

Colleagues, dear friends!

I too would like to welcome you to the conference. I am very happy that so many of you have been able to attend. I look forward to two days filled with rewarding and interesting discussions. But first I would like to provide you with some information.

1. As far as **mobile telephones** are concerned, we would appreciate it if you could keep them completely switched off - with the power off - when you are in this room. The reason is that when they are turned on - even if they are muted - they disturb the sound system and this interferes with interpretation.

2.. **Smoking is** allowed – but restricted to certain areas, marked by signs.

3. Finally, as there are so many of us and our time is so short, it would be valuable if everyone who wishes has the chance to contribute. I must therefore ask you to **make your contributions as short as possible**.

And now to the subject that I am actually going to speak about, namely to answer the question:

Why has Sweden decided to organize the Seventh European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on ITC, Information and Communication Technology?

I believe we all share the opinion that information technology is of profound importance for our societies. This importance is estimated to grow even more as we move towards an information society. However, there is an ongoing discussion concerning the most efficient tools to promote ITC. IT development is mainly based on the market being the main actor and driving force. However, the public sector has important functions as a regulator and a procurer. And in this respect, we have to ask ourselves at what level measures to promote ITC should be formulated and implemented - at local, regional, national or international level? I would like to state my position on this and give you three reasons why the Riksdag has decided to organize this EU conference.

As my first point I would like to recall that the member states in EU, have adopted a resolution on implementing the eEurope 2005 Action Plan aimed at promoting development towards an information society for all. The action plan includes e-government, e-learning services, e-health services, a dynamic e-business environment, widespread availability of broadband access at competitive prices and a secure information structure. Issues that to a large extent affects Parliaments. In order to develop a sound programme of action, we need to share experience and pool research and development. *We need international cooperation.*

Secondly ITC can be a very useful tool for consolidating and renewing parliamentary democracy by allowing better participation by all citizens. The use of ITC can also

strengthening the role of parliaments in following up decisions and resolutions relating to the information society by monitoring and implementing commitments made by governments. In order to promote ITC in the most efficient way we have to look beyond our own borders. *We need international cooperation.*

Thirdly, we are living more and more in a global society. This means that there is a great and growing demand of smooth information exchanges between parliaments. IT can also expand inter-parliamentary relationships and cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels, thus enhancing parliamentary democracy and diplomacy. *We need international cooperation.*

Furthermore, as far as ITC is concerned, a certain degree of political consensus has been achieved in our parliament, the Riksdag. I think it is not unfair to say that we are a significant driving force in the process of improving ITC. This means that Parliament can play an important role in improving information technology.

These are the main reasons why we have decided to organize this conference. Finally, I would like to admit that we also have a less obvious agenda. We believe that it is important that we create a closer partnership between our parliaments in Europe. This gathering of politicians committed to information technology is one important step in this direction.