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Video Recording
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to give this opening address and to allow me to outline the policies of the European Commission for the information society.

Why are Information and Communication Technologies or ICTs so important? The short answer is that they are critical for productivity growth.

Productivity growth depends on product, process and organisational innovation. This cannot happen efficiently without the use of ICTs and the upgrading of skills.

There is now considerable evidence that the productivity resurgence of the second half of the 1990s, especially in the USA, is based on combining these three elements: investment in ICT, in organisational innovation, and in human capital.

Productivity growth is essential for long-term sustainable increase in wealth and employment.

It is therefore urgent to enable the deployment of ICT infrastructure across the EU and to initiate the required changes in our administrative and legislative framework to facilitate the diffusion of ICT.

ICT must enter in all aspects of economic life. The use of computing for a wide variety of tasks, from e-learning to inventory management, is essential. Lessons can be learned from the experience of those countries that have successfully seen the introduction and diffusion of ICT in recent years.

A key obstacle appears to be the availability of human capital and of skilled professionals. The demand for higher skills has increased rapidly. In 2000, nearly one out of every four jobs in the EU required tertiary education and the relative share of tertiary education jobs increased in every sector.
Supplying these skills must be secured through modernising the educational system, including the use of ICTS, and through more efficient allocation in the labour market.

Europe must also increase its spending on ICT and on R&D. There are important externalities associated with technological advancements and breakthroughs.

The Lisbon strategy is a decisive step in making our economy more competitive and dynamic. Unless the program of modernisation and reform of the Lisbon strategy is pursued urgently, the final objectives will simply not be reached.

A key element of the Lisbon strategy is the eEurope initiative. Last June, at the Seville Summit, EU leaders endorsed a comprehensive eEurope 2005 Action Plan.

A key priority of its predecessor, eEurope 2002, was to put Europe on-line. Much has been achieved. The number of EU homes with Internet jumped from 28% in October 2000 to 40% in June 2002. Almost one out of five had a broadband connection via ADSL or cable modem.

By December 2001, 9 out of 10 EU businesses of at least 10 employees had an Internet connection. Over 60% had a Web site.

eEurope 2002 also played a key role in speeding up the EU decision making process in decisive areas such as the telecommunications and e-commerce regulation.

Above all, eEurope has created a powerful dynamic, placing the Internet on top of the political agenda across the EU and beyond. The candidate countries have responded to the challenge with their own eEurope+ initiative.

eEurope 2005 will take us a step closer towards realising the full potential of the information society for economic growth, productivity, employment and social equity.
eEurope 2005 focuses on both demand and supply. On the one hand it will stimulate services, applications and content that make a real difference for the user in four essential areas: e-government, e-learning, e-health and e-business.

On the other hand it will enable widespread broadband and a secure information infrastructure. Broadband should be based not only the PC but also digital TV and third-generation mobile terminals. The aim is to widen the reach of new services and democratising access to them.

E-inclusion of socially marginalised people and e-accessibility of people with special needs, namely disabled, elderly and sick people is taken into consideration throughout eEurope 2005.

The perspective of enlargement makes it indispensable that eEurope 2005 is flexible. A mid-term review is therefore foreseen to adapt objectives and measures in the light of new accessions.

It is also essential to support the effort of the European industry and research community in preparing the future. This is the role of the Information Society Technology Priority within 6th Framework Programme for research and technological development.

Future European R&D in Information Society Technology has a budget of almost 4 billion Euro. It should strengthen Europe's position in communication infrastructures and attractive contents. Trustworthy and secure applications and infrastructures are amongst the priorities together with easier interaction with technology.

In addition we need to push the limits of miniaturisation and explore new materials, such as organic flexible materials for displays and sensors.

By setting itself the target to approach spending 3% of its Gross Domestic Product on R&D by 2010, Europe will strengthen its overall research basis.
Europe's enlargement is a project of vast possibilities and of risks. One dimension is the technological modernisation of these economies. The acceding nations are at various stages of deploying information technologies in economic life.

At the meeting in June in Ljubljana the Ministers of the Candidate Countries reaffirmed their commitment to the eEurope+ Action Plan. The plan focuses at improving affordable access to communications and, in particular, Internet, education, and e-commerce. I was happy to note that significant progress has been made.

The Candidate Countries have been participating in the Information Society Technologies Programme for the past four years. Many organisations have been very successful in international RTD projects in IST. This is a good demonstration of their skills and capabilities.

All countries have decided to be associated to the 6th Framework Programme. This is a good impetus to create a single European Research Area for the enlarged Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to have had this opportunity to share with you today, our vision for the development of a Knowledge Society in Europe.

I wish you success in this conference and hope that it will contribute to our understanding on how ICTs can be of best use in economies in transition.

Thank you for your attention.