

<p style="text-align: center;">SECOND EUROMED MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY</p>
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Cairo, 27 February 2008

Mrs Mojca Kucler Dolinar

Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology

Excellencies, respected guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you today at this, the second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Information Society. I am particularly pleased to be here because I, too, come from a Mediterranean country. As a Slovenian and as a European, I can see the many benefits that cooperation between the different shores of the Mediterranean can bring to us all. I am honoured to be here, moreover, as the representative of the Republic of Slovenia, a country that is assuming the EU Presidency for the first time.

I would like to emphasise the centrality and the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, whose purpose is to achieve a common area of peace, stability and prosperity, as well as to improve awareness and promote mutual understanding between peoples across the Mediterranean.

The Slovenian Presidency is working hard to deal with the common challenges facing the Euro-Mediterranean region, focusing on issues such as economic and social development, energy and climate change, civil protection, countering terrorism and extremism, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the promotion of intercultural dialogue – dialogue between cultures, in implementation of the Five-Year Work Programme, agreed at the 10th Anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit in 2005, and the acknowledgement by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs in November 2007 of the importance of taking forward high-level cooperation in the field of the information society.

At the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research, held here in Cairo on 18 June 2007, Ministers underlined the importance of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in supporting development and modernisation processes in higher education, especially through the TEMPUS Programme, as well as fostering research, technology, development and innovation in cooperation with Mediterranean Partner Countries, in particular through the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. We also welcomed the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window and the prospects offered by the Euromed scholarship scheme for university students and higher education staff from partner countries, as endorsed by the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in the year 2005. All this will add to the existing funding opportunities offered by both European Union Member States and Mediterranean Partners.

It is natural that there should be cooperation between the field of information society and the field of higher education, research and innovation since they complement each other. In Slovenia, my ministry is responsible for all these areas. Information society, research and innovation can increase competitiveness in business, help create new job possibilities and meet the challenges of globalisation. All of us here should therefore have an interest in actively participating in the development of the information society.

All aspects of the information society need to be made available in the region. In order to assure the necessary basis for communication infrastructure, our main aim is to continue the liberalisation of the electronic communications market, pursuant to the decisions of the Second Euro-Mediterranean Meeting between the European Regulators Group and the Mediterranean regulators, held recently in Rome. Both sides emphasised the need to exchange views on the further liberalisation of electronic communications markets. Development in terms of liberalisation could stimulate an environment favourable to the use of Information and Communication Technologies, and encourage both domestic and foreign investment. A review aimed at modernising the EU regulatory framework for electronic communications in Europe is under way.

The Slovenian Presidency is committed to the goal of speeding up the development of the region. In this context, the importance of knowledge as a key element needs to be underlined. Supported by the achievements of the information society, knowledge is the basis for faster development – nationally, regionally and worldwide.

In order to take a more active role in strengthening partnership and dialogue, Slovenia launched a specific initiative to establish a Euro-Mediterranean University in Piran. The formal inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean University will take place in Slovenia in June. The main reason for establishing an international institution of this kind is the need to draw inspiration from the cultural, religious and human inheritance of the Euro-Mediterranean area.

The University has every prospect of becoming a meeting place for young people, researchers and academic staff from the entire Mediterranean area.

One of the emphases of the Slovenian Presidency is on promoting multilingualism and intercultural exchanges between young people as a means of increasing their employability, mobility and social inclusion and, thus, promoting development.

I am deeply convinced that we are on the right path to implementing all the commitments agreed at the first Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers for the Information Society, held in Dundalk, Ireland, almost three years ago. These commitments call for our joint support for strengthening dialogue on all aspects of the information society in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, allow me to thank our Egyptian colleagues for their hospitality and also the European Commission for the great work they have done together in the course of preparations for the conference and for its successful outcome.

My wish is that the information society will become a tangible and successful reality for all Mediterranean Partners, and in particular for each and every one of us.

Thank you very much for your attention!