

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in a dynamic era full of challenges. The biggest challenge, though, is the society that we are building and passing on to the future generations. The quality of the social and cultural society we live in will be a guarantee for either the development of the full potential of human abilities and new intellectual achievements, or for division and conflicts. Europe has had similar periods throughout its history, and its people, overcoming sufferings and hatred, have joined forces in transforming European values and principles for liberty, security, cooperation and democracy into a working framework for the future. These eternal values and principles constitute the activity of the two organizations that unite our efforts for achieving common valuable social objectives – the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The Council of Europe is the oldest organization on our continent, which immediately after the end of World War II promoted the unification of Europe as a high ideal and an immediate practice for action. It has strived for the recognition of the norms of human rights, democracy and rule of law and has been dedicated to the cause of human rights and freedoms, an active dialogue and innovative approach, which all provide good grounds for fruitful debates and important decisions.

The information society we live in requires not only greater knowledge of the ever developing social and technological processes but also open-mindedness, courage when searching for new practices and decisions and wisdom when implementing them. The information society is not a society of chosen ones, but a society of and for the people. The information society is a society of free people, not a means for dictatorship and obedience. The information society provides for economic prosperity and security. That is why we refer to an information society that is diverse in its form and color, an integrating society not a dividing and excluding one. The information society is for everyone. Electronic democracy today is the unbreakable bond between democratic processes and new technology and is the broadest modern framework where the interests and aspirations of people lie. We have witnessed that this process is developing at different levels and what we are seeking is a suitable approach for perfecting democracy in accordance with the requirements of the information era, globalization and people's expectations. The backbone of the society we are striving to build is the free, universal and open Internet. A week ago, in Seoul, at the Cyber-security conference representatives of over one hundred countries shared the idea that a global and open Internet is the driving force behind progress and that the protection of human rights inside and outside the network, and more precisely the freedom of speech, must be provided regardless of the borders and in accordance with the international agreements and more specifically Article 10 of the ECHR.

The values of free exchange of opinion, which enables the full potential of each and every member of society and their spiritual enrichment, are the basis of a modern and people-oriented information society. Freedom of speech is not merely a transmission for the diffusion of information and ideas but also a responsibility for the content that is being spread. Words of hatred, humiliation and negligence towards others should not be tolerated or promoted, especially among young people, as they do not build but rather destroy the pillars of democracy and pluralism. The Council of Europe has defended its firm position on the issue by bridging the issues of cyber-security and the protection of the principles of equality and

tolerance as it adopted an additional protocol to the Cyber-security Convention (the 1991 Budapest Convention concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems) in 2003.

Besides the adoption of the corresponding national constitutional and legislative frameworks, their implementation in accordance to the values of democracy and human rights is of significant importance. These values should be clearly stated in the procedures as immediate principles of action, not as some abstract decoration. They are to comprise the foundations of the ethical codes of the media and should be made into everyday practice. The responsibility of the political leaders in this respect is important too, and, whenever opportunity presents itself, they should state their negative position on any forms of expression that imply hatred and separation towards specific social groups. Maybe we should look for some new solutions to efficiently combat words of hatred and at the same time affirm a tolerant pluralistic and philanthropic information society. The Forum of the Council of Europe in Belgrade is a suitable platform for an open and honest exchange of views with the stakeholders and for finding not only innovative but also pragmatic solutions. The prepared documents in this respect are a valuable contribution.

By liaising the events in Seoul and Belgrade, once again I would like to remind you that “the information society should be based on and promote respect for the cultural identity, culture and language diversity, traditions and religions and boost the dialogue between cultures and civilizations.” This is the dream of the children in Seoul and Belgrade, as well as of the young generations around the world that crave for a secure and diverse communication, which enables them to create and express their ideas.

Thank you for your attention!