

**Address by Mr. Premysl Sobotka, Speaker of the Senate,
Parliament of the Czech Republic
at the EPRI (European Parliaments Research Initiative)
Interparliamentary Conference**

Senate, Main Hall, 15 March 2006

Ladies and gentleman,

It is always a great pleasure when I can address participants attending an event which aims to enrich and improve the workings of our society, speaking here in the stately and ancient building of the Czech Senate. To reconcile the past and traditions with the present requirements of our society, the seat of the Czech Senate is, indeed, most appropriate. I am confident that this also applies to the conference which I have the pleasure of opening today. Therefore, I wish to extend a warm welcome to the participants of the 8th Conference of Members of the National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies with the conviction that the ever-stronger market of information and communication technologies and services constitutes a solid basis for effective shaping and development of the information society in all its aspects.

The Czech Senate, which was established in 1996, is as such a “young” institution of the modern democratic Czech Republic. That is why ICT is unsurprisingly an everyday part of our work. Nevertheless, we have been recently trying to find new ways to make the Czech Senate open, and to increase its accessibility for the Czech and international public. An information society is thus becoming one of the ways to improve the ongoing communication and awareness of our activities, and to improve the quality of parliamentary democracy. This was, by the way, one of the main topics of a conference entitled “Effective State as a Partner to the Self-Government” last November, held also here at the Senate.

On the other hand, it needs to be clearly stated out that our state administration requires a profound transformation to become an efficient state, free of excessive bureaucracy. Indeed, we are still far removed from an economical and efficient state which is aware of its real task, of what should be the responsibility of local and regional governments and what should be left to the discretion of its citizens. It is not going to be easy, since the desire for centralised administration, command economy and bureaucratic mentality are still deeply ingrained in many people and are the basis of many an influential concept of public governance.

Still, there are numerous positive examples of how the policy of public investment in the use of new services favourably influences the overall development of the information society. Any scepticism or reluctance concerning achievements in what we are learning to call “eGovernment” only shows lack of appropriate information and citizen-oriented strategy. It is therefore the governments in particular that have the responsibility to bridge these gaps and prepare the ground for new possibilities of eGovernment. I would therefore like to wish the participants of this meeting a successful conference, also charting this particular field, and I am looking forward to your conclusions. Thank you.