



K O S T A S K A R A M A N L I S

The development vision for Greece

The dynamics of the convergence of information and communication technologies leads humanity rapidly to the "knowledge society". In the coming world, the majority of goods and services will be available through the Internet. The broadband digital online information highways, either wired or wireless, enhance the provision of electronic government, distance learning, telecommuting, online information and entertainment. Technology abolishes boundaries and geographic distances and the entire planet becomes a global village. Development correlates to the integration of innovation in the productive and business structures and

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the operation of the state mechanism. The need to integrate new technologies in citizens' everyday life and the rapid exploitation of their advantages by the public and private sector is therefore imperative.

In the framework of its Digital Strategy, the Government promoted - and is still promoting - the vision of Greece as a technologically advanced and financially strong country, by encouraging the development of the appropriate network



in tomorrow's world

infrastructures for the new digital environment. Our strategy concerns on the one hand the fixed broadband optical fiber networks and the digital terrestrial television networks, and on the other hand the mobile broadband wireless networks. These measures aim at encouraging competition in both infrastructures and services. Recognizing that the prosperity and competitiveness of a country depend more and more on the possibility of businesses, the state and the citizens to use new technologies advantageously, the Government launched numerous initiatives, specific measures, plans and actions towards this direction:

- A) It created and is still creating critical access infrastructures, both wired and wireless, terrestrial and satellite, to upgrade and improve business activities in the areas of the Greek territory, as well as to create and sustain new jobs.
- B) It supported actions for the creation of metropolitan network infrastructures, mainly on a local and regional level, by financing and supervising projects of the Information Society to the benefit of the citizens, to combat bureaucracy and enhance transparency in the transactions of the citizen with the State.
- C) It achieved the automatization and simplification of numerous administrative procedures. It enhanced the introduction of electronic government systems. It supported projects to upgrade the information systems of ministries, public authorities, social security organizations, etc.

D) It provided incentives to develop applications aiming at the elimination of regional inequalities and the improvement of quality of life throughout Greece, and in particular for the citizens who live in remote and island regions, for which it managed to ensure the provision of distance health, education and employment services.

Even though the development route is still hard to cross and uphill, the results of our policies are already evident. The progress made during the last few years is undoubted. Greece is no longer the last to use and offer high speed Internet and at the same time the first to impose the highest retail prices for this service. Our country managed to achieve a substantial broadband penetration. At the same time, through the promotion of healthy competition among the providers, it managed to multiply the average connection speed and to decrease substantially the retail prices for broadband connections, which are today much lower than the EU average.

Through the systematic exploitation of the structural programs provided in the Third CSF, our country completed successfully the Operational Program "Information Society", putting emphasis on the digital services sector. Through this, important modernization actions were financed for the entire public sector, in the narrow and wider sense, the municipalities and the rural areas.

Through the new Operational Program "Digital Convergence" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), our ambition is to bring our country

to the same level of the advanced EU member states as to digital services. The new actions are focused on services that concern the citizens directly. Our aim is for the digital services to no longer be a privilege enjoyed only by a few "knowledgeable citizens" about the new technologies, but to become visible and perceived by the largest possible number of citizens, giving specific emphasis in those experiencing financial, social or geographical impediments or disadvantages.

A supplementary axis of the governmental intervention is the exploitation of the "digital share" and the redistribution of the map of available radiofrequencies, both terrestrial and satellite, to be used by the next generation television programs and telecommunications networks and services providers.

Within this dynamic and constantly changing environment, the Information and Communication Technologies sector is the most important strategic partner of the government in order to achieve all these ambitious objectives. We have faith on the Greek business community and we are looking forward to its creative contribution in order to overcome all the difficulties that will be encountered during the projects design, assignment and implementation procedure. We intend to exploit all the modern models to create reliable, viable, flexible and interoperable applications, which will require the minimum development and operation cost, which, even though centrally built, will be regionally used through the Internet by geographically distributed users throughout the entire territory.

KOSTAS KARAMANLIS

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I also consider it important to reaffirm the strong interest and the actions

undertaken by the State for the rapid creation of the necessary infrastructures,

which will soon bring Greece on the head of the countries with modern digital infrastructure. As we have repeatedly stated, we are working systematically for the implementation of the Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) network, with the aim to cover 2 million households and businesses in the entire country within the next 7 years. The Ministry of Transport and Communications has already prepared the legislative framework for this important project, which is equivalent to the electrification of the country during the 1950s. As it was announced, this project of public benefit will be financed

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through the model of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP).

It is a main objective of our policy to supply Greece with a passive access infrastructure, which will be open to all network and services providers and will cover the needs of citizens and businesses for the next decades. The optic fiber networks may attract substantial investments and create thousands of new highly specialized jobs for the young people of our country. It may become the catalyst for the creation of numerous new export-oriented businesses and make critical electronic government and telemedicine services affordable for more Greek households. Finally, it may transform our country into a main regional

telecommunications node, as it is the case in the energy sector, with the natural gas pipelines to Western Europe.

Another important intervention that we are about to complete in the near future concerns the bridging of the domestic digital gap, the inequality in the Greek rural areas as to high speed Internet access. We are examining actions for the promotion of subsidized wireless broadband connections for those living in the rural areas, with comparable characteristics and prices to ADSL connections.

Ensuring fair competition among the businesses of the sector is a cornerstone for securing maximum transparency

and safeguarding the objectives of our country's technological modernization. To this end, we have already simplified many of the conventional procedures followed during submission of tender, thereby decreasing the cost for the relative procedures. Moreover, we are planning the comprehensive application of electronic tenders for as many public procurements as possible, in order to eliminate all the areas of possible lack of transparency.

It is clear that the government considers extremely important the existence of competitive business schemes with domestic added value for the promotion and absorption of both the public actions for "Digital Convergence" and the digital economy in general. Encouraging new scientists and engineers to seek an outlet in new technologies companies or to setup new business units is a prerequisite for the survival of our society. In this context, we are planning new actions to enhance youth entrepreneurship and to simplify the procedures for setting up new companies.

After the end of the global financial crisis, we are looking forward to a modern and new generation of Greek businesses with high know-how and competitiveness, able to face the challenges of the most advanced new information technology applications and to lead the national effort to bring Greece in the cycle of the most advanced EU member states. The coming world belongs to those with a vision and a strategy, to those who know how to be prepared to face successfully the challenges of the new digital era.

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Mr. Kostas Karamanlis is the Prime Minister of Greece. 