

**Opening Speech
of
H.E Dr. Tarek Kamel
Minister of Communications and Information Technology
at
The Euro Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Information Society
"Building an Enabling Environment for the Euro Mediterranean
Information Society"**

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today addressing this distinguished gathering and to welcome you all in Cairo. Egypt is honored to be hosting the 2nd EUROMED Ministerial Conference on The Information Society. We see this event as an excellent forum for government to government consultation within the Barcelona process in order to achieve an open, inclusive and competitive Information Society in the region with prosperity for all.

I am also happy that our event coincides with Cairo ICT, which allows a complementary forum of discussion in the business sector, hence, giving us all a golden opportunity for constructive exchanges.

Indeed, our region is renowned for its historical and geographic linkages that closely bring us together. As the EUROMED is positioned to become a strong region of free trade and economic development, we are proud that our sector is a horizontal and enabling one that cuts across other sectors and contributes to the growth and development of different aspects of society. We believe that it is crucial to develop a EUROMED Information Society that can help integrate the EU and Mediterranean countries into the global Information Society; an Information Society that creates an environment conducive to investment and private sector development in ICT related industries. The geographic proximity between the two regions, the close and successful cooperation in development, culture, common projects, as well as the relative synergies available with regard to the telecom policies and legislations, provide an ideal platform for collaboration that can help create an information society with win-win relations between the different players.

The agenda of our conference today includes two major topics that touch on critical themes to our region:

- The changing dynamics of the EUROMED Information Society in light of recent technological and business realities related to convergence, creativity and cyber security and the policy and regulatory challenges they pose. How can we create the enabling environment that builds on the complementary resources in our region?
- The second issue is the mechanisms for cooperation in the EUROMED region in regulatory issues, connectivity research and ICT for development and how we could improve cooperation and information sharing in the region.

Through these two ministerial round tables, I hope that we will be able to think together, based on the interventions of the distinguished ministers and heads of delegation about the best ways to address the challenges of global access to the web, convergence, digital identity management, the evolution of doing business on the Internet and most importantly, what the next billion users of the Internet will trigger with respect to issues of safety, access, language, networking and content.

It is imperative to consider such issues in the light of our EUROMED realities. In fact, I see no need in a gathering such as this to make the case for the importance of ICTs and their applications as the main driver for economic growth. Recent research argues that the diffusion of ICTs in society with its new applications is a remarkable source for growth and productivity in most nations. This is expected to continue for decades to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this respect, and as a contribution to our constructive discussions, I would like to share with you some of the achievements of the ICT sector in Egypt and point out to a number of challenges.

In Egypt, our current government's objective is to secure a well functioning free market economy. We are therefore, working seriously to establish the institutional and regulatory framework for a successful market economy. At the same time, we seek to improve the investment climate. It is well known that the ICT sector has been a role model in Egypt in terms of pace and policies of deregulation and privatization. In addition, the ICT4D programs of the sector were a driver for development and change in a number of key sectors and within society.

As a result of the reform process we are undertaking, the ICT sector is no more competing for subsidies and grants, but is strengthening itself as a revenue generating sector. Indeed, the public proceeds of the sector in Egypt have reached 4.5 billion US dollars from IPOs and licenses. This fact encourages us to pursue our reform plans with more energy, to develop state of the art communications infrastructure and services, as well as to put in place the framework required to deploy broadband and converged services throughout Egypt via fixed and mobile services. On the other hand, we are adopting policy measures to improve the protection of intellectual property, respect privacy and further improve security and reliability of our networks. In all our endeavors, public- private partnership is our channel for implementation.

However, both Egypt and the other Arab Mediterranean countries recognize the existence of a number of common challenges and problems that need to be addressed consistently and continuously. The challenges revolve around keeping pace with the sector's development locally and internationally, in terms of institutional and regulatory structures and policies, security issues, as well as dealing with the scarcity of Arabic content on the internet. I am certain that a number of these concerns are shared by EU members states. That's why, we consider the solutions developed by the European Commission's Directorate General on Information Society and Media, to be of important value, and we look forward to discussing them through a constructive EUROMED dialogue

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The preeminence of the ICT sector in our region is not confined to Egypt, we are proud to note that this sector is becoming a key one in a number of Arab Mediterranean countries.

The ICT sector in the Arab Mediterranean countries allows innovative forms of cooperation based on the fast pace of development of the sector in the region. Arab Ministers of ICT were keen to produce the Arab ICT Strategy 2007- 2011 as a clear commitment, setting the priorities of the region and the channels of their implementation.

It gives me great pride to note the effort to formulate the Arab Mediterranean countries' common position to the Second Euro Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in light of the Arab ICT Strategy and the Barcelona Process. The document "Investing in our future, building together our Information Society", suggested priority areas for EUROMED cooperation in multilingual e-content, in media convergence, electronic learning, R&D, e-government and ICT SMEs, through cost sharing models. The document took stock of existing EUROMED projects and identified potential stakeholders for a new momentum of cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Successful EUROMED cooperation in ICT is not new to us. I would like to recognize the tremendous impact of NATP I and II projects on the development of our sectors and policy formulation, as well as EUMEDIS with its pioneering projects in a number of fields. EUMED CONNECT is a third successful endeavor of great value. I would also like to recognize some projects done within the framework of the ICT thematic priority of FP7, while stressing on the importance of taking the Mediterranean region research priorities in ICT more into consideration in formulating the forthcoming work programs; with special emphasis on natural language processing, data mining and electronic and wireless design. In addition, we are happy to have participated in some activities of the Safer Internet Plus program of the EU, by taking part in the Safer Internet Day organized by the European internet safety network. We wish to stress on the importance of opening such programs to Mediterranean Partner Countries, for their huge reciprocal benefits.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We live in an age where national challenges are becoming global in nature, whether in climatic issues, environmental concerns or health. We are working in a sector that transcends national boundaries, and whose impact touches on so many areas. This is a credit and responsibility. However, global solutions cannot but start regionally. Regional and international fora are great spaces for tackling the constantly emerging issues of the Information society.

The World Economic Forum, the OECD Working parties and forthcoming ministerial conference, ITU high level experts group of the global cyber security agenda, and other great fora in which Egypt is actively engaged, have all touched on the issues of global concern in ICT.

It is high time for the EUROMED region to have its own Think Tank. While the EUROMED Forum for Senior Officials was established in the first ministerial conference in Ireland in 2005, I would like to urge the distinguished attendees to instill a new spirit

and momentum to this Forum. The activation of the Forum through solid mechanisms and follow up systems is imperative for the benefit of our region and successful cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Egypt will be hosting a number of prestigious events in 2008 – 2009 where we hope you will be with us:

- Egypt's Internet Safety Conference on the 24th- 25th of March in the framework of The Cyber Peace Initiative.
- ITU Africa Telecom 11 to 15 May 2008
- The World Economic Forum on the Middle East in Sharm El Sheikh from 17 to 19 May 2008.
- The International Olympiads in Informatics in August 2008
- And in 2009, the Internet Governance Forum.

On behalf of the Egyptian government, I welcome you all again in Cairo and wish you a productive conference and a wonderful stay in our country.

I thank you for your attention.