

## OPENING SESSION

### WELCOME ADDRESS

**Christos Patsalides**

#### CYPRUS

**Introduction by Costas Agrotis, Cyprus.** Good morning everyone.

Let me welcome all of you and once again to Cyprus, we have sand, wines and good weather.

At last night's welcome reception I spoke to you on Cyprus history, conquerors or visions. Today I would like to welcome the Permanent Secretary, the Minister of Finance, Mr Christos Patsalides and our other guests and I would tell you that Mr Patsalides is going to address this conference on behalf of the Minister of Finance. He is the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance for the last two years. Before that he served as a Director of the Office of the President of the Republic and Director of Finance responsible for budgeting.

Mr Patsalides, as you may have realised, is an economist. He is in charge of the Ministry of Finance which includes responsibility for IT and public administration. So, I will not bother you any more – I will call Mr Patsalides for you to open this 38<sup>th</sup> ICA conference on behalf of the Ministry of Finance for the Republic.

#### **Christos Patsalides, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Cyprus**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I have accepted to address the 38<sup>th</sup> ICA Conference on behalf of the Minister of Finance of the Republic and welcome you once again in Cyprus.

Cyprus as all the other countries recognizes that Information and Communication Technologies created a new economic and social environment. They have provided new dimensions and new capacities for human intelligence, which constitute an important resource, a new factor of production. Knowledge is the most significant element for creating wealth in a country. It is the competitive advantage that countries have over other countries, in the competition for the creation of the Information Society.

With your visit in Cyprus, I am sure you have all realized that we are a small country, which apart from the beautiful beaches and the sunny weather, it has limited natural resources which is a constraining factor for economic development. We are an E.U. country as from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004. Cyprus has very good relations with the Middle East countries and the wider Mediterranean. It has modern infrastructure and excellent quality of human capital.

With these strategic assets, it didn't take long to realize our potentials. In 1996 a group of experts (from Government, commerce and academia) prepared our first strategy, for the creation of the Information Society in Cyprus, which following our accession process to the E.U., was modified to fit with eEurope+ and subsequently eEurope 2005. Our vision was and it is still today "to develop and establish Cyprus as a regional service center bringing together the European Union and Mediterranean Countries" in other words to become a hub between Europe and the Middle East.

Cyprus, is today operating a state-of-the art highly sophisticated telecommunications network, through which it provides a wide range of services both on the national and international level. We are thereby placed in a strategic position to become a regional Telecommunications and Information Technology hub, which is of paramount importance in the effective establishment of the information society in the Mediterranean region.

Keeping in pace with the information revolution, our multimedia market is slowly emerging with private sector initiatives in the provision of interactive services in areas such as education, vocational training, business promotion, tourism and culture, as well as advanced business services fully exploiting Global Information Networks.

To speed up the development of e-Commerce in Cyprus the Government has hired the services of consultants who have prepared a strategy study the findings of which have already been submitted to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism for implementation.

As far as e-Government is concerned, we have already completed all the necessary back office systems and the infrastructure projects and we have started converting them to web-enabled.

Our vision is to provide services to the citizens anywhere, any time on any platform. Towards this effect, we have prepared a strategy, which provides for the creation of the necessary infrastructure, over which all the existing back-end systems will be interconnected. This will allow the provision of services to the public with the least possible cost and will government investment in I.T. made so far.

Our strategies are based on the following pillars:-

Do more with less

Do it online don't lose time

Choose the most useful services for citizens

Take into consideration the complexity of services

Increase accountability, transparency and competition

It is a great honour for Cyprus to be a member of ICA and even greater to host the 38<sup>th</sup> annual conference. This event is the most important event organized each year by ICA. Cyprus had the opportunity to host for the first time ICA in 1985. Now ICA finds Cyprus a full member of the European Union having to follow a demanding ICT plan and ready to respond to all the challenges.

The subject of the 38<sup>th</sup> ICA Conference is "e-Government FAQs: Searching for the Right Answers".

Reading the conference theme I realized that all of you, the prominent, key Managers in your countries, require answers to several questions. Questions that have to do with changing governance structures for transforming government, innovative ways to fund the transformation given the economic climate worldwide, the change in the relationship that citizens have with their government and when will it be finally enough?

The above are questions resulting out of your long experience in government I.T. in your countries and apply to all the Government I.T. community. Finding answers to such difficult questions is not an easy task. However, I am sure, that within ICA, during this conference, utilizing the networking of people from so many countries, you will find the best possible answers to the above crucial questions, as well as to all the other, more technical ones, which are also included in your agenda.

With these thoughts in mind I welcome you once again in Cyprus, and I wish you a pleasant stay and every success to your conference.