Good morning. I am glad that I have the opportunity to present the programme "Interklasa", which is an important element of adjusting Poland and its regions to information society and the requirements of EU Member States.

One of the problems of our education is large regional diversity. The historical legacy is best reflected on map No.1 showing the percentage of population without primary education. On this map every Pole without any difficulties will distinguish the remains of educational systems of annexation states. More than 80 years have passed and divisions remain drastic. Diversities in the level of education in Poland are also caused by regional diversities in economic development of our country – map 2. The educational chances of children still depend on living in towns or villages. The chances of disabled people are much smaller. According to UNDP report of 1998 half of Polish youth live in villages, but account for only 2% of students. Similarly only 11% of children living in villages are learning English whereas in towns 27%. Only 15% of disabled graduate any form of secondary school.

We were wondering where to begin to equalise the chances. Can for example computers help here? Our intuition said yes and this answer was confirmed by results of research conducted by for example Centre of Chemistry Didactics of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. According to the team conducted by professor Andrzej Burewicz activity on lessons conducted with the help of computer software rises by 80-90%, understanding of the topics by 60-70%, saving time: 20-70% and absorption of knowledge is 30% higher.

Polish response to the problem of unequal access to education and the challenge of Information Époque\(^1\) is the programme Interklasa. The programme came into being as an

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\(^{1}\) The formation of a new type of society is becoming more and more visible in our surrounding. On 8 December 1999 President of the European Commission Romano Prodi announced the opening of an initiative “eEurope – an Information Society for All”. Its objective is accelerating activities transforming European society into Information Society. The main priorities of the initiative “eEurope” are:
initiative of a group of enthusiasts and found its greatest protector in the Parliament and local governments. Thanks to the Parliament it became possible to assign funds in successive state budgets 1998-2000 to equip Polish schools with Internet workshops. By the end of September we will have installed 58 000 computers connected to Internet.

Apart from the Parliament important partners of the programme are Ministry of Education, universities, private companies (financial help and know-how), media, parents of pupils and non-governmental organisations.

Among the partners of Interklasa a special seat is taken by local governments and local communities, which are responsible for most schools in Poland. So far local governments have become engaged in the programme by financing training for teachers from schools, which have been equipped with internet workshops, redecoration and securing rooms for workshops, purchase of furniture, etc.

Authors of the programme "Interklasa" want youth to be able to use a computer as freely as a book or pen, want internet workshops at schools to be open for the village or estate, want the school to be free of barriers and complexes. An important effect of the programme is its influence on equalising chances. Internet workshops found their way to schools in rural areas or structurally weak ones first. Taking advantage of Internet at school children from a small gmina in Bieszczady (south-east Poland) have the same chances to go for a virtual walk through the library of the Congress of the United States as children from Warsaw or Katowice.

The programme Interklasa has got two main objectives:

- bringing all people living in Europe, in all spheres of activity: at work, at home, at school, in business, in contacts with public administration – to the age of digital civilisation,
- creation of Europe capable of taking advantage of digital information, supported by creative culture ready to finance and develop new ideas,
- making sure that processes that are happening take into account social conditions, create confidence and strengthen solidarity
  Among 10 thematic fields of activity set by the European Commission to execute these priorities we find:
- European Youth in the age of digital civilisation: introducing internet, multimedia to schools, adopting them to educational needs of the new age,
- Quick internet for scientists and students: building and making accessible quick internet connections for the needs of scientists and students, i.e. group making the strongest contribution to the creation of internet, group having a special need for quick, direct exchange of information.
1. Pupils and teachers are capable of using computers and internet to collect and process information and to solve various problems.

2. Internet workshops, particularly in rural areas, serve local communities also outside the educational process. We want schools to become local innovation and training centres as they used to be before the war.

As far as the realisation of the first objective is concerned, we may be glad that all gymnasiums in Poland will begin school year 2000/2001 equipped with Internet workshops. This is the first type of school fully equipped with computers. If the Parliament assigns to schools comparable funds it will be possible to equip 50% of secondary schools with Internet workshops. We hope however that these funds will be twice as big what will enable Poland to come closer to European standards\(^2\) (map 3 – internet workshops installed till September 1999).

For the success of the programme it is essential to train teachers. Teachers are not as open to new technologies as we would wish. In Poland there are about 650,000 teachers and only 10% of them can use computer and Internet. As far as the ability of using the computer in teaching a subject is concerned the indicator is even more dramatic. Schools preparing teachers do not make the situation easier - most of them still do not prepare new staff to take advantage of modern information technologies. We want 65,000 gymnasium teachers and 9,000 secondary school teachers to be trained till the end of year 2001. We hope that there will be not only budget funds to fulfil this task but also funds from assistance from the European Union. Negotiations are going on so that Poland can participate in an international programme conducted by Microsoft and Intel “Teach for the future”. The programme is expected to train 400,000 teachers from all over the world. On a smaller scale such training is being conducted by Apple, which is training teachers from schools equipped with their computers.

In larger schools internal local networks will be installed, so called intranet, what will support the management of school and improve the flow of information. An equally important element is transforming school libraries into multimedia information centres. Equipping

\(^2\) The Council of the European Union during its Summit in Lisbon 23-24 March 2000 among its postulates called on Member States to cause that before the end of year 2001 all schools have access to internet and multimedia resources and by the end of 2002 all teachers have been trained in using the net and multimedia resources.
libraries with Internet can be done at a low cost. Actually one computer for the librarian and two in the reading room are enough. These are very concrete things, these are not postulates, all this is happening.

In Poland we have got an advanced process of creating thematic internet services with educational materials for pupils and didactic ones for teachers. Work is going on, financed from public funds of Polish-American Freedom Foundation, to create a non-commercial educational portal.

As I have mentioned before, it is very important to use the network of schools equipped with computers having access to Internet (there will be 6,000 of them soon) outside the educational process, in favour of the local community. We imagine, that after lessons schools remain open, people can come to workshops like to internet cafes and use its equipment for a payment, in the evenings training for unemployed can take place there or for farmers financed by Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture or Employment Office. We have already got such examples. The programme Interklasa promotes such activities.

Schools can also take part in other projects for example collecting information about natural environment, in projects activating disabled people and in elections and referendums. Probably around 120 Internet workshops at schools will, for the first time in their history, be used in presidential elections. For the time being this system will function parallel to the traditional method of counting votes and flow of information, but if this pilot project succeeds Internet workshops will be used on a larger scale in referendums and elections at different levels.

Schools can also promote local environment. In small gminas these are schools that promote tourist and economic activities, placing advertisements and information about local events on www sites. There are examples, where pupils create www sites promoting economic activity of their parents.

In Internet workshops there will also be Communal European Information Points. This project is executed by Foundation for Economic Education and financed by Office of the Committee for European Integration – European Information Centre, Ministry of Education.
and European Commission. Integration with the European Union will require a conscious
decision of every Polish citizen (referendum) whereas knowledge of the European Union is
insufficient especially in villages and small towns. The project Communal European
Information Points uses schools’ Internet infrastructure. Teachers and librarians, who have
undergone training on the European Union and are capable of enriching their knowledge
using Internet, will service these points. These teachers will inform local communities and
additional working hours will be paid by gmina.

Interklasa is a programme on a large scale. Support in publicity is provided by media
patronage, especially Telewizja Polska (two programmes about Interklasa a week at good air
time), Polskie Radio and the biggest Polish newspaper – “Gazeta Wyborcza” (weekly bloc of
articles).

Secretariat of the Programme Interkl@sa is held by Foundation for Economic
Education. It organises and provides legal service to the work of the Task Force conducting
the Programme (00-024 Warsaw, Al. Jerozolimskie 302nd floor; tel. (+48) (22) - 828-06-71,
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We also suggest you visit www site of Interkl@sa where you will find details and latest
news concerning the programme: www.interklasa.pl.

Thank you for your attention

Grażyna Staniszewska
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Co-ordinator of Programme Interklasa