

- Speech Global Forum - Frank Leyman  
Manager International Relations, FEDICT, ICT Department of the  
Belgian Federal Administration

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to wish you a warm welcome to this meeting of the Global Forum. It is my honour, as Manager of international relations for Fedict and representative of the hosting country, to declare this conference open. I am both honoured and enthusiastic - not simply because the programme and the list of guests look extremely promising, but also because we are able to welcome you here in this stunning setting at Egmont Palace.

Allow me first to say something more about this extraordinary building in which we are accommodated: The Egmont Palace. The palace itself dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and has been owned by the Belgian State since 1964, which thoroughly restored it after a period of decline and neglect. Part of the Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs has been located here since the 1970s, but the building itself has always been the centre of diplomatic activity in Brussels. Various notable personages have stayed in this building, such as Queen Christina the First of Sweden (in 1655), King Louis XV of France, Czar Peter the Great, the Thurn und Taxis family, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and even Voltaire. Important agreements concerning Belgium's State reform were signed here.

Today, senior foreign guests and Belgian politicians are still received in the palace's sumptuous reception rooms and high-level conferences are also held here. I hope that this prestigious setting will also inspire this meeting of the Global Forum.

Belgium fully supports the objectives of a think-tank such as the Global Forum. In our country too, cooperation is crucial - we want to make progress in the domain of the Information Society and think seriously about how we are going to shape our digital society in the future. Belgium operates under a federal model and is divided into Communities and Regions, each with their own needs, priorities and specific contexts. In that sense, Belgium is a microcosm of Europe. In order to prevent each entity having to invest separately in similar technologies and applications, consultation and cooperation is absolutely essential. "*Fedict*" - which is an acronym for the ICT Ministry - is working to be the bridge between the various administrations and shares its services with all parties to improve the government's provision of services for citizens and in this way stimulate the development of the Information Society to best advantage.

The policy set out by our outgoing caretaker minister, Vincent Van Quickenborne, is focussed on the further expansion of a successful Information Society. He expounds this policy in his 2010 Digital Plan in 30 points for action. This plan focuses mainly on encouraging fair competition

between the players on the ICT market, the development of applications for efficient e-government and security and legislation are also major components of his Digital Plan.

Belgium is a small country at the heart of Europe. For this reason we, even more than other countries, have been focussing on international cooperation. European Commissioner Neelie Kroes expounded the digital agenda for 2010-2020 during the “Lift-off towards open Government” conference, which Fedict organised in December 2010 in the context of Belgium’s presidency of the European Union. Here too, the emphasis is on cooperation and security; on closing the digital gap between the various economic and social population groups and between the various Member-States themselves; on stimulating the development and spread of new technologies. All these elements are a constant worry for us and oblige us to keep questioning our decisions and adapting them to future needs.

A think-tank, such as this one of the Global Forum, perfectly complements the national and international agendas in the field of digital technology and its use. In these times of economic turmoil, it must more than ever help to outline a vision and help to shape the future:

- By being a pioneer and showing the way towards future digital policy;
- By indicating priorities for the future, the challenges, the opportunities that the Information Society certainly offers;
- By creating awareness of the differences in speed at which communities are evolving in the field of the Information Society and proposing solutions for enabling the stragglers to catch up with the rest of the platoon.

Our diversity - public and private, our geographical diversity, our technical, economic and political backgrounds - our independence, all enable us to give free rein to our thinking and to see solutions and possibilities where others get bogged down because of their lack of freedom and their tunnel vision. So, let us make the best possible use here and now of these outstanding advantages!

I earnestly hope that we will succeed in this over the next two days.

I therefore wish everyone a highly informative and useful conference. And now I will hand over back to the Chair.

Thank you.