

SUMMARY

Previously, policy and the regulative framework in the field of the information society was mainly limited to the sector of telecommunications. Telecommunications are a typical example of an industry that gradually lost their position of a natural monopoly. Deregulation processes seen in the last decade have had positive effects on the development of this industry and the economy as a whole, supporting the notion that maintaining natural monopolies in telecommunications is inefficient. However, a number of authors call attention to the possibility of the inefficiency of free competition, which is primarily reflected in growing social stratification. It is therefore sensible to encourage deregulation processes in areas where the market is more efficient than state control. This means that regulative measures need to be reviewed in line with the new circumstances (technological development) and directed at reducing the inefficiency of free competition.

The theory says that the state can perform at least two important functions in promoting the information society. On one hand, an appropriate regulative framework and development policy should stimulate the development and use of information and communication technologies which, in turn, enhance the economy's competitiveness. On the other hand, the state should play a key role in preventing the emergence of a two-track society and the digital divide.

The European Union has taken some important steps towards establishing and accelerating the development of the information society. The main strategic document setting out the chief guidelines for the transition to the information society is the Bangemann Report of 1994. In 2000, the EU identified ten priority areas for the development of the information society in its document called eEurope – the Information Society, which was followed by the eEurope Action Plan in the same year, defining the actions necessary to achieve the set goals. As far as the regulative framework is concerned, one of the most important steps was to liberalise telecommunications (1 January 1998), followed by an agreement on further development of the regulation of telecommunications.

Over the last few years, Slovenia has introduced important changes in legislative and institutional fields: the liberalisation of telecommunications, the setting-up of the Ministry for the Information Society and an independent regulatory body for telecommunications. It has established a legal framework allowing harmonisation of this field with the *acquis communautaire* by passing the new Telecommunications Act; this framework will have to be additionally adjusted to accommodate further changes in the EU law. It should be noted that the legal framework adopted is not being implemented in full because a number of implementing regulations still need to be passed while interim measures are envisaged for some areas.

Compared to legislation, Slovenia is lagging behind more as regards the policy of promoting the information society. Foundations have been laid in the Strategy for the Economic Development of Slovenia, and another important step has been accession to the eEurope Plus action plan; however, Slovenia needs its own national strategy for the development of the information society.

In Slovenia, the economic significance of the information and communication technologies sector (the ICT sector) is somewhat lower than in EU members. According to the figures, Slovenia is ahead of the Czech Republic, but significantly below Hungary, which is a country with a highly intensive use of information and telecommunication technologies, as shown by the OECD's figures. In 1995-2000, Slovenia saw dynamic growth of its ICT sector. The biggest contribution came from the service sectors, which represented the largest part of this activity in terms of value added. The importance of computer services grew fastest. A significantly weaker rise was seen in the manufacture of information and communication technologies, accounting for one-quarter of value added, but almost a half of the total ICT sector in terms of the number of employees. Productivity measured by value added per employee was lower in manufacturing than in services on average and, at the same time, slightly below the average of manufacturing as a whole and the average of total commercial companies. The manufacture of telecommunications equipment was an exception, rising from the average level of value added per employee in 1995 to about 60% above the average level of the economy in 2000.

According to the main indicators, Slovenia saw the relatively fast development of its information society in the second half of the nineties. Most indicators measuring the development of the information society show that Slovenia is significantly ahead of other candidate-countries seeking membership in the EU and occupies a solid position compared to the EU average. The relatively fast development of the information society in Slovenia has been due to the strong integration of Slovenian companies in international trade, which has necessitated the use of modern information and communication technologies, as well as due to the intensive use of computer technologies in the public administration, education and health.

So far, these factors have played an important role in expanding the information society in Slovenia, however, further development (the expansion of information society services among individuals) calls for a well-devised strategy for instituting the information society on one hand and measures to make information and communication products and services more affordable. This should lead to a more even expansion of all elements of the e-society and prevent the exclusion of certain groups. The recent deceleration of some indicators measured against the EU as well as other candidate-countries (e.g. the use of the Internet) shows that Slovenia's active policy of the information society's development is lagging behind.