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Country Report on e-Inclusion by Senator Angel Tilvar
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On behalf of the Romanian Delegation to the Third General Assembly of the IPAIT, I would like to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Parliament of Brazil for the warm hospitality and for the excellent conditions in order to make this meeting a real success.

At present it is widely recognized the Information society's potential to deal, on the one hand, with the basic roots of social exclusion (education, employment, income, gender, age, disability, geopolitical factors), and, on the other hand, to promote sustainable development, democracy, transparency and good governance. How to benefit from and maximize the potential of *e-everything*, as a part of the global trend, how to implement an information society which is really participative and equalitarian (e-Inclusion), as an important social dimension of the development of the knowledge-based economy, represent tremendous challenges for all our countries.

Taking all these into account, our delegation very much welcomes the initiative of choosing Digital Inclusion as the main subject of our meeting and supports an intense multilateral exchange of the best practices and policies with a view to strengthening partnership and cooperation among our Parliaments in the framework of IPAIT.

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Before referring to *e-Inclusion* policies and projects in Romania, I would like to stress my country's present situation being at the border between an emerging country and a developed one, a NATO member since March 2004 and a future member of the EU, committed to conclude the preparations for joining the EU on January,1st, 2007.
As a consequence, during the past years, the measures adopted by Romania for implementing the Information Society concept were marked by the negotiations on Chapter 19 of the *aquis communautaire* regarding the field of telecommunications, postal services and IT. According to the EC Country Report on Romania for 2004:

- Significant progress has been made, especially with regard to the setting up the legislative framework for the liberalization of the telecommunication market and the implementation of the *acquis* in the field of ITC.
- The number of the providers of services of communication and electronic networks has almost doubled.
- Referring to the Universal Service Directive (*EU Directive on universal service and user's rights relating to electronic communication networks*) our country has adopted a strategy on establishing all around the country of centers providing the access to the public telephony network and other modern services.

Moreover, the signals received by Romania from prestigious organizations evaluating the IT market worldwide are very encouraging:

- According to the *Economic Impact Study of the IT Industry by the International Data Corp* (May, 2005), the Romanian IT market witnesses an increasing development :
  - ✓ the IT Romanian Industry will grow by more than 10% yearly and an increase by more than 15% is expected in the coming years;
  - ✓ there are 1450 companies in ITC domain with 30.000 employees, from which 52% in software industry.
  - ✓ the IT market is going through a transition to software and IT services, creating good premises for attracting foreign investments.

- According to the *Report* recently made *by the World Economic Forum*, Romania advanced 8 positions in the global classification on the level of expertise for using information technology, registering the most important progress in Europe, a similar situation being recorded in Iceland.

In full compliance with both the national interest in promoting democracy, free market and the European values for the purpose of our country's sustainable economic development and the commitments assumed within the EU accession process, Romania established its priorities for incorporating *digital inclusion* in its *e-strategies* on the twofold approach that dealing with *e-inclusion inequalities* means:

- on the one hand, to **prevent digital exclusion** – which may result from a lack of digital literacy, from economic or technical barriers to

Internet access, or from a lack of capabilities to use efficiently the new services and facilities linked to ITC,

- and, on the other hand, **to exploit new digital opportunities** for a better inclusion of socially disadvantaged people, groups or less-favored areas. This approach includes the distribution and circulation of knowledge resources, the potential of new information and communication services, new job opportunities and better access to employment, and, more traditionally as regards to ITC, overcoming barriers of distance or mobility.

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Allow me now, to shortly refer to some successful projects in the Information Society Implementation Process as well as to some projects which are in progress, which I consider the most relevant for the subject of our meeting:

1. The Romanian National Electronic System (NES)
The legal framework regulating the NES implementation process in Romania is mainly provided by Law161/2003 stipulating the obligation of public institutions to ensure equal, transparent and non-discriminatory access to all citizens to public services, respecting confidentiality and protection of private information. The NES was launched in September 2003 and is available over the www.e-guvernare.ro web site, as a unique access point to public information and services, allowing more than 160 standard forms to be freely downloaded, printed, filled and, in some cases, sent electronically. The forms cover areas of interest like taxes, pensions, allowances, social security. In addition, NES provides a set of useful links to some of the city halls, prefect's offices and country councils, to www.ecariere.ro for job seekers, or www.e-licitatie.ro for the e-Market and Procurement portal of Romania.

2. Knowledge -Based Economy
With the support of the World Bank, Romania initiated the project entitled "**Knowledge - Based Economy**" through which, in the following years, 300 *Local Community Electronic Networks* serving as "*knowledge centers*" will be set up in the rural and small urban areas, improving the digital literacy of the respective communities, ensuring the citizen's access to information in digital format and opening the gate for the local communities' participation in international exchanges. The networks will be built so that to meet necessities of each community and will also provide through broadband connections, access to information and e-services for the main institutions in the respective communities – school, Mayor's house, library, culture house, etc, narrowing the significant divide between

the rural and the urban areas, developing and promoting e-government services and e-commerce.

3. e-Education

By adopting of the **e-Europe+** Program and **e-Learning** initiative, Romania took, among others, specific actions to stimulate the use of Internet in the institutions of education system, to ensure cheaper and faster Internet access, as well as to support all Romanians to participate and work in the knowledge–based economy, giving the labor force the chance to become digitally literate through life-long learning.

In this regard, the Romanian Authorities launched, in 2001, a four-years project with a view to providing "***at least one computer having access to Internet for every school by the year 2004***". In this framework, beginning with 2002, 200 million USD were allocated for the acquisition of 12,000 new computers and printers. This successful program enjoyed international recognition being the only Central and Eastern European program that received an important European award: "***Best practice in e-Government***". In the future, we intend to make the necessary arrangements to introduce ICT disciplines as compulsory starting with the primary school. This project is to be continued during the following years together with the program concerning **Euro200 financial support** granted to pupils and students coming from families with low incomes, for the purpose of purchasing personal computers.

At the same time, numerous international corporations have opened certification and professional development ITC training centers in close cooperation with the higher education institutions in Romania that specialize in ITC. E-Learning has also lately been developed so that currently there are a number of functional e-Learning portals and distance learning centers in more than 20 towns. We are also faced with the phenomenon that, many students are recruited by foreign universities that offer, in the respective countries, more attractive employment opportunities than could be found in Romania. Therefore, an encouraging set of regulations was approved introducing salary tax facilities for the graduates in automatics, electronics and telecommunication, informatics, cybernetics and Economic IT, etc.

4. e-Job Information System for Job Search and Recruiting

This project is part of e–Government project implementation process and perform the following basic functions: presents available positions offered by the employers, the job seeker's CVs in electronic format, enable the job seekers to view all offers and to apply for the desired job, the employers to

view and analyze job seekers' résumés and to contact suitable job seekers via e-mail in order to follow up the next stages for selection for the job. The interface and user browsing are friendly and only accurate and complete data are stored in the system, the access being enabled by an authentication mechanism like username/password.

5. Multimedia Centers for Citizens
The first stage of this project required building an initial multimedia information center for the general public, located within the MCTI Headquarters, structured as a web portal ensuring citizen's rapid and intuitive access to information in various areas of interest. The Multimedia Center Information System will be available through "info-kiosks" in public areas, reducing the gap between the level of IT culture of rural and urban areas citizens, facilitating people in getting accustomed to the use of PC and changing their mentality toward the opportunities provided with the use of ITC.

6. CityNet 2005- 2008

The MCTI initiated the CityNet Program that aims at developing "Digital Cities", based on the metropolitan network made up by the municipalities and business services. This program, by means of which the citizens will benefit from integrated information services, is to be elaborated in detail and there will be a selection of the representative cities included in the project.

7. Electronic Information Services for citizens (Info-kiosk)
Info-kiosk represents a portal grouping information from different government sites and other political useful information, easy to be used by the citizens. The target of the implementation of the project is the distribution of more than 4000 info-kiosks all over the country, especially in the low information level areas. Final scope of Info-kiosk is to increase the quality and accessibility of state institutions services to the benefit of citizens, business and public services employees, leading to an improved efficiency of the local and central public administration bodies and enabling state institutions to answer the citizens more promptly.

8. Health Portal
Health Portal is a pilot – project realized by the MCTI, which will represent a unique point of access to the information regarding the services in the sanitary sector, available both for the patients and for the medical personnel. The computer application has been finalized; the equipments are functional, while digital content is to be completed with the close collaboration of the Ministry of Health, in order to provide the interested

persons with useful, updated information regarding the medical units in each of the Romanian counties and the services provided by these units.

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Taking into account that Romania will become a member state of the European Union on January, 1st, 2007, participation in the European programs regarding information society, represents both an opportunity and a priority for us.

- e-Ten [1]

The contribution Romania has paid in order to participate in the e-Ten Pogram, amounted, in 2004, at 91,000 Euro whereas in 2005, the amount is 246,000 Euro. Last year, 4 projects in which Romanian companies participate were selected by the EU Commission and the Romanian companies succeeded in gaining 400.000 EUR financing resources.

- IDABC [2]

The Parliament of Romania adopted, last year, the Law on the ratification of the Memorandum of Understanding between Romania and the European Commission regarding the participation by Romania in the Community Program for Interchange Data between Public Administration Business and Citizens- IDABC.

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Referring to the legislative framework supporting Romania'strategy to implement an Information Society for all, I would like to underline the important role of the Parliament and of its specialized Standing Committees which, jointly with the Government, and following constructive consultations with the representatives and associations of ITC Industry, have initiated and passed the appropriate legislative framework for the implementation of the projects and strategies in the ITC domain.

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1. e-Ten is a community program created for the purpose of extending e-services to a trans-European level, in which participation is conditioned by collaboration with other countries associated in the program. The program promotes public interest services that create for any citizen, company or public administration the opportunity to benefit from the advantages of information society. The services proposed must fall under one of the 6 categories: e-Government, e-Health, e-Inclusion, e-Learning, Trust and Confidence and SME services.

2. The objective of this program is to develop pan-European communication networks and electronic exchange of information between Members States administrations. Through this program Romania benefits from the EC support for the rapid and direct connection with the trans-European telematic network services (TESTA) for the national public administrations.

There is no doubt that, compared with the developed economies, Romania is still facing many obstacles in implementing its comprehensive strategy on Digital Reform and I will mention here the small number of computers, the difficulties in ensuring cheap and quick access to Internet and computer network security, lack of ICT infrastructure in less developed areas, etc.

In this regard, we are confident that preventing e-Exclusion represents a very important issue for our countries .Therefore this subject deserves to be constructively discussed within the IPAIT, which proved to be the most appropriate framework for the parliaments of the countries all over the world to exchange their expertise and practises.

On this basis the IPAIT is called upon to provide a well articulated package of recommendations for the benefit of our countries, in order to avoid the danger of increasing inequalities and disparities threatening the sustainability of the global processes.