

Communication, Information, Technology



by the Vice Minister of Infrastructure,
Transport and Networks,
Mr Nikos Sifounakis



The proliferation of communication and information technologies on a global scale has radically changed the political decision-making process and, by extension, the actual pursuit of all policies that affect and shape the citizens' everyday life. In this day and age, practically no policy is implemented in the absence of a prior relevant social dialogue, where concerned citizens and bodies participate and jointly form values, principles and measures in all fields of public life.

The triangle "communication, information and technology" constitutes today the main driver of the world's transition from its industrialised past to the knowledge society. This transition means that, for the first time in the history of mankind, raw materials cease to be the cornerstone of the production process and the economy is now based less on manual labour and

more on services. **Knowledge** has become the main source of wealth production in the world economy.

Our country now has to face these challenges, i.e. the transformation of the world economic model and the formation of a "global knowledge society", in which the digital component -with the New Technologies of Communication and Information- will constitute the basic infrastructure. In view of this, the Greek State needs to promptly take measures to ensure that all Greek citizens, and particularly those who form part of the weaker population groups and are threatened by poverty and exclusion, can grow accustomed to all these rapidly occurring changes.

Accordingly therefore, two immediate priorities of the Ministry of Infrastructure,

Transport and Networks are -among other things- the creation of a national fiber optic network and the allocation of the digital dividend.

The deployment of a national fiber optic network -that will connect the households and businesses of all Greek cities (Fiber To The Home-FTTH project)- is a fundamental infrastructure task comparable to the development of the country's electrical power supply, motorway, airport and port networks and all other major infrastructure projects that have been carried out in Greece in the previous decades.

On the other hand, the currently promoted switchover from analogue to digital television by 2015 will set free a substantial part of the radiofrequency spectrum, referred to as **the digital dividend**, which will then be able to accommodate new,

innovative services ranging from wireless connection to the Internet and cutting-edge mobile phones to the new high-resolution interactive television channels, and from the provision of telework and telemedicine services to electronic commerce. Particularly the country's remote areas will reap the highest benefits from this switchover, as wireless broadband communications will be able to use the then made available radiospectrum to provide high-speed Internet connections in regions not yet covered by fixed-wire network infrastructures.

The completion of the above projects will transform the country's current profile and will place it among those at the vanguard of the new era. The benefits for end users -i.e. households, businesses and public sector services alike will be multiple, touching upon the economy, the society,

the environment, the provision of public services to the citizens, as well as the underpinning of democratic institutions.

As regards the economy, the targeted Green Growth is directly associated with knowledge, innovation and environment-friendly new information and communication technologies. It thus enables the creation of new capital, new jobs and, in general, whole industries of new economic activities, which will operate while ensuring harmonised use of natural resources, or will use no natural resources at all.

Furthermore, **as far as society is concerned**, the increasing growth of the number of people using the Internet is structuring a new trend, the so-called "digital communities". These communities, which are groups of citizens with shared characteristics and interests, mobilize forces and take the lead in many cases. We all remember the large protest of the citizens of Athens regarding the ecological destruction of Parnitha back in the summer of 2007, which was fully organized through Internet and mobile phones.

And of course, we should not forget that our country has already witnessed the emergence of the "Internet generation", i.e. the children that were born after the reestablishment of democracy (in 1974), who have been obtaining information, knowledge and education, and have been shaping their character, through the Internet. Soon enough, this generation will be called upon to take action and participate in the world's evolution and progress. We, as representatives of the State, have the obligation to "endow" these children

with the most powerful tools of knowledge and democratic conscience. And this is exactly the reason why we consider all digital infrastructures and access to them as our country's new national capital, in which all citizens should have a dividend.

Every modern-day Republic relies on two main pillars: an effective and transparent State, and the participation of its citizens in the proceedings through open public consultation procedures.

The introduction of the **Electronic Public Administration** saves vast resources that could be used for covering other, more pressing needs, extricates the citizen from the labyrinth of red tape and, ultimately, fosters the creation of a State-helper that stands right next to, and not on the opposite side of society. Already today, in several public administration sectors, a simple "click" is enough even for residents of the most remote areas to gain access to information and services for which they once had to travel perhaps even several kilometres. Our goal is to constantly and increasingly improve these services and allow an ever growing number of citizens to partake in this new reality.

On the other hand, the proliferation of communication, information and technology leads to a new form of "electronic democracy", where traditional institutions are no longer the only "transmitter" of information, and where the importance of information acquires a different, much greater dimension. For a modern-day Democratic State it is inconceivable not to take into consideration the needs and the views of its citizens with respect to all major issues that determine their lives. Recognising and adopting these developments, we, as Government, have established the institution of public consultation on every draft law we propose, and have rendered the Internet a substantial tool for transparency.

To achieve our objectives, we need society to move along with us in this direction, we need the social bodies to participate in the currently ongoing "ferment" for the formulation of our policy. The shape of future developments in the fields of technology and communications not only depends, but also relies on society.

