

Closing remarks

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Seminar of the European Network for Rural Development on:
"ICT and rural areas: building the knowledge society at grassroots level"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank you all for this intense work today, and your stimulating contributions.

From our exchanges today, I retain the following messages:

- ICT can make a significant contribution to the economic recovery, in particular in rural areas. But it needs to be given a further push. A front loading of public investments is therefore still needed to support growth. Completing the broadband infrastructure is considered a key factor for long term economic growth, in particular in rural areas.
- The EU puts emphasis on expanding the ICT infrastructure, in order to get everyone connected. This roll out of IT connections is seen as a basis for sustainable growth. It is important to note that the USA pursue the same objective, as this was put in evidence by Mr Adelstein in his interventions.
- To make this possible, there is also a need for new financial and business models for rural areas. The use of financial engineering, such as guarantee and loan funds, acts as leverage for infrastructural investments and helps close the digital divide.
- Acceleration in implementation of the European Economic Recovery Plan¹ is needed. In this regard, the Swedish example presented in the morning session shows the importance of having all actors involved together, at different levels (national, regional and local).
- The coordination of broadband strategies is key, notably to ensure the best use of available EU funding opportunities.
- "Adoption" strategies for/by stakeholders are similarly important, in particular at local level. The role of local communities and the willingness of individual actors are decisive in the success of these strategies. They need to be supported by a bottom-up dynamic.
- Another key factor highlighted today is the determining role of cooperation between communities, researchers, farm advisory systems and businesses. There are still gaps to be filled in between scientists and technicians, and potentials users, like farmers. Enhancing links between these communities could make a significant boost in the use of ICT.
- E-services should continue to be developed, as shown in the case of the Hungarian agricultural administration presented in the morning session.

¹ See the brochure "Over view of the CAP Health Check and the European Economic Recovery Plan"
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/healthcheck/recovery-plan_en.pdf

- Access to information and training facilities should also be further supported. Member states should reinforce ICT training programmes, especially for farmers, but also for food-processors and rural economic actors.
- Altogether ICT can help bringing administrations closer to citizens at local, regional, national and EU levels. They are a core tool for networking. At EU level, the website of the European Network for Rural Development is a key electronic platform to connect administrations with European organisations, national rural networks and their stakeholders.
It can also concretely support the exchange of experiences in developing ICT in rural areas, as was done already today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, following the invitation of DG INFSO of the European Commission, I would like to encourage you to participate in their event on 16 and 17 June in Brussels, where rural concerns will continue to be addressed.

Thank you for your attention.

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