

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE
INFORMATION SOCIETY
KINGDOM OF SPAIN

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Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you today in my position as State Secretary for Telecommunications and the Information Society of the Spanish Government and also as the representative of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at this European Ministerial Conference.

Spain has taken over the Presidency of the European Union Council during the first half of this year. This Presidency is held at a singular historic juncture distinguished by special circumstances at the community level. We are at the final stage of a historic process that began a decade ago leading to the enlargement of the European Union.

Our country has been always available to contribute in a decisive way to conclude the negotiations with the prepared countries for the adhesion before the end of the year.

This is the case for the Republic of Slovenia. Slovenia means for Spain, and for the European Union as a whole, an example of the new Europe, and a model of economic and political transition.

Slovenia shares with Spain the double dimension of being both mediterranean and continental. Both countries have the same vocation for the European integration, passion for democracy, solidarity and defence of the human rights. I am convinced that the sum of these circumstances will lead us to work together with success in the new Europe we are building.

I would like to share with you the philosophy that has inspired the Spanish Presidency and that can be summarised with the idea of consolidating and giving a boost to the actual European model. Therefore Spain has chosen as motto of this Presidency 'More Europe', because we believe that this is the way to achieve for Europe the proper weight and place in the international context and because it reflects the essential European character of the Spanish society.

We firmly believe that to achieve the target pointed out by our Heads of State and Government in the Lisbon Summit, two years ago, of enabling the European Union become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world in the year 2010, it is crucial to modernise the economy and make it more flexible.

This statement presupposes the conviction of the Member States of the European Union that the development of the new information and communication technologies are key elements for the economic growth, the generation of more and better jobs and in general a better quality of life of all the European citizens.

And it also reflects the commitment of the Member States to work for an enlarged and unified Europe, addressing all our efforts to combat the regional division between north and south, west and east. The Information Society can rarely be implemented if the information and communication

technologies do not flow through the same means and the same technologies.

The European policy for the promotion of the Information Society is basically expressed in the eEurope 2002 initiative for the fifteen Member States of European Union and in the eEurope+ 2003 for the candidate countries.

These initiatives represent the fundamental framework to accelerate the assimilation of the new information and communication technologies and guarantee the access to the benefits of the Information Society to all citizens.

In order to pursue these targets, the development of new networks, especially broadband, e-Government, the impulse to eCommerce and stronger efforts in eLearning are key elements to reinforce the development of the information society in Europe.

The European Commission has published the results of the e-Europe Action Plan 2000-2002. Europe has made undeniable progress in catching-up the United States and Japan. However, we believe that there is much work still to be done, and we are absolutely convinced that a clear and well-designed strategy in the medium term, after the eEurope 2000-2002 Action Plan, is a key factor to reinforce the Lisbon strategy within the 2010 horizon.

That is the reason why we held an extraordinary Meeting of Ministers for Telecommunications and the Information Society on February 23rd in Vitoria with the main objective of giving a fresh boost to e-Europe within the horizon 2005.

The results of this Council were reported to the Heads of State and Government held in Barcelona on 15 and 16 March, in which the candidate countries participated as well.

Let me summarize in a rapid way some of the results of this Informal Meeting held in Vitoria, reported later to the Barcelona Summit and that are the basis of the Action Plan e-Europe 2005, in which the Commission and the Member States are working at this moment.

The Ministers had a fruitful exchange of views on the next challenges for Europe in the field of Information Society with relevant representatives of the private sector.

The Ministers for Telecommunications and Information Society underlined the importance of eEurope as an integral part of the Lisbon strategy for growth, competitiveness and employment.

This is the reason why we restated our conviction that widespread access to the Internet and to information and communication technologies in the EU is a source of economic growth and social inclusion, quality of life, more and better jobs and opportunities for all citizens. In this sense, we all have to welcome the large increase in Internet penetration in homes, businesses and schools since Lisbon, and that greater emphasis in European Information Society policy should now be put on use of all electronic communication infrastructures, including mobile communications and digital television, to access at Internet.

The technological convergence brings opportunities to achieve widespread access to new services and applications of the information society through open platforms, in particular in digital television and third generation

mobile communications, and the Union should step up efforts to utilise fully its advantage in these areas.

The new communications regulatory package will greatly contribute to increased competition in services and infrastructure, while allowing the distribution of Information Society services to residential and business users through fixed, mobile, satellite, cable and digital television networks under the same technology neutral legal rules.

Nevertheless, eEurope should continue to provide a comprehensive strategic overview of initiatives and programmes in the field of the Information Society. In this way, all the relevant aims currently identified and those resulting of future discussions, taking into account the evaluation of the results of eEurope 2002, should be integrated and prioritised into a new action plan which is to supersede eEurope 2002 beyond 2002 and which is to last until 2005.

One important key factor for eEurope 2005 is that the impact of future actions should be significant and measurable and directly linked to the objective of making the EU the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world.

Also, eEurope 2005 will intensify the exchange of best practices, and will enhance the co-operation of governments and the private sector in the design and implementation of the new action plan eEurope 2005.

The Ministers highlighted as well that attractive and innovative digital content in people's own language and adapted to their culture will play a key role in ensuring the success of the Information Society.

In this sense, broadband Internet access, including public access, can bring important changes to lifestyle, business, education, healthcare and e-Government services. Member States and the private sector are encouraged to make broadband available to as many citizens and businesses as possible.

However, the existing community economic and social cohesion policy should help to avoid the potential risk of a regional divide resulting from insufficient broadband deployment in disfavoured regions.

In addition to the broadband services and the social cohesion policy, a better co-operation across Europe is necessary to strengthen the security of networks and information and improve safe access to e-Government services and e-business. The Council Resolution of 15 January 2002 and the actions foreseen in it should therefore be rapidly implemented.

In this context, the most outstanding eGovernment service to be produced in Spain in the next few months will be the electronic identification ID. I am convinced that it will become not only a necessary tool to access a wide range of public services, but also a key service in enhancing citizens' confidence in the security of e-Government.

That is the reason why the Spanish Government, a true believer in the "More Europe" process, has launched some discussions on the concept of a European electronic ID identification in coming months. After the results of the Ministerial Conference on eGovernment in November 2001, a group of national experts should carry on its work so as to survey national electronic identification and authentication systems and tools.

It is clear that the large-scale use of electronic signatures for both public services and business should be encouraged and existing technical and legal barriers should be removed as soon as possible.

As I stated before, these conclusions were reported to the Barcelona Summit and, in the light of them, the European Council called on the Commission to draw up a comprehensive *eEurope 2005* Action Plan to be presented in advance of the Seville European Council, focusing on the abovementioned priorities and the security of networks and information, *eGovernment*, *eLearning*, *eHealth* and *eBusiness*.

The Barcelona Summit gave us thus a hard but exciting work. Therefore, the Spanish Presidency hosted with the Commission in Palma de Mallorca the last 5 and 6 of April a working meeting with representatives of the fifteen Member States and the candidate countries to begin the preparation of the new *eEurope* Action Plan 2005.

I can inform you that the preparation of this new Action Plan is almost concluded and we hope to fulfil our commitment of presenting the new Action Plan in the next Head of State and Government Summit in Sevilla, the next 22 and 23 of June.

I will shortly refer you the fundamental aspects of the new Action Plan, that are perfectly in line with the results of the Informal Meeting of Vitoria.

Firstly, the development of interactive multimedia services is directly linked to the roll-out and upgrading of infrastructure. On the one hand, infrastructure investment is driven by availability of content and services. On the other hand, the development of new services and contents depends on infrastructure deployment. Both developments will reinforce each other. The infrastructure itself evolves and upgrades when new services and

applications emerge and viceversa. eEurope 2005 should try to stimulate a positive feedback between infrastructure upgrading, both broadband and multi-platform and service developments.

Secondly, many measures at the European, national and regional level in support of the knowledge economy are already underway. Most Member States have national action plans for the development information society, many of which were inspired by eEurope2002. The actions should therefore go beyond current policies and make a real difference. They must also be in line with the Barcelona conclusions and the discussions at the Informal Telecom Council in Vitoria.

Thirdly, by the time this new action plan expires it is likely that a number of today's Candidate Countries for accession to the EU will be member states. It will be a challenge for them (and for the current Member States) to meet the targets and to implement the actions contained in eEurope 2005. eEurope 2005 therefore needs built-in flexibility and should provide for a mid-term review of actions and targets to measure up to the new Member States.

I do not want to take up any more of your time. A lot of fruitful work is being done. As you have seen, the European leadership in the Information Society is fully reflected in the eEurope 2005 Action Plan.

I would like to end thanking you once more for the opportunity that you have given to me to participate at this Conference.

Thank you very much.