made.

4. Romania as a host

Following an initial offer from the Government of Romania (May 2001), we have been engaged in intense dialogue with the Secretary General of ITU, the acting Executive Secretary of UN/ECE, the European Commission, the members of UN/ICT Task Force, the Swiss officials responsible for the organization of the first phase of the Summit, as to the issue of hosting in Romania the European Regional preparatory conference. This dialogue included discussions at ITU at the level of the president of Romania (October 2001) and of the Minister of Communications and Information technology (October and December 2001).

As stipulated in the “**Guidelines for the preparation of regional conferences**” issued by the ITU, *“the host country is expected to assume all the costs related to a regional conference. This includes providing adequate meeting rooms and facilities; interpretation; translation; production and distribution of documents; and security. Each region will decide of the official languages of the conference for meetings (plenary and subsidiary organs) and for documents. Participants shall bear their own travel and subsistence costs”*.

With the endorsement of this offer at the regional level today, we will be in a position to move ahead with preparations, in a timely manner.

5. Tasks for the regional meetings:

The regional conferences are called upon to undertake a series of main tasks, which include the following:

- conduct regional assessments;
- develop a vision for an knowledge-based society in the region and an adequate strategy to achieve it;
- establish a platform for dialogue that includes all major stakeholders;
- forge a better understanding among countries in the regions as to prepare positions at the Summit and identify key-themes;
- identify initiatives and networks in the region and assess examples of best practices;
- consider new initiatives and commitments within the region and its subregions with a view to overcoming the prevailing constraints and fostering further progress towards achieving the vision of an information society;

- prepare contributions for consideration by the World Summit PrepCom meetings.

6. Possible specific contributions from our region:

Those contributions come from the general guidelines valid for all regional preparatory conferences. I would however insist, that apart from what our group might bring into the discussion, as an intellectual contribution to the global Summit, we should try to really reflect the specific achievements and needs of our region. There are a number of issues that may be stressed with some priority in the preparatory process, in Geneva in the PrepCom, and in the regional meeting in Bucharest, and in the two phases of the Summit.

- a. sharing **national strategies**, achievements and challenges and in particular making known **success stories** that might be generalized as **good practices** for other countries,
- b. presenting **regional experience** and activities in which our countries are involved, while trying to take stock of major initiatives taken in Europe, as to suggest harmonization and mutual reinforcement and complementarity,
- c. bring into discussion as much input and contribution as possible from the **private sector**, including the work of transnational companies, thus reflecting the dynamism of the private sector in our region,
- d. illustrating the complexity of the issues by contributing arguments from **multiple sectors**: information, infrastructure for (tele)communications, education, media, academia, software production and others.
- e. stimulating **patterns of cooperation and partnership** which might prevent brain-drain of human resources from countries in transition to developed countries,
- f. presenting proposals of projects, **networking** ideas, interdisciplinary undertakings, diversity models, plurisectoral impacts;
- g. projecting a positive image on the countries in transition as an **investment marketplace for the information technology**, with emphasis on the comparative advantages of the region (quality of human resources, good systems of education adaptability, intellectual potential in general).

7. The European meeting may set up an example

There are also issues that might come out of our own reflections and from those of our capitals. Please consider this as an **open invitation for you to present proposals** of common interest for our own region. The organizers of the Summit expect the European meeting to be a success, and we need to work together, among ourselves and with the ITU, UN/ECE and other partners, in making the Bucharest conference a positive signal as to the huge potential of and expectation from the World Summit on Information Society.

Such a success should be defined in terms of **pragmatism, action-orientation, and moderation**, with a particular **focus on concrete issues and creativity**. It would be also useful to look at the **balance** between regional specificity and the global dimension

8. Building on past experience

The UN General Assembly, at its millennium session, paid a special attention on the Information and Communications Technologies as a powerful engines for economic, cultural and social development. An **UN ICT Task Force** has been created as a practical step aimed at strengthening the UN system's role and leadership in developing effective partnership with national governments, the private sector and civil society organizations.

The **ITU Convention and Constitution**, as well as the **Valletta Action Plan** (adopted at the 2nd World Telecommunication Development Conference, 1998), confers upon the ITU a leading role in the promotion and development of Information and Communication Technologies worldwide. The ITU has been participated actively in ongoing Digital Divide initiatives, most notably in the G-8 launched Digital Opportunity Task Force and has been invited to serve on UN ICT Task Force.

The G-8 Okinawa Summit (July, 2000) set up the **“Okinawa Charter” on the Global Information Society** and created the **“Digital Opportunity Task Force”** (DOT Force). The first report of the DOT Force, *“Digital opportunities for all: meeting the challenge”* has charted the roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders - national governments, the private sector, the civil society and international organizations – in creating digital opportunities for all.

UNESCO and **World Health Organization** are exploring the role of ICT in education and health respectively.

The **UNDP** has launched several initiatives and partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations. The 2001 Human Development Report focuses on the role of new technologies in development.

The **World Trade Organization** adopted in 1996 an Agreement on Trade in Information Technology Products and concluded in 1997 an agreement on basic telecommunications services that opened the market for investments introduced pro-competitive regulatory frameworks in a number of countries.

The **eEurope Action Plan 2002**, adopted by the European Council, which is the central element of the EU strategy to make Europe the most open and competitive economy of the world. The **eEurope+ Action Plan 2003**, launched at the European Ministerial Conference held in Warsaw on 11-12 March 2000, aims to accelerate reform and modernization of the economies in the candidate countries, encourage capacity and institution building, improve overall competitiveness and provide for actions which address the specific situation of the Candidate Countries.

2002 provisional timetable:

(a) Our own calendar in Geneva includes:

UN Economic Commission for Europe Informal Regional Expert Meeting on ICT for Development and World Summit on Information Society, Geneva (Switzerland), 29 April 2002

ITU Council, Geneva (Switzerland), 22 April to 3 May 2002

NGO's Conference "Digital Divide to Digital Bridge Solution", organized by Web Force International United NGO Foundation, Geneva (Switzerland), 6 - 8 May 2002

Fifty-seventh Session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva (Switzerland) 7-10 May 2002;

WSIS Global Preliminary Preparatory Conference – PrepCom 1, Geneva (Switzerland), 1-5 July 2002

(b) Related events:

ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference, Istanbul (Turkey), 18-27 March 2002;

European Council, Barcelona (Spain), 15-16 March 2002,

G-8 DOT Force meeting, Palermo (Italy), 10-11 April 2002

European Conference "Information and Regional Sustainable Development", Tenerife (Canary Islands), 11-12 April 2002

European Council, Seville (Spain), 21-22 June 2002

Germany-UNESCO Thematic Conference on "E-Education", Mainz (Germany), 27-28 June 2002

ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2002, Marrakech (Morocco), 23 September to 18 October 2002;