

Address by
Professor Nikitas Alexandridis, President of EETT
For the
**“Broadband Forum:
Dialogue for Broadband Development”**
(Athens, 26-2-2008)

Mr Minister,
Secretary Generals,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this day of dialogue organized by EETT as part of the Broadband Forum.

2007 has been a crucial year for the electronic communications market in Greece. By resolutely using the new regulatory tools provided by the State, the National Telecommunications Regulator (EETT) implemented **the unbundling of the Local Loop**, which resulted in the strengthening of competition in telecommunications and allowed the alternative operators to invest in infrastructures in order to launch new, innovative double- and triple-play products. The results of regulation and of the strengthening of competition are evident and fully depicted in the following three facts:

1. The consumers who have been connected to alternative operators through the unbundled access to the Local Loop and who enjoy advanced products, have increased rapidly and today they have already reached 325,000 (as opposed to only 20,000 at the end of 2006).
2. The total number of broadband connections has exceeded the milestone of one million already from the end of 2007, registering an increase of 108% within a year (although at this point we would have wanted faster rates of development).
3. The prices for broadband access have dropped during the period 2006-2007 by 55%-75%, depending on the connection speed, whereas the reduction in the cost of broadband access per Mbps is even more striking, ranging from 77% to 88%.

Still, despite the considerable efforts and the impressive development, we still have a lot of work ahead of us until we bridge the distance that separates us from the advanced markets.

We consider that this objective is multidimensional and is not only about infrastructure networks and number of subscribers. It requires (1) applications that will give useful and appealing content to broadband, (2) new skills on the part of the citizens, the companies and the State, and (3) new business models and new policies. And above all, of course, it requires the contribution of us all, of the State through its elected representatives, the business world, the local authorities and the social organizations.

Realizing those needs, we launched, as of last year, the **Broadband Forum** initiative. It is part of other activities EETT is launching for the "2007 Year of Broadband", the aim of which is to examine certain aspects that are crucial for the development of broadband, through a broad dialogue that embraces all parties involved.

So, as part of the above initiative, there has been, over the past 8 months, an enormous effort to gather and coordinate the representatives of the organizations that have responded to our invitation. More than 80 people from 30 different organizations have contributed to this dialogue through regular meetings of the Groups and through participation in the drafting of Working Papers.

The ideas and suggestions that we have already gathered (and which we expect to increase even more after the today's meeting) will be put for consideration to all involved parties, State representatives, local authorities, telecommunications providers and social organizations. We hope that they will contribute towards the forming of the appropriate policies and actions and towards further mobilization of all of us, so that we can progress even quicker.

In order to make this whole effort feasible – and given the broadness of the subject – five Working Groups have been set up, each one of which has been invited to adopt a common position on a specific issue.

The first issue focuses on the **digital content** which is particularly critical, since broadband is not a means to an end but a means of access to and equal and active participation of all in the Knowledge Society. Advanced infrastructures and high speeds are devoid of meaning if they are not accompanied by usable content and applications (what we call "**broadbandization**"). The development of broadband (i.e. more and higher-speed connections) prompts the creation of more usable content and applications (i.e. more "broadbandization"), which in turn make broadband internet more appealing. Do the appropriate conditions exist so

that this feedback cycle functions effectively or are there inhibiting factors that we should combat and how?

The second issue is an everyday point of consideration, since it has to do with the two-way relation between **broadband and education**, putting forward two key issues: What skill requirements does this new environment create, so that the citizens are equipped with management skills and skills for the efficient use of the new technologies? And, vice versa, what kind of opportunities does the broadband internet create in education, both in terms of school and university learning and in terms of lifelong learning? Combined, those issues are determinant factors for the overall preservation of social cohesion and the smooth transition of the society to the Information Society.

The third issue focuses on the **digital divide and how to combat it**. We know, beyond all doubt, that there is a considerable digital divide both between Greece and Europe and within the country as well. Do we settle with this general, qualitative concept or do we need to measure and better understand this digital divide in order to be effective in our efforts to deal with it? And can we propose specific actions, given the picture we have today, in order to bridge this digital divide and achieve convergence, both in relation to the rest of Europe and within the country? And finally, do we all agree on the definition we give to the terms "digital divide" and "convergence"?

The fourth issue has to do with the relation between **broadband and entrepreneurship**. On the one hand, broadband internet reshapes the business landscape, creating new business opportunities and changing entirely the way of working and communicating, but also the way of promoting and providing products and services. On the other hand, in an environment of rapid developments, the role of entrepreneurship becomes crucial not only for the Internet related services and products but also for the provision of quality services to consumers. But which business models will lead henceforth the development of both broadband and broadbandization through the optimal utilization of the forthcoming advanced network infrastructures (such as next generation fixed access networks, mobile broadband networks, etc.)?

Lastly, the fifth issue pertains to gathering proposals for **policies and actions** to be undertaken in order to contribute, as soon as possible, to the further development of broadband. This issue is of a particular importance, because, even though over the past year the development of

the Greek broadband market has been quite rapid, our country still ranks last among the EU countries.

Ladies and gentlemen

Today's forum takes place at a particularly interesting juncture. The rapid progress in the Local Loop Unbundling that has accelerated the development of broadband in 2007 and brought about considerable increase in the nominal access speeds, further drop in prices and the appearance of new double and triple play products, has highlighted the importance of new technologies on the one hand, but on the other hand it has confronted us with a new challenge. In a market that is growing fastly and in a country where the vast majority is just beginning to become familiar with the concept of Internet, how can we make sure that the consumers will enjoy the quality of services that they want, deserve and pay for? I believe that this is now the major challenge for the State and the Market. Because the dissatisfied broadband user is the toughest obstacle to overcome in order to develop broadband.

This is the reason why EETT has described the year 2008 as "**Year of Quality Broadband**", placing on top of its priorities actions that will ensure the proper quality of broadband services that the consumers require, and it is determined to use all the tools provided by the national and EU legislation, so that, whichever telecommunications companies exasperate the consumers, will feel the serious consequences of their actions.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all the representatives of the organizations, who through their participation have contributed to the effort of the Forum, as well as the members of EETT who have supported the work of the groups. A special thanks to the coordinators of the five groups, who have dedicated long hours of work over the past months, in the order you will see them coordinating the respective panels today: Professors Yiannis Stavrakakis, Lazaros Merakos and Dimitris Varoutas, as well as Mr. Michalis Sakkas, member of the EETT board, and Mr. Lefteris Spithas, consultant to the board of EETT.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all of you who have come to this meeting today and I hope that there will be a fruitful discussion with useful conclusions.