

ICT and E-Business Strategies for Development

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Summary of “Activities and Results of the Stability Pact eSEEurope (eSEE) Initiative”

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Much lower level of Internet penetration in South Eastern Europe (2-6%) comparing to EU level (15-65%) confirms existence of digital divide and urgent need for quicker information society development in that part of European continent. The eSEE Initiative that supports such activities at the regional level.

The eSEEurope Initiative, focused on building capacity for the Information Society in Southeastern Europe, was launched upon request from Great Britain in the summer of 2000. Its objective was to give assistance to the countries of the region with reference to the possibilities offered by ICT. The initiative involves the Southeast European countries which are not candidates to the European Union (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the FYR Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro) which, nevertheless, wish to keep in line with the European Union's achievements and legislation in the area of the Information Society. Since March 2002 Stability Pact has accepted new regional approach, and Serbia and Montenegro has become the first regional chair of the Initiative.

The activities of the eSEEurope Initiative by now included:

1. Signing a Letter of Intent by the ministers from the SEE region on the European Ministerial conference in Ljubljana in Jun 2002;
2. Preparatory work on eSEE Agenda for the Development of Information Society. This document is completely in line with eEurope 2002 and 2005 Action Plans and eEurope+ plan of candidate countries.
3. Regional Ministerial Conference “Telecommunication for Development” held in Belgrade on 28-29 October 2002, at which ministers from SEE countries signed and accepted the eSEE Agenda for the Development of Information Society.

There are two major products (publications) of the eSEE initiative, which may be used as “best practice” in other regions:

- ?? **Common Guidelines for National Information Society Policies** as a basis for establishing National Information Society Policies (NISP), which should be adopted by the signatories of eSEE Agenda by 1st of November 2003.
- ?? **Terms of Reference for Information Society State Bodies.** Signatory countries accepted the obligation to create the cabinet level bodies in their respective countries

by the 1st of November 2003. These agencies should be the governmental structure for the implementation of NIS Policies.

The eSEE Initiative focuses now on (a) monitoring the fulfillment of the commitments of the eSEE Agenda; (b) introducing into the eSEE countries the eEurope+ practices of benchmarking

Conclusion

The potential of ICT increases possibilities of integrating Southeastern European countries in the world market. In this light, the eSEEurope Initiative has received support in the SEE countries, which need to work together in IT development, undertake common actions, and exchange knowledge and best practice experience. The regional IT development concept is very important for future economic and social growth.

NB: presentation summaries are provided unedited as received from the authors and presenters