

Ministers, Heads of Delegation, Representatives of the European Union, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the organisers: the EU Commission, DG Information Society and the Slovenian Government I welcome you to the European Ministerial Conference "Information Society - Connecting Europe". I am very glad to see that so many participants are taking part at this conference. This indicates that the issues that we are going to address during this conference are important for the future development of our societies.

The conference is going to address the development of the information society, we will assess the past experiences that are outlined in the eEurope+ Progress Report to, but more importantly we are going to review some recommendations for the future development.

There is no doubt that the central questions that we will raise and try to answer are: how to speed up the processes that lead to the information society; how to catch up with the most advanced countries; and, of course, how to use the benefits of new information technologies and services for the benefit of our citizens?

That is what the slogan of the conference "Inclusion, Participation, Trust and Security" refers to. The eEurope+ Action plan has enabled the participation and inclusion of the EU accession countries in certain European Union information society programmes and projects. I certainly hope that some other countries will follow soon. Trust and Security are necessary preconditions for further development applications and projects that will deliver services for our citizens.

Nevertheless, we still have a lot to do. We have to modernise our governments, speed up the processes that will enable competition in the telecommunication markets and make services available to the citizens at affordable prices. Greater emphasis should be given to make the new telecommunication and information technologies available in our education system. To sum up we have to put the information society programmes higher on our governmental agendas!

Ministers, Heads of delegation, distinguished guests, I hope that you will have a fruitful two days here in Ljubljana. I also hope that many ideas and incentives will be produced in our discussions and, above all, that all this will have a positive effect on our endeavours to make the benefits of the new technologies available for our citizens.

Thank you very much for your attention.