

Traian Băsescu Republic of Romania President's Welcome Address at the Global Forum 2009

The Palace of the Parliament, Monday 19th October, 2009

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to participate, at the invitation of the Global Forum organizers, to the most important meeting on Information Society at a global level, which brings together for the first time in Bucharest leaders from local and central administrations, government experts as well as representatives of the private sector and civil society, from over 35 countries worldwide.

I would like to refer today to the international meaning of this event, as well as to the expectations that we, as host country, have from the Global Forum.

Romania is one of the countries that provide brand specialists in the IT&C sector. Thousands of Romanians are working in the USA, Canada and Europe as IT specialists. Romania is the leader in Europe in terms of number of certified IT specialists (in terms of density rate of population per 1,000 inhabitants) and we are among the first 6 countries in the world.

Romania has thus become one of world's most important markets for software production. At national level, Romania represents an important center for the Information Society. Companies such as IBM, Microsoft, Ericsson, Intel, HP, are strongly rooted in Romania.

For me this is an extremely important sign that Romania is modernizing at a rapid pace, even if it is not yet acknowledged by everyone.

Now I would like to draw your attention on the fact that for his 18th edition, the Global Forum is organized for the first time in an East European country. This represents the acknowledgement of the potential of the development of the Information Society in this region and more particular, in Romania. But there is also another meaning upon which I would like to draw attention: we are all here, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, beyond the borders of the "Iron Curtain".

The reason I am mentioning this fact is because our recent experience, as East Europeans, allows us to think over the importance of a value system that could orient the way in which are used the huge possibilities offered by science and technology with respect to the citizen and his relationship with the authorities. Depending on the orientation, the government can either become more efficient, more transparent and better subordinated to the citizen's decision (idea that we have been trying to put in place since 1989), or the citizen can become completely submissive to the government, which could have the power and the technological means to control every citizen's life in the smallest details.

It is a reality that our every day actions involve an element of the Information Society. We are living in an interconnected world in which the banking systems communicate with each other 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, the national institutions, the companies, the population, they are all in constant communication by means of the Information Society. The evolution of technology should not scare; it should sustain the modernization and the development of the society.

On the other hand, it is important to be aware of the fact that technology as a whole cannot be qualified as good or bad. It all depends on how and by whom is used this enormous power. This decision cannot be taken based on technical criteria; it comes from something beyond science and technology. It derives from the value system that set the bases of individual freedom and democracy in western civilization. After decades of silence, in 1989 the peoples of this region chose without hesitation to return to the values of democracy and to the market economy. We appreciate better than those who did not experience communism the political freedom, because we know what it means to be deprived of it, as a country and as individuals.

We know, thus, from our own experience, that excessive power in the hands of the state means tyranny, corruption, inefficiency. We also know that in the hands of a totalitarian government, the

progress of science and IT can become an instrument of oppression. Therefore, we don't want that, in the future, thanks to the progress of Information Society, governmental bureaucrats look discretely in our personal life, medical record, financial status, eating habits or in the way we raise our children.

In a free society, information technology must play an extremely important role in the freedom of speech, guaranteeing public access to information and encouraging competition, in order to stimulate creativity. All this must be done by assuring the protection of personal information and privacy of the citizen, a citizen that can control himself the activities of the governments, a normal thing that should happen in all democratic countries.

In this regard I would like to provide you with some significant examples for Romania: the use of IT&C applications in the financial-banking sector, particularly in the electronic payment system can generate, directly or indirectly, economies that might exceed a few percents (approximately 4) of the national GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

On the other hand, electronic payment systems involve a transparent process, which makes it difficult not to report incomes; this is a means of reducing underground economy. In the case of Romania, electronic payment systems can reduce by 10 to 15 % the underground economy, i.e. the equivalent of several billion euros annually.

Furthermore, IT&C use and implementation in the governance play a major role in decentralization of the public administration in Romania, in the same time making it more modern and more efficient. Making "e-governance" possible is a major objective for a country like Romania: it improves public services, reduces costs and facilitates transparent communication between the citizens and the public / private institutions.

The National Electronic System is an eloquent evidence for the benefits of adopting electronic tools. Over 9554 public institutions were registered in the system at the end of September this year, compared with only 800 at the beginning of the year. Also, the number of auctions in the electronic Public Procurement system (SEAP - [www. e-licitatie.ro](http://www.e-licitatie.ro)) has increased from under 2% to over 12%.

Then again, we must admit that this technological progress at a global level can be the source of extremely serious new risks. It is enough to mention that nowadays even terrorism has a technological potential threatening for us all.

In order to protect national sovereignty, public order and to ensure the freedom of their citizens, democratic governments are completely entitled to make use of these technological tools to counter these threats. This does not mean monitoring all the citizens; on the contrary, governments should act only against those citizens that are involved in acts of terrorism, spying and organized crime. Such an attitude does not constitute a violation of individual liberty, but rather, a way to defend it, a fundamental duty of the government towards the citizens who want to live in a free society.

I think that in the center of all the topics debated during this two-day conference the citizen should be the final beneficiary. Whether it is the private or the public sector, the services provided should be of good quality, adapted to the evolution of Information Society, being in the same time a guarantee for the protection of personal data of the citizen.

To conclude with, I would like to highlight the priority of the two themes:

1. Unbureaucratization and reducing of costs with the help of IT&C
2. The security of personal data when using electronic services.

I wish that the Global Forum in Bucharest contribute to clarifying and finding solutions to critical problems of the modern society, initiate fruitful partnerships that will determine the progress of the Information Society, will stimulate economic growth as well as the implementation of modern services for the citizens of all participating countries.

I thank you very much and I wish you good luck!