

Pavel Bem

speech to delegates of the conference EUROCIITIES Knowledge Society Forum – TeleCities, Prague, 13 October 2005

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to our capital in the heart of Europe.

Like other modern cities in the world, Prague also nurtures a vision in the field of e-Government and is keen to provide quality information services to citizens, entrepreneurs and tourists. It contributes to joint projects between public administration and the private sector.

The capital city's population of more than a million constitutes a tenth of the population of the Czech Republic. More than 70% of Prague inhabitants claim to be regular Internet users. Among the younger generation, the figure is higher than 80%.

I realize that efficient development and modernization is only possible if we have a clear vision, a realistic appraisal of the current situation, well-appointed goals and a well-laid plan on how to achieve them, together with consideration for future developments. In response, Prague City Council has adopted a document, 'Information Strategy of the City of Prague – Towards an e-Prague', which was long in preparation and broad in discussion.

I would like to illustrate the fact that we are trying not to follow this path alone, but as part of a broader community, by the fact that we have taken part in an analysis and benchmarking project with other cities. The results are explained in the publication 'Czech Cities towards an Information Society', which is included among the conference materials.

I consider it an honour that we have managed to incorporate the signing of the EUROCIITIES Charter of Rights of Citizens in the Knowledge Society, which Prague has supported since its inception, into the programme of today's conference. Please allow me, then, to talk briefly about Prague in relation to the main points of this Charter, which are in keeping with the information strategy 'Towards an e-Prague'.

1. Right of access

Prague is creating its own broadband infrastructure required for the cooperation of public administration information systems and for the sharing of necessary data and information; it is supporting the connection of schools, libraries and other entities to the Internet. Statistical surveys reveal that Prague can boast the highest proportion of households with an Internet connection – approximately 35% – compared to other Czech regions.

Further infrastructure development is still primarily a challenge for the private sector, but we are aware, of course, of trends and possibilities of cooperation in the form of Public Private Partnerships. We also recognize the new challenges concerning data security and protection.

2. Right to education

In a survey of computer literacy organized by the Ministry of Informatics, Prague again came top of the Czech regions. More than 40% of respondents met the criteria laid down in the survey methodology (the average for the Czech Republic as a whole is 27%). Given the concentration of universities, research centres and head offices of diverse institutions in the capital, this is hardly surprising. Naturally, we want to continue supporting this trend. The support of projects prepared in the scope of a programme for Objective 3 of the EU's structural policy is a topical example.

3. Right to information online

The provision of quality information online is now taken for granted by the city. The City Hall, the authorities of the municipal wards, and city organizations offer a wide range of information on their websites. We also monitor trends and new technologies; we have started creating a City of Prague portal in order to provide a broader range of interactive services.

4. Right to participate online

The willingness to open up city administration for citizens and encourage their involvement is declared in Prague City Council's Policy Statement. It is quite clear that information and communication technology is a key tool for the realization of ideas now labelled as eDemocracy. We implement this idea at the time of developing our websites.

My fellow conference delegates, I am sure you will believe me when I say that Prague has a number of other themes and ambitions connected with the development of the information society in areas of city administration I have not mentioned, such as crisis management, transport, the arts, monument care, and the environment. Nevertheless, I will leave them for some future opportunity.

Thank you for your kind attention, I hope the rest of the conference is successful and that you enjoy your stay in Prague.