

**Opening Address by the President of the European Parliament,
Hans-Gert Pöttering,
at the International Conference on
"Information and Communication Technologies for a global sustainable future"**

How can ICT durably contribute to the well-being of all citizens around the world?

European Commission, 22 January 2009

Madam Commissioner, dear Viviane Reding,

Mr. Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union, dear
Hamadoun Touré,

Dear Maria da Graça Carvalho (Principal Adviser, BEPA, European
Commission)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today for the opening of this landmark Conference on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for a sustainable future.

I wish to thank the European Commission not only for organising this event, but also for inviting me to take the floor and to say a couple of words from the perspective of the European Parliament.

When first looking at the title and topic of this conference, you easily get the impression that this meeting will primarily be dealing with highly technical and scientific issues, and rightly so, as these questions need to be discussed and dealt with in depth and detail.

But at the same time allow me not wish to enter into this debate about ICT myself, as we have many highly recognised specialists and engineers amongst us today who will certainly do that with much more talent than I could.

As president of the European Parliament I would rather wish to point out the importance of the topic we are addressing today, the importance of information and communication technologies for our everyday life, for the well-being of our European citizens and that of future generations.

Not only has the ICT sector profoundly transformed the way we live, work and learn: From mobile phones and micro-computer chips to the Internet, ICT has delivered new products and services that have become part of everyday life.

We have become fully used to the presence and often unnoticed support of ICT in our life. But yet have not made full use of the opportunities information and communication technologies can play in increasing the quality of our life.

Information and communication technologies can without doubt contribute to improving our prosperity, to enriching our society and to ensuring our future.

We are in the midst of two global tides - the financial and economic crisis on the one hand and our dire need to fighting climate change on the other. Economic growth is slowing down and likely to become negative in a number of countries of the European Union.

At the same time, the timeframe available to us to decisively mitigate climate change is very limited. We have seven, maybe eight years at our disposal to act. These are major challenges we are facing, not only in the European Union, but also in other countries and regions around the world. We need to take action now at a global level. But we also need the means and the innovation boost to do so effectively.

That's where the Information and Communication Technologies' sector comes into the picture. As a major and constant source of innovation, as a driving force for enhancing competitiveness in the European Union, but also as a means of better assessing the evolution of our environment, ICT can play an important part in the future, not least in achieving the economic, social and environmental objectives we set ourselves with the Lisbon strategy.

These technologies will have a massive impact on our economy and society. Therefore, the role of the ICT sector should be planned strategically both in the short, medium and longer run in the European Union.

That is also why, in the name of the European Parliament, I have very much welcomed the initiative of this conference and expressed my support for the objectives it is aiming at.

I. What is quality of life? How can we achieve sustainable development?

Before getting more into detail, it is important in my view to clarify what we actually mean when speaking about promoting a sustainable future and a better quality of life.

Let me remind you: Prosperity is not simply equal to ensuring economic growth, nor is increased economic growth equal to better life quality. Development is only then sustainable, when it also improves the quality of life of our citizens in terms of social well-being, health and a clean environment. That is the core meaning of prosperity.

Thus, the social environment and the sustainability of economic production methods have a major impact on our well-being. Ultimately, well-being results not least from a reconciliation of the people with their national heritage.

There is a major change in thinking taking place since a couple of years. When nowadays, as a consequence of pollution in cities, people are increasingly suffering from asthma or allergies, can one then seriously say that our well-being has improved and that our way of living is sustainable?

Knowing that climate change is accelerating and that millions of people may be threatened by storms and floods, by the real danger of having their livelihood destroyed or diminished, we need to be able to better prevent these phenomena and their impact on the world population.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The topic of today's conference indeed reminds us that we in the European Union are committed to shaping our policies on the basis of our common values - we put the citizens and their interest at the centre of political objectives.

My deep conviction is that the European Union is far more than just an association of economic interest. We are a community of values. And as such, we carry a major responsibility for the well-being and cohesion of the European society.

Now, please do not think that I might have misread the subject of today's conference. Rest assured, I have not.

The reviewed Lisbon strategy is nothing else than the concrete implementation of a new sustainable development model based on the strategic triangle of market economy, social cohesion and environmental protection. It requires the promotion of sustainable production and consumption patterns that decouple economic growth and environmental damage.

At both European and global level, a sustainable future means doing more with less. Information and Communication Technologies can help us achieve productivity growth and economic growth with fewer resources - that means to become more efficient, and to move on by substituting older, more polluting means of production to new ones.

For instance, to fight climate change we need to adapt our production patterns and show the way towards a low-carbon society. This is what our friend Jeremy Rifkin calls the third industrial revolution.

It is economically and technically feasible to overcome the hitherto damaging production methods without cutting back on economic growth, but even increasing it. ICT can help us adapt to this new framework. Therefore, we must raise awareness of the potential and environmental benefits of ICT and promote their development.

II. How can ICT help achieve a sustainable future and improve the quality of life of citizens?

To highlight the growing importance of ICT, allow me to give a number of examples of possible contribution of this crucial sector.

Firstly, ICT is an important factor to promote growth, competitiveness and create jobs, which will be decisive in the coming months and years.

The European Parliament has worked in favour of redirecting our focus to sustainable growth and jobs.

Future economic development and prosperity in Europe are strongly dependent on future investments and innovation. This importance has been underlined by designating 2009 as the European Year of Innovation & Creativity.

The target Europe long has set is for a 3 percent Research & Development intensity by 2010, yet the results of our efforts have stagnated since the mid-nineties, and today the level has still not risen above the 2% mark.

ICTs feature strongly in the priority areas identified by the Lisbon strategy. And, ladies and gentlemen, the ICT sector is indeed the largest R&D investor in Europe.

The current debate on the Lisbon strategy in the European Parliament focuses on the economic crisis and the medium and long-term effects that the Lisbon Strategy can have to alleviate the consequences of the crisis

The "i2010 strategy" dating back to 2005 aims for a true single market for the digital economy and promotes the positive contribution that information and communication technologies can make to the economy, society and personal quality of life.

With this in mind, my colleagues in the European Parliament are already debating what is to follow the current Lisbon Strategy after 2010.

We are looking forward with a lot of interest to what the next European Commission will propose to follow "i2010", as there are still many challenges to tackle towards 2015 or even 2020.

Secondly, as already mentioned previously, ICT can have a decisive part to play in the move towards a low carbon society, and thus help us protect the environment and improve the well-being of citizens.

As politicians responsible for our society and for its sustainable future, we need to legislate and foster the transition to the third industrial revolution. But we cannot work in the dark; we need accurate information on our natural environment to justify our legislative steps and policy action.

ICTs provide the means to improve our understanding of the natural world and the impact of human activity on it. They offer us valuable tools to protect the environment and reduce the damage we cause.

Thus, using ICT can help us manage finite natural resources and energy consumption much more efficiently, so improving environmental protection without holding back economic development. Now we need to demonstrate to citizens, businesses and policy-makers alike that investing in ICTs is worthwhile!

Of course, no technology can protect us from the power of nature or prevent an earthquake, but ICTs can certainly help reduce the scale of possible destruction and damage by providing more extensive and more systematic monitoring systems.

Permanent monitoring of areas at risk, linked to emergency response procedures, is the key to saving lives and minimizing devastation so that normal life can resume as quickly as possible.

But the largest-potential direct influence of the ICT sector on a global sustainable future is by enabling energy efficiency. ICTs should make it possible to change our energy consumption patterns and reducing carbon footprint whilst maintaining growth and quality of life.

The European Parliament is due to vote its resolution on Energy Efficiency through ICT at its February I Plenary session. In its draft resolution drawn up by my colleague Vladimir Remek, the European Parliament calls on both the European Commission and the Member States of the European Union to promote the testing, validation, introduction and further dissemination of computer- and ICT-based methods to improve energy efficiency.

Notably, this resolution also puts emphasis on the building sector, which accounts for 40 percent of the European Union's energy requirements. The resolution underlines the need to develop smart energy efficient buildings and to create better conditions for the uptake of ICTs for intelligent buildings.

The potential of ICT in the field of energy has already been addressed in the energy package, which was so successfully approved before Christmas by both COuncil and the European Parliament. The implementation of the resulting measures will contribute to achieving the energy and climate targets and realising the gains to which ICT can contribute.

Other fields within the energy sector where ICT plays an important role are for instance eco-innovation, renewable technologies, and sustainable ICT strategies to reduce carbon emissions

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These few examples illustrate the importance of the ICT sector for our society and its future, and the need to promote it. You will have the occasion throughout this conference to discuss more in depth the role ICTs can play in ensuring a sustainable future and the ways to foster the development of larger access to ICTs.

I just want to thank again the Commission for taking the initiative of this conference. Allow me to conclude by saying that even if ICT were just a means and not a policy objective in itself, their promotion is indeed means to a greater good and will help promote the common values our European Union is built upon.

Promoting information and communication technologies in the European Union can and will give us a major competitive edge. Failing to seize the chance by investing more into these technologies would create a problem for which future generations would have to pay an enormous price in terms of loss of well-being and quality of life.

It is therefore our responsibility towards future generations to urgently develop these technologies and to promote, what some would call, an ICT connected governance.

Thank you.