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Our policy hinges on recognition of the fact that information and computer technologies act as a powerful motor for development and employment. Indeed, according to the European Commission, one quarter of the increase in the EU's GDP and 40% of its increased productivity can be ascribed to these technologies. Today, no-one can afford to overlook the fact that the countries which are able to use new technologies, in order to open up the structures and functions of public administration to their citizens and promote e-governance, are the champions of economic performance and competitiveness. Particularly within the EU, which takes development, employment and prosperity as its cornerstone, as set out in the Lisbon Strategy, the need for the digital revolution is evident. In the new digital economy, ICT can and should act as the driving force towards achieving the triple objective of sustainable development, boosting employment and improving the everyday life of the citizen.

Within this new reality, it is common knowledge that unfortunately until recently

our country had neither the vision nor the planning to allow it to play a leading role. The lack of sound organisation and the failure to exploit opportunities to diffuse ICT, added to limited investment in research, development and training, were the main reasons for Greece's poor performance in digital convergence. For years, we were losing ground and were missing major opportunities for development and prosperity. This situation had to be reversed.

To make up for this lost ground, from the very moment we came to power we started to take major steps to involve the citizens as widely as possible in the digital age and to upgrade the state's technological infrastructure and services. Substantial progress has been achieved over the last two years in promoting ICT through a series of activities, the main driving force being the Information Society Operational Programme. This, in spite of the fact that in the early stages of the programme there was a lack of cohesive planning and delays in implementation, the result being that the measures which needed to be taken to prompt the

and Information Security Agency (ENISA) in Herakleion, Crete. This bears witness to the IT progress we have achieved through our educational and research centres (universities, research foundations, the Foundation for Research and Technology), but first and foremost to our great human potential. At a time when the issue of security in telecommunications and computer networks is so much to the fore, it is of particular importance that the international community's attention is focused on Greece.



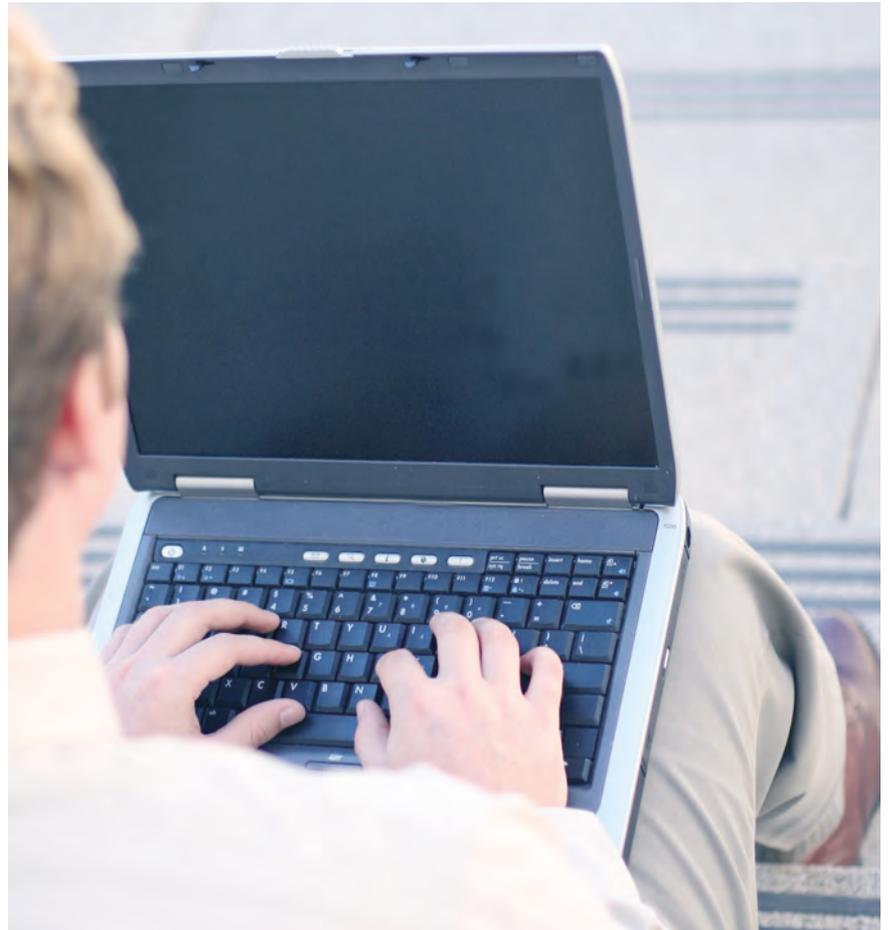
DR. KOSTAS KARAMANLIS

Greece in the Digital Age

technological modernisation of the country failed to come about at the desired speed. Implementation of the Information Society programme has accelerated considerably. From 12% in March, 2004, public expenditure has now reached 37%. The percentage of contracted projects has increased from 19% to 55%. ICT investment over the last two years shows that our country is now following a new development model with clearly improved prospects.

Certainly, in order to accelerate the use of new technologies we need to improve

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accessibility, broadband infrastructure as well as the services which strengthen digital convergence and broaden the creative prospects of the economy. More than 40 digital services will soon be available to the citizens of Greece, the main aim being to use ICT to enhance their daily life. And, of course, special attention has been paid to the regions through the "Digital Local Government" programme which includes activities intended to familiarize citizens with the use of new digital services within local society.

At the same time, we have laid great store by the dissemination of reasonably priced

broadband internet access, primarily targeting the remote regions and the young generation. All universities and technological institutes provide to their students high speed Internet access, whilst primary and secondary schools continue to be connected apace. We are already developing broadband infrastructure in 70 large regional cities. Moreover, as we had promised, cheap, fast Internet has already become a reality through the "Diodos" programme for our young generation.

Our strategic aim in this is to improve the quality of public administration and to cut through red tape. This is why we focused

on interconnecting public services and agencies and providing both citizens and business with new services. We expedited the completion of the "Syzeftis" national public administration network, which provides 3,000 clients with high added value advanced telecom services. "Syzeftis" is already up and running, making a decisive contribution to the promotion of e-governance. Public administration is now adapting to these new developments, to ensure that it is able to quickly and efficiently meet citizens' needs.

the public administration has improved. But use of the Internet is providing an even greater potential. Most of the citizens' basic transactions with the tax office can be dealt with electronically, thanks to the new TaxisNet. Over the last year there were almost 2.5 million on-line transactions, a 67% increase compared with 2003, which in practice means that an equivalent number of visits to the tax office have been avoided. The facts speak for themselves, since there has been a drastic reduction in the

So far, we have achieved much of great importance. But we still have a long way to go. That is why we need drastic actions, consensus and a national strategy in order to achieve our common aims. Our political will and our dedication to the objectives we have set are the basic components in our country's progress and its convergence with the technologically advanced members of the European Union. Building on the steps we have already taken, we are moving forward to meet the commitments we have made to our people -towards strengthened productivity and competitiveness within our economy; towards a friendlier, more efficient public administration; towards new opportunities and prosperity for all citizens and, above all, for the young generation. 

Dr. Kostas Karamanlis is Prime Minister of Greece.

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Considerable efforts are already being made against this backdrop. The work being put in by the Ministry of Economy and Finance to modernise and to provide advanced electronic services shows that there are examples of electronic services which enjoy high levels of public acceptance. After many years of indifference for Taxis, the technological infrastructure in the tax offices has already been hugely upgraded with the installation of 8,000 new computers from our Olympic inheritance. This is a particularly successful example of how we have turned the Olympic Games to good account. Our citizens now enjoy more rapid service, whilst at the same time productivity in

time people spend when dealing with public authorities, whilst national economy also benefits.

Our priorities, the priorities of the new governance, are anchored in speeding up our country's development, and in equal treatment for all citizens. They are anchored in the conviction that all Greeks are entitled to equal access to the opportunities provided by the new age. And it is this conviction which gives palpable content to the concept of the Information Society -a society which concerns all citizens, which bridges the computer illiteracy gap rather than making them wider.

