

EN RD seminar:  
"ICT and rural areas: building the knowledge society at grassroots level"  
10th February 2011

by Alina Ujupan, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Ciolos

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to be here, among all of you, and open this important event together with Constantijn, my colleague from the Commissioner Kroes Cabinet. It is an opportunity to come together and discuss the role of Information and Communication Technologies and the need for policy support for all these investments that bring innovation, new ideas and technologies in agriculture, forestry and in rural areas in general.

For many of us Information and Communication Technologies have rapidly become part of our lives: cell phones, fast internet, GPS, social networking, etc., but still, not everyone is "connected" or is in a position to be able to make use of what ICT can offer.

Some of you may know that this event is not a stand-alone initiative and it was not even triggered by the Recovery package, which is the focal point of interest for our meeting today. This event was actually flag shipped in our joint with DG INFSO Commission communication on better access for rural areas to modern ICT from March 2009, which among other things, stressed the importance of dissemination and sharing good ICT practices in rural areas and invited the European Network for Rural Development to undertake such an event; and I have to say, that this event comes at the right time.

The recent EU Recovery package, and the consecutive programme modification process, has shown that we are still some way from where we should be; that there are still gaps to be filled in. I am quite glad to see that 17 Member States have committed themselves to the idea of boosting broadband in rural areas, to the idea of giving their rural population the chance to become connected. The Recovery

package was just the first signal, the first spark that showed us that we must act. With this event, I hope all of us to have the opportunity to see where we are, what has been done and how we can further progress.

It is not a secret that we are currently having extensive discussions on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, and we all trust that the choices we will make, together with you, all our stakeholders and the Member States, will be the correct one. These discussions cannot ignore the question on how digital we are going to be or want to be, respectively, where we should put our priorities as regards the Digital agenda and Europe2020 objectives.

The potential for ICT to play a role and the challenges that agriculture, forestry, food industry and rural areas more generally, are facing, is going to be discussed by us today. We have produced a first brochure providing examples of ICT projects supported under rural development, and we already have our set of good ICT practices for rural areas, which was collected and widely disseminated back in 2007. Together with some of the case studies to be presented today, these first experiences provide us with material to further build on.

The richness of the choices also lies with you, the stakeholders of the policy; and I trust that you will act and push for more, and come forward with innovative and good project proposals.

With this, I would like to open the event and welcome everyone of you. I am also extremely pleased to see here Mr Adelstein who will be kind to present us the US experience on ICT and broadband.

Thank you very much for your attention and I will now give the floor to my colleague from the Cabinet of Commissioner Kroes, who will further transfer us into the "digitalised" world of the Commission.