6: What Price the Information Society? A Candidate Country Perspective within the Context of the EU's Information Society Policies

MIYASE CHRISTENSEN

Introduction

The 1990s, the years preceding WSIS, were marked by a number of radical initiatives implemented in order to bring ICT regimes increasingly outside of the national domain. The 1990s also witnessed vigorous European Union and United States telecommunications and IS policies.

This chapter, which is built on my recent case study of the EU's IST (Information Society Technologies) policies vis-à-vis candidate countries (Goktepeli, 2003), is an attempt to provide an insight into the current efforts to internationalize questions such as digital divide and communication rights from a country-specific perspective. In this regard, the focus remains on the discussion of the Turkish experience with regional IST policies, while I link my findings and arguments with the vision put forth through WSIS. The point of departure for this case study of Turkey is the contention that telecom infrastructure and the social shaping of national policy constitute the building blocks for the emergence of an IS (Information Society).[1] In other words, not only does the telecommunications infrastructure constitute the material basis for an IS, but the nature of and stakes around the infrastructure in a given context ultimately determine the nature of the IS or, preferably, a *communication society*' (Ó Siochrú, 2004) to emerge in that context. As Murdock (2004: 22–23) emphasizes:

> *Media scholars have tended to ignore the analysis of networks. For most, telecommu-nications policy, a long-standing and extensive area of research and debate, has remained a far away enclave of which they know little and cared to know less. In a context where popular telecommunications traffic was monopolized by voice telepho-ny from fixed point and access was underwritten by principles of universal service this did not matter much. But in a commercialized communications environment where telecommunications links carry the full range of expressive forms, from images to video and music, the political economy of connectivity is increasingly central to a full analysis of the social organization of access and use.*

It is with these issues in mind that issues of telecommunications infrastructure and information society are addressed in relation to each other in this chapter. At

their current stage, telecom policy and IS regimes in Turkey (a candidate to the EU) are shaped first and foremost by the binding policies of the EU and Turkey's own national power geometry, while the impact of a newly thriving civil society upon Turkish policy-making remains minimal. The findings presented in this chapter – apart from the discussion of WSIS – are based on policy analysis and personal interviews with over 35 stakeholders from Turkey and the EU. The interviews reveal useful insights into the web of power relations and personal/institutional conflicts otherwise missing from traditional policy analysis.[2]

The European Way

The current IST landscape in the EU region needs to be understood within the framework of the global developments in telecommunications over the last two decades. As the information economy has been expanding globally since the early 1990s, it has also enforced a new kind of global structure within which telecom flows take place. As Wilson (1992: 355) points out:

> *The transformation of the telecommunications industry from a regulated natural monopoly, which met the demands of the great majority of users, to a more competitive industry structure entailed a passage from the familiar to the unknown.*

One of the most remarkable milestones of this global move toward the 'unknown' has been the *Uruguay Round Final Act* embodying the results of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, signed in 1995. This agreement, establishing the World Trade Organization (WTO) and aiming at the liberalization of trade around the world, was also approved by the Great National Assembly of Turkey on 26 January 1996.[3]

Parallel to the market-oriented logic of the international communication regime, as embodied within agreements such as GATT and NAFTA, the (infamous) *Bangemann Report* (1994) argued that, should the EU wish to catch up with the U.S. and the Asia-Pacific region, the development of the information sector in the EU should be based on private sector funding and commercial activity. The launch of the *National Information Infrastructure* (NII) initiative in the U.S. added additional impetus to European efforts to sustain competitiveness in the area of telecoms and ICTs. After Bangemann, there was a need for more concrete programs for action. In response – and parallel to the radical restructuring of the telecommunication sector at a time when most incumbent carriers in the European region (except for the UK) were state-owned monopolies operating with high telephony prices – the EU launched in the latter half of the 1990s region-wide *Information Society Action Plans* (ISAPs). Despite difficulties arising from the complex decision-making system of the EU, European telecommunications liberalization could be considered successful – at least in terms of reaching the desired economic goals (save for the later 3G disaster).

Throughout the 1990s, the European Union worked toward establishing a common regulatory regime in the telecom sector, which was not an easy task, considering the variety of political and institutional traditions that abide in the Union. As pointed out by Romano Prodi, then President of the European Commission, at the European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000,

'*telecommunications liberalization in Europe is a success story*' (Cave & Prosperitti, 2001: 40). Data presented by Prodi supported this conclusion: between 1998 (when the EU entered a full competition regime in telecoms) and 1999, international call prices fell by an average of 40 percent; long distance prices by 30 percent; and, regional prices by 13 percent. Between 1998 and 2000 the total telecom services market grew by an estimated 12.6 percent, to 161 billion euros (Cave & Prosperitti, 2001).

The end of the 1990s marked a turning point in the field of European IST policy-making. At the 2000 Lisbon summit, which centred around information society issues, the heads of state of the 15 EU member countries set a very ambitious goal for Europe for the next decade: to become '*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*' (EC, 2000a). The EU recognized the need for Europe to further exploit the opportunities offered by the information society, and the *E-Europe Plan of Action* was officially launched on 20 June 2000. Establishing the infrastructure to enable economic and social activity in the new economy, or e-economy, was set as the primary goal of the *E-Europe* plan. Although the requirements of the initiative only applied to the (then) 15 members, the EU's regional goal to become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge economy in the world by 2010 inevitably held consequences for candidate members.

At the European Information Community Ministerial Conference, held in Warsaw in May 2000, the Central and East European Countries Information Community Joint High Level Committee (EU-CEEC JHLC) decided to form an action plan similar to *E-Europe* for the CEEC countries (Personal interview, 2002). The action plan was initially named the *E-Europe-like Action Plan*, and later changed into *E-Europe+*. The EU High Commission for Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) started the *E-Europe+* initiative following *E-Europe*. At its fifth meeting in October 2000, the Commission realized there were three other eligible countries outside of the CEEC group, and invited Malta, Cyprus and Turkey to join. The sixth meeting, held in March 2001, was the first attended by Turkey. The reasoning behind *E-Europe+*, as stated by a Turkish public sector official, was as follows: '*As the candidate members, we are all going to join the EU. Hence, whatever the requirements for E-Europe are, we should meet them and use E-Europe as a guide*' (Personal interview, 2002).

Clearly, the EU attributes a central role to the information society within the enlargement process. As noted at the European Ministerial Conference in June 2002: '*At this crucial moment in Europe's political development, we underline the importance of the Information Society in increasing social and cultural cohesion and in strengthening economic integration*' (EC, 2001). Accordingly, the desired outcome of the *E-Europe* and *E-Europe+* action plans is to allow member and candidate member countries to co-operate and to exchange information and experience so as to help the integration of Europe, and to avoid the further growth of the digital divide within the EU. The standardization of telecom regulation and the adoption of unified information society policies throughout the member and candidate member states, therefore, carry very significant implications for the future of the EU and for the accession of new members.[4] As stated in the EP's *Report on the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Turkey's Progress towards Accession*:

Telecommunications is a particularly important sector, since enlargement coincides with the advent of the Information Society [...] Almost all applicant countries are on course for full liberalization. It often happens that a regulatory authority has already been set up or decided on in principle, but its independence has yet to be secured. Substantial amounts of work still need to be done on infrastructure, services and adjustments to European standards. (EP, 2001: 42–43).

When one takes the EU's IST policy discourse at face value, regional information society policies seem to aim at the inclusion of large segments of the European population, and for good reason. But a lot of emphasis is placed on the problem of the digital divide, particularly in new member and candidate countries, for which the same medicine – liberalization of the telecommunications sector – is deemed a sufficient remedy.

As is evident from *E-Europe* (EC, 2000a; 2002c), *E-Europe+* (EC, 2000b) and other ISAP documents, the EU's IST policy rhetoric emphasizes, within a neoliberal framework, 'technological change' and 'economic imperatives' (i.e. the advantage of competition in terms of lowering prices in the public interest) as the reasons why increased '*marketization*' (Murdock, 2004) is needed. As discussed, a major driving force behind the EU Commission's decision to liberalize the sector has been the international trends towards expanding the scope of free trade in the area of telecommunications and, hence, the market imperative toward increased competition by penetrating into national markets. In line with this logic, and according to *E-Europe+*, the candidate countries had to take government – level action to meet the 14 targets by the end of 2003, targets which were gathered under four areas: (1) speeding up the formation of the information community basis; (2) cheaper, faster and more secure Internet; (3) investment in human resources; and (4), promoting Internet use.

In this regard, there is no basic difference between *E-Europe* and *E-Europe+*. The only difference is to be found in Article 0 of *E-Europe+*, which requires meeting the legislative criteria, *communitaire acquis*, of *E-Europe*. Harmonizing with the legislative framework of the EU is required in all other sectors including telecoms. *E-Europe+* also includes an article regarding the application of IS in environmental issues (Personal interview, 2002). Apart from these two basic differences, both *E-Europe* and *E-Europe+* rank-order the priorities in achieving IS as listed above: building infrastructure, training skilled people and carrying out implementation. What looks like a straightforward strategy, however, is quite problematic in the Turkish context. First, high levels of fixed telephony and online access is not a goal easily reachable within a liberalized telecom environment without a strong incumbent in monopoly position. Secondly, privatization of Turk Telekom (TT)[5] is on the Turkish government agenda but could have to happen in an already liberalized market, an anomaly. And third, the EU Commission wants universal service obligations enforced – which will scare off potential buyers of TT.

In short, there are significant gaps between old members, candidates and new members; and one size does not necessarily fit all. Until the middle of the 1990s, telecommunications services in Turkey were provided by the Post-Telegraph-Telephone (PTT)[6] administration, under the Ministry of Transport and Communications. A significant move towards liberalization and privatization of

telecommunication services was made in 1994, when, in accordance with the new law, telecommunications services were separated, through corporatization, from the directorate general of PTT and transferred to Turk Telekom Co. Inc.[7] Since then, TT has operated as a public corporation but subject to public procurement law until recently – yet another anomaly which resulted in inefficiency. The gap between the member and the candidate members, in terms of the adoption of the *acquis*, is accounted for in *E-Europe+*, but with a rather simplistic approach:

> *[...] E-Europe was launched at a time when the liberalization of the telecommunications sector was complete, the 1998 Telecoms* acquis *was adopted and implemented, and nearly all households had phone penetration in the EU. This is not the case in the candidate countries. Thus, a new objective 'acceleration of the work toward creating the fundamental building blocs of the information society' [Article 0] was added to E-Europe+, to address these three factors.* (EC, 2000b: 18)

E-Europe+ affirms the determination of the candidate members to liberalize their telecoms markets: '*providing accessible communication services to all citizens is a fundamental necessity to prevent digital exclusion. Such services can be possible on the basis of a liberalized communication sector that operates within an efficient, competitive regulatory setting*' (EC, 2000b: 20). As articulated in policy discourse (and by Erkki Liikanen), the EU approach to ISTs is based on three pillars: 1) enhancing competition and investment in the market through a uniform legal and regulatory environment; 2) investing in R&D; and 3) promoting the use of the ISTs via *E-Europe*. Thus, liberalization of the telecoms market is seen as key to achieving the overall goals of these three pillars.

On this, one state sector informant from Turkey, who attended the Joint High Level Commission meetings, commented:

> *At the E-Europe+ meetings, they wanted to put in a sentence like 'Internet prices will fall after privatization of telecoms in Turkey'. I objected to this, saying the Internet prices are already low in Turkey. Later, another country representative came up to me and said 'We privatized and it went up ... So, you are right.' ... This is one of the vague points in E-Europe+. It sets 'cheap Internet access for all' as a goal. But how is this going to happen? It suggests the strengthening of the Internet backbone as the solution. But Turkey doesn't have a problem like that. The backbone is fine. The backbone in Turkey is one of the best examples in Europe. But the user can't feel it because we are connected to a huge water pipe through a thin little hose. Or it suggests that all schools are connected to the Internet. But how? With which resources, with the goal of what? What kind of service should be offered?* (Personal interview, 2002)

In regard to communication among candidates on the adoption of common goals, the same informant remarked:

> *At the* E-Europe+ *meetings, you can easily voice your concerns or raise objections, since the other candidate countries are experiencing similar problems. Hungary and the Czech Republic are well ahead, but there are countries like Bulgaria and*

Romania. And since the EU is sympathetic toward social concerns, they understand. But if you say you won't liberalize or privatize altogether, that will create problems, of course. (Personal interview, 2002)

Apart from the question of suitability of the scope of *E-Europe+*, one major problem is the cost of the work carried out within the *E-Europe+ Action Plan*, which comes predominantly from the national budget, private sector investments, related programs, and from the European Investment Bank, European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank through programs founded by the EU. Since *E-Europe+* is an initiative that came from the candidate countries themselves, there are no direct EU funds available to candidate countries. For the EU members, however, there are special funds and subsidies available to allow countries such as Portugal to catch up. One possibility for the candidates is to use the available funds for certain projects based on *E-Europe+*, defining certain goals as '*priority areas*' (Personal interview, 2002). In Turkey, the action plan was managed and co-ordinated jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union Secretary General, and the secretariat of TUBITAK (Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey). According to the current time line, Turkey has to meet all the criteria by the end of 2006. While determining these dates, the expiration date of the MEDA (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) fund in 2006 was taken as a basis in order to benefit from this fund, which the EU has reserved for such projects.

The Turkish Response: From *E-Europe+* to *E-Turkey* to *E-Transformation*

In September 2001, the Deputy Undersecretary of the Prime Ministry launched the *E-Turkey* action plan in order to reach the national goals as identified in *E-Europe+*. In March and May 2002 progress reports were published: the former of little substance, the latter relatively comprehensive. The 1st Progress Report on E-Europe+, Contribution from Turkey describes Turkey's joining *E-Europe+* as:

> *The information society policy studies, initiatives and projects in Turkey have gained a new impetus after launch of eEurope+ in June 2001. The existing efforts to transform the society into the harmonized combination of a knowledge-based economy and value adding citizens found a common appreciation at all levels of public, private, and non-governmental sector [...] The outcome of the close cooperation by all stakeholders was the eTurkey initiative with the international dimension realized by eEurope+.*
> (sic) (Office of the Prime Minister, 2002: 1)

In the same document, it was stipulated, on the progress made to date in '*providing affordable communication services for everyone [Article 0]*' in Turkey, that

> *The completion of the privatization process will prepare the basis for the liberalization of the sector. Considering that currently TT supplies infrastructure services to ISPs as a monopoly, Internet access will become cheaper and faster after the completion of the privatization process.* (Office of the Prime Minister, 2002: 3)

Within *E-Turkey*, 13 project groups were formed. A head institution was picked for each of these groups. The first report quoted above outlined the project areas and provided national demographic data as to the situation of IS in Turkey. The 13 work groups and respective coordinators as outlined in this report were: Education and Human Resources; Infrastructure; Legal infrastructure; Standards; Security; E-commerce; Investments and Planning; Archives and Digital Storage; International Monitoring and *E-Europe+*; Special Projects; Assessment of Current Situation; National Coordination and Monitoring; and, Environment and Health. These work groups, most of which were headed by public institutions, assessed the current situation, projects, initiatives, and policy studies in their respective fields. To facilitate comparative assessment and monitoring between the member and the candidate member countries, the candidates agreed on using the same indicators adopted by the 15 EU members for the purposes of benchmarking. Furthermore, in order to develop a common methodology and approach in collecting and presenting the related demographic data, it was agreed that the respective institutions of the candidates will work in close cooperation with their counterparts in the member countries. (Office of the Prime Minister, 2002)

After its launch, serious studies were undertaken in the scope of *E-Turkey*, although with little practical outcome. One informant from a civil society organization who heads one of the *E-Turkey* projects remarked:

> *When you look at these reports, you realize that we have moved only an inch. The second report is not even a status report. We should learn a lesson from this: unless we institutionalize these studies and unless we produce more professional work rather than amateur stuff, we can't get anywhere. This was realized, but a bit late. Finally, the government issued a memo and decided to bring together these project groups under a central office.* (Personal interview, 2002)

With the memo (Genelge, 2002), the then Deputy PM, Devlet Bahceli of the Nationalist Party, was assigned as the head of the action plan. The future of *E-Turkey* looked bright for a short while in spring 2002, before the coalition government fell apart due to the Prime Minister's fragile health. One informant from the public sector, who is also a member of the EU High Commission for CEEC, Joint High Level Commission, suggested there was no political consciousness as to IS prior to *E-Europe+*. '*In that regard,*' he further commented:

> *the only advantage of joining the E-Europe+ has been the launch of E-Turkey. But the prime minister announced this at a glamorous event, said a mouthful and nothing has been done since then [...] they understood this as 'something we need to do otherwise they won't accept us'. They joined not because they care about creating an IS in Turkey, but because joining the EU is a non-negotiable national goal. They formed some work groups and all that. Was it meaningful? Certainly not [...] E-Turkey doesn't really signify a national policy and approach to 'e'.* (Personal interview, 2002)

Another public sector informant who attended a number of *E-Turkey* work group meetings offered similar observations:

As far as I observed, academia and social scientists were completely left out of the work groups they formed. The groups were made up of computer technician kind of people, of informatics division heads and others appointed by them. So the method for pursuing E-Turkey was wrong. They should have started by launching an action plan [...] They formed some ad hoc work groups. Turkey wasted all progress made up to that point. I joined the meetings of some of these groups, and quit later. When you said universal service, most of these people understood to mean the Universal Declaration of Human Rights! Nothing could come out of those meetings. (Personal interview, 2002)

Another major development in the spring of 2002 was the Informatics Council held through cooperation between the under-secretariat of the Prime Ministry and four sectoral civil society organizations (CSO). The work toward organizing the event started in September 2001 upon an invitation letter by the then Prime Minister Ecevit. A report was issued following the Council and the participants presented a list of their expectations. Although the Council was a one-time event, the CSOs agreed on meeting every three months in order to discuss progress achieved. However, the participating CSOs never divided the ten or eleven key issues between themselves, and never agreed on carrying out specific projects (Personal interview, 2002). One CSO informant who participated in the Council commented:

The next meeting is on August 10[8]. I guess we will just get together and chat, since nothing has been done since May. This is common practice in our sector. We get together and chat on a lot of issues. We can't even satisfy ourselves at the end, let alone accomplishing something. (Personal interview, 2002)

Shortly after this, and upon the announcement of early national elections in July, all efforts in all areas were halted until November 2002. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), a centre-right party with former Islamist aspirations, won the office with 34% of the vote. Due to the popularity of the IS rhetoric in 2001–2, and thanks to *E-Turkey* and the Informatics Council, all political parties included 'e-transformation' (i.e. taking steps to make changes in certain aspects of society, economy and governance in order to catch up with the information age) in their election manifestos.

By the end of 2002, the EU was not happy with Turkey's homework. According to the EU's *2002 Progress Report on Turkey*, the country had '*made little progress since the last Regular Report.*' The report highlighted a number of troubling facts: that competition for fixed voice telephony would not be implemented before January 2004; penetration rates of not more than 28% in the fixed mobile network; Internet and household cable television penetration rates of only 4% and 5% respectively; and, the partial implementation of universal service. Urgent liberalization of fixed voice telephony by no later than 2004 and transposing the updated telecommunications *acquis* were prescribed along with other recommendations (EC, 2002a: 105).

From the start, the ruling party AKP pursued a pro-EU policy, and, hence, gave priority to privatization and liberalization of the state sector, including telecoms and informatics. Shortly after taking office, the government introduced an *Urgent*

Action Plan (sic) to address problem areas in IST policy implementation and to better coordinate relatively disorganized efforts. The first implementation period of the *Urgent Action Plan* was completed in December 2003. Within the Plan, as part of the Public Management Reform Section, *E-Transformation Turkey* was declared as a high-priority project and the responsible institution was identified as the State Planning Organization (SPO), which is directly affiliated with the Prime Ministry. A *Short Term Action Plan*, which covers 2003–2004, was put into force to implement specific tasks in eight areas: strategy, e-education and human resources, e-health, e-commerce, standardization, infrastructure and information security, legislation and e-government. To coordinate implementation, a new unit, Information Society Department, was also established within SPO.

In addition to the common goals adopted via *E-Europe+*, *E-Transformation* also identified a number of social objectives as priority areas, such as '*mechanisms that facilitate the participation of citizens to decision-making process in the public domain via the use of ICTs,*' '*enhancing transparency and accountability for public management*' and '*putting into place good governance principles through increased usage of ICTs*' (Genelge, 2003). To increase participation and success, an Advisory Board of 41 members from public institutions, NGOs and universities was established. In February 2003, with a PM's Circular, a new body, the Executive Board, was established. The Board included five members: the Minister of State and Deputy PM, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Industry and Trade, the Undersecretary of SPO (State Planning Organization) and the Chief Counsellor to the PM. In addition, heads of eight other related organizations can participate in the board meetings. These are: the Heads of the E-Transformation Turkey Project Advisory Board; TUBITAK; Telecommunications Authority; the CEO of Turk Telekom; TOBB (The Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Maritime Trade and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey); TBV (Turkish Informatics Foundation); TBD (Turkish Informatics Association) and TUBISAD (Informatics Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association of Turkey). The Board is in charge of running the *E-Transformation* project and steering actions in *Short Term Action Plan*.

In the telecom field, TT's monopoly position ended on 1 January 2004, and the market opened up to other operators. A new privatization decree for TT was also issued in November 2003, in which it was stipulated that 51% of TT's shares be privatized through block sale, with the remaining shares put on public offer. As deemed necessary within the *Short Term Action Plan*, a new telecommunication law is also being prepared by the TA in order to amend the current laws in areas such as interconnection, licensing, universal service and numbering so that they fall into line with the EU *Acquis*. The TA is also undertaking the completion of necessary legislation to cultivate competition in the areas of VoIP licenses, long-distance telephony, cable services, network provision, rights of way, local loop unbundling, co-location and facilities sharing, numbering, personal data protection and consumer rights. Universal service is defined as '*minimum service*' according to Law No 4502, Article 1, and it includes '*public pay-phones, emergency telecommunication services and telephone directory services.*' The *Short Term Action Plan* requires that the preparation of a Directive for Universal Service by the

Ministry of Transport introduce incentives, financial grants and other necessary mechanisms with a legal basis.[9]

Currently, following liberalization of the sector in January 2004, the market environment remains turbulent. Long-distance telephony licenses and broadband provision is the subject of fierce clashes between TT, the TA and the private sector actors. TT is accused of breaching competition rules by misusing its dominant market position – for example, currently only TT is licensed to provide broadband services – and the TA for operating in the interest of TT. Considering that *de facto* liberalization of the mobile and ISP markets took place in the mid-1990s, the inception of a national regulatory authority in 2001 is a very late development. Moreover, the TA had to inherit a large number of staff from the Ministry of Transport and DG Wireless, it lacked regulation-making experience, and monitoring of the board was highly politicized.

At the end of the day, *E-Transformation Turkey* continues, and in a much more organized manner compared to the national projects preceding it. Nevertheless, at the execution level, the project seems to have been monopolized by industry groups such as TUBISAD and TBV, and there appears to be little understanding of the social issues at stake on the part of the media – other than a handful of columnists. While the *Action Plan* itself underlines the importance of transparency, the manner in which the project is carried out is far from meeting this principle. First of all, the fact that 'civil society' is represented only by a number of industry groups at the Execution Board meetings, with no participation from grass-roots organizations and community activist groups at any level, is an anomaly. Secondly, the meeting minutes are not made available for public access or to the media. The public is essentially in a no-win situation given the fact that only a fraction of Turkish society have access to online information; conventional media, for the most part, are turning a blind eye to the developments (despite the fact that the stakes are very high for industry groups and public sector, who want their share from the domestic IST pie); and, finally, the absence of any meaningful community-level activism. One of the two pillars missing in the Turkish equation, therefore, is the role of the press as auditor. The second is civil society organizations in the real sense of the term – not sectoral think tanks.

In addition, another adversity from an economic point of view appears to be lack of mutual trust between the public and private sectors. Currently, like the private sector, the state is in a process of restructuring in Turkey. However, both the private sector and sectoral CSOs tended to see the state as '*inefficient, visionless, bulky, clumsy, unjust and crooked.*'[10] The following comment by a private sector informant is emblematic of the sector's attitude toward the government. In response to my question regarding his view about E-Government applications in Turkey, he remarked:

> *Well, they need to start from a-government, the ABC of government, I mean, before e-government. The mentality of the state should change above all. Also, as long as there isn't enough number of users, what difference would it make even if they come up with the best e-government of the world?* (Personal interview, 2003)

A number of public and civil sector informants, on the other hand, commonly defined the private sector as *'greedy, lazy, simple-minded and shady.'* Thus, efficiency of the regulatory authority has an even greater importance in such an environment of mutual distrust, although particularly at the beginning the TA was far from providing satisfactory regulation and intervention. In the end, the TA was perceived as an extension of the state, and thus, it is seen as everything that is ascribed to the latter.

Where Does WSIS Leave Us? A Tale of Two Visions

During an interview with a private sector representative from Turkey on the suitability of the EU policy agenda, a revealing anecdote was offered which highlighted the potential chasm between the intent and actual application of policy:

> *ATM machines arrived quite early in Turkey. In fact, Turkey acts rapidly in receiving and using new technology. And it wasn't because people demanded it, but those who brought the technology realized that they would be of use in many ways and therefore they were needed. The first ones opened on Istiklal Street [a major street in Istanbul]. For the first 6 months, they were available only between work hours during the day. Only later they realized that this technology was meant to be used otherwise! Likewise, adopting the EU standards in a similar fashion is not going to solve anything.* (Personal interview, 2003)

Ultimately, the ways in which policies are implemented are determined by social, economic and cultural factors. In that regard, there are two realities involved in the current global, regional and national levels of IS-regimes: what is really needed and what economic actors desire. The official discourse of WSIS, like that of the EU Commission, was geared toward justifying that the latter is really what human society needs at this point in time.

Despite the problematic issues inherent in the WSIS initiative, the novelty and significance of the program stems from the fact that WSIS was the first international event bringing together multi-stakeholders-governments, civil society, private interest groups and bureaucrats – from all over the world to reflect on the future of IS from people-centered, communication/human rights perspectives: perspectives which are lacking in current national and supranational policies. So, is there hope for optimism? Yes, since the initiative, even if not in the form of any binding resolution for global, regional and national governing bodies, has opened up a discursive space for civil society organizations to vocalize their position on international IS governance and communication rights as major actors – through participation in the WSIS process itself and parallel alternative campaigns such as CRIS. These are spheres otherwise dominated by the techno-deterministic rhetoric of WTO, WB, and the regional/national power blocs such as the EU, U.S. and Japan.

If the aim of the summit was to create a 'common vision of IS' endorsed by the participating governments, then the event, from the point of view of the organizers', could be seen as a success. The *Declaration of Principles* (WSIS, 2003a) is all about common denominators such as equal opportunities in the digital age and cooperation among all stakeholders. Yet, because two potentially thorny

issues – the fact that contributions into the Digital Solidarity Fund remain voluntary, and the question of Internet governance – were pushed forward to the second phase in Tunis in 2005, it is questionable to say that the summit bore fruit as it failed to solve problems identified within its own official agenda.

Ó Siochrú (2004: 203) suggests that there were two summits at WSIS: one of the Information Society ...

> *... the summit of information, telecommunication, the Internet, the 'digital' divide, and ultimately the neoliberal model of development, exposing its limits even as it strained to plead its relevance. The other was the summit on a knowledge and communication society, full of contradictions, ideas still in formation, but nevertheless beginning to perceive new potentials and possibilities. Each has its own distinct history. But only one has a future.*

Ó Siochrú traces the lineage of 'information society' back to the 1970s, to the futurist visions put forth by Bell (1973) and Porat (1976) and sees the techno-deterministic approaches of the Bangemann Report (EC, 1994) and the later EU policy discourse as products of these visions. 'Communication society', he argues, is directly linked with the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), spearheaded by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of UN countries during the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s (Ó Siochrú, 2004: 204–210). At the summit, these two visions materialized into two distinct documents: *Declarations of Principles* (WSIS, 2003a) (and the accompanying *Plan of Action* (WSIS, 2003b)), and the *Civil Society Declaration* (Civil Society Plenary, 2003).

Ó Siochrú's conceptual delineation of the two ideological realms and different stakes (global economic goals vs. human needs), which exist in stark contrast to each other (not only in terms of their genealogical trajectories but also in terms of the kind of future they envisage), is useful. It helps to sift through the pros and cons of 'information age' obscured by the grandiloquent policy discourse of regional and national governing bodies, and it also subverts the hollow significance attested to it within the neoliberal agenda. The creation and promotion of the 'information society' in Europe as elsewhere has been more an economic imposition, a forced effort, than a genuine development. As Calebrese and Burgelman (1999: 5) observed a few years back:

> *For the past several years, a small industry dedicated to futuristic speculation and argument about the idea of the information society has existed, as is perfectly illustrated by the European Union's information society policies (and, similarly, in the United States and elsewhere). We are told that the evolution toward an information society is absolutely essential to improve the way things are and to allow us to be better citizens. The end of the cold war can also explain the success of this new discourse, when a particular clash of ideas ceased and a new mythology became necessary to mobilize society around the aims of capitalism.*

More recently, Preston (2003: 51) notes that:

> *we may note certain semantic shifts and genuflections towards a 'social Europe' agenda within recent spate of eEurope policy reports. But these seem little more than occasional rhetorical gestures in the midst of policy concepts and practices that are fundamentally embedded in the neoliberal ideology which celebrates a 'market-driven' information society and which privileges consumer identities and roles over those of citizenship.*

Yet, while 'communication society' offers a much broader scope to change things in the right direction, as well as a lingual convenience for identifying ideological differences, such theoretical delineations do not translate into any difference in the current policy practices, particularly in countries bound by the EU policy agenda such as Turkey. If the aim is to bring the information society realm into the domain of communication society – and in the *Civil Society Declaration* the term 'information and communication societies' is used consciously – aspects of infrastructure governance, currently at the discretion of neoliberal policy-making and implementation, should be given priority in Tunis in order to '*build information and communication societies that are people centred, inclusive and equitable,*' (Civil Society Plenary, 2003) as underlined in the *Civil Society Declaration*. In that regard, solutions *within* the IS rhetoric first is much crucial. But this is not to suggest that the declaration does not address the importance of infrastructure. On the contrary, it does mention, at various levels, the importance of civil society and end-user participation in shaping technologies, and calls for financial support for sustainable e-development. It also argues for reforming international arrangements to augment network interconnections, frequency allocations, to ensure free trade, open public domain, protection of human rights, consumer safety and personal privacy, social and cultural diversity, and the prevention of the concentration of market power in ICT and mass media industries, all of which ultimately have to do with infrastructure. The declaration's recommendation to initiate public interest-oriented monitoring of intergovernmental and self-governance bodies is a step in the right direction, and this agenda needs to be pursued more vigorously in Tunis. In addition, civil society lobbies should gain representation at international policy-making bodies, such as the EU Commission, to influence and monitor policy output and implementation – easier said than done.

The other vision, as embodied in the official document output of the summit, is much more user-friendly as it does not require any change in current policy-making, particularly in the developed West. Before the summit, Commissioner Liikanen affirmed that the WSIS would provide the EU with the opportunity to point out what it considers key drivers for the IS: constant interaction with policy-making, regulation and technological development (EC 2003). In the *July 14 2004 Commission Communication* issued by the EU Commission, Commissioner Rehn confirmed that, '*the EU Commission is committed to continuing the road-map set out by the WSIS last year. We need to focus on bridging the digital divide and work to ensure access to the* information society for all *so that we have concrete deliverables at the next Summit in Tunis next year,*' (EC 2004; emphasis added). Based on this

standpoint, the Commission proposed to implement the *Action Plan* around three axes: 1) creating an enabling environment based on eStrategies at all levels and on pro-competitive legal and regulatory frameworks that encourage investment and innovation; 2) showing applications that work in the areas of eGovernment, eLearning, eHealth and eBusiness; 3) paying special attention to the research dimension of IS. In addition, need for action for least developed countries was also addressed in the same communication.

Similarly, Turkish participation at the summit did not go beyond the official national agenda pursued to date. Turkey was represented by a delegate headed by the Minister of Transport, comprising of individuals from SPO (State Planning Organization), TA (Telecommunications Authority), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Turkish Embassy to the UN. In his statement at the summit, the Minister of Transport, Mr. Yildirim, underlined the importance Turkey gives to building a global information society and pointed to the problem of global economic disparity as well as the question of a digital divide (SPO, 2004b). He called for contributions from developed countries for social-development projects in developing countries and suggested that intellectual property and patent policies be revised for the benefit of developing countries. Finally, the minister drew attention to the need for '*public-private partnerships and cooperation among governments on the one hand and private sector and the civil society on the other*' to implement policies to bridge the digital divide. The Minister concluded his statement by noting that

> *Freedom as access to information and knowledge is the cornerstone in transforming the world into an Information Society. As a prerequisite for the democratic societies governed by the rule of law, the right to access to information and knowledge should be included among the fundamental rights and freedoms and be defined as such at constitutional level. In this context, we would like to stress that the sharing and dissemination of the global information and knowledge would also contribute to the development of the desired level of international solidarity and cooperation in combating the scourge of terrorism which has a global character, as we witnessed in the light of the recent wave of terrorist attacks in different parts of the world.* (SPO, 2004b: 2)

It is interesting that among all the benefits of right to access information and knowledge has to offer, the Minister chose to identify an immediate link between this and fighting terrorism through sharing information, which, more often than not, translates into a breach of privacy rights.

Conclusion

Only when it came to a point where it was necessary to maintain the macro-economic balance as part of the Maastricht Agreement did the EU countries pass painful market reforms, in areas such as telecoms and energy. The same thing is true for the Lisbon strategies, which initiated the '*most competitive knowledge-based market*' process. (And the 6th Framework Programme is a tool designed completely for the realization of the Lisbon strategy.) Despite the social goals later pursued within *E-Europe* and *E-Europe+*, a technology-centred political economy

marks the communication field in the EU region, and the achievement of economic growth and prosperity in this milieu depends heavily on the success of national IS strategies to be pursued – or so we are made to believe.[11] The fact that countries such as Turkey, with relatively low penetration rates, are expected to catch up with an 'information revolution' that took decades in the West in a matter of a few years – and in liberalized environments without the economies of scale of telecom monopolies – is absurd, but a fact nonetheless. As one informant, an EU representative of a major trade union, remarked:

> *In the EU, what they try to accomplish with ISTs is to catch up with the U.S. and to turn IS into something that directly lowers the costs and budget deficits for the government, that makes the expenditure more efficient and that turns the balance sheets of businesses in the positive direction, and something that materially produces surplus value, something that contributes into the economy. In other words, the purpose is not to win the Nobel Prize. It is to make money.* (Personal interview, 2002)

This pattern of policy-making in the EU raises many questions concerning governance in the EU region. First of all, the Commission is not an elected body. Although it draws its authority and legitimacy from national governments who concede to supranational governance, based on the fact that EU IST policies have been pursued, from the start, with an industry-pushed techno-deterministic rationalism, it is fair to suggest that the 'social' comes second to the 'market'. Significant reference is made to the participation of 'citizens' and the strengthening of 'democracy' in recent policy documents and ISAPs. Yet, as pointed out in various studies on EU communication policy, while the *E-Europe* initiative put a more 'human-centred', 'culturally and socially sensitive' face on EU activities in this area – particularly in comparison to the rigid neoliberalism of the telecom policies – information society policies of the EU, as Preston (2003: 49) puts it, are *'fundamentally framed, imagined and measured in terms of the maximum production and use of new ICTs'*. Parallel to that, the building blocks of democratic governance such as 'democratic participation', 'dialogue' and 'transparency' are commodified to increase demand and legitimize the market-oriented reforms. The treatment of ISTs as neutral, as is the case with the WSIS *Declaration of Principles,* and the lack of consideration of societal and cultural factors in the policy discourse contradict the EU's self-attested commitment to pluralism and diversity.[12] The massive amount of bureaucracy, which characterizes EU governance, also takes away from the transparency made possible by online access.

On the national level, while the global and regional context (in the form of binding agreements) provide the backdrop against which policy issues are approached in the EU region, Turkish policy-making follows a country-specific track: personal and institutional relations (conflicts, relationships of interest and rivalries) play a key role in shaping policy and regulatory output. As Williams and Edge (1996) suggest, technological change is patterned by the conditions of its creation. Policy-making is a key factor in shaping IST diffusion and use in the European context, and the way it is approached and implemented in Turkey might yield different penetration and use patterns than in other EU countries. The ways

in which domestically driven forms of commodification respond to the regionally and globally driven forms of commodification is an important aspect of the political economy of communications today. In Turkey, domestic commodification took place within a statist environment and against the backdrop of a symbiotic power relationship between the state, military and the power elite. While the military has lost its prominence, for the most part, in influencing policy and legal decisions – thanks also to the reform packages Turkey passed over the few years to meet the EU criteria – nepotism both in public-private sector relations and within policy circles emerges as a major barrier to creating a market environment conducive to efficient competition. In relation to this, the concepts of 'public' and 'state sector' need to be redefined within their respective national contexts. The question of whether privatization and further marketization are desired is both an ideological and practical issue. However, due to a high level of corruption and inefficiency within the state sector, and to the adversities created by rent-seeking within and around TT, at this point a private monopoly appears to be a better, but an unlikely, alternative to the current structure in Turkey – given that sufficient institutional and operational transparency and efficient regulation are ensured.

Civil society also needs to be approached carefully and defined contextually. While it is referred to as a uniform social actor in policy, media and even in academic discourses, in Turkey, for example, it largely corresponds to sectoral non-governmental organizations and think tanks. This is not to suggest these groups do not count as civil society, but given that the term is laden with social roles and responsibilities ascribed to it (i.e. grass-roots movements and community activism) in popular and academic discourses alike, it is important to differentiate between sectoral lobbies and civil rights advocacy groups, which are much needed in transitional socio-economic realities of countries like Turkey. As a vital actor in democratic governance, the role of the CSOs in Turkey could be in terms of augmenting the heavy-handedness of state and private sector actors in policy-making.

In this chapter, I attempted to describe a national experience in the light of the existing forces of global/regional IS regimes and international aspirations expressed through the recent event of WSIS. In other words, I have tried to illustrate how, in Sassen's (1996) words, global processes materialize in national contexts. While a number of characteristics are distinctly national (i.e. the national history, certain ties between certain individuals and groups, etc.); many other aspects of the Turkish experience with telecoms restructuring (i.e. inexperience with independent regulation; lack of human and financial resources; institutional corruption; and the high amount of influence international organizations like the IMF and the WB exercise on domestic policies) are certainly regular fare in many other developing countries and new EU members. To benefit economically, Turkey needs to find her own means to support the national industry and to find areas where she can gain competitive advantage. One approach to the latter, as also suggested by some of the EU officials I interviewed, is that Turkey can be a good user: '*Why produce software or hardware or know-how when the others do it already?*' (Personal interview, 2002) This approach is prevalent in some circles in Turkey, too, and it carries important implications. Staying as a mere user-market increases the level of Turkey's dependency on European and global manufacturing,

service and culture industries, and it also prevents the country from benefiting from the opportunities offered by the IST sector in the EU region. For the maximization of socio-economic and cultural benefits, the Turkish case points to the need for the Commission's consideration of transitional factors, and of a less techno-centric approach. Transferring electronic communication tools (e.g. e-government) alone does not mean anything, unless they are utilized in a meaningful way by large segments of the society.

Ultimately, given the influence of regional and global forces in policy-making, information society, an economic imperative, comes with a price tag. Whether it turns out to be worth the price, creates economic and social profits through right policies and use, or it turns out to be a waste, depends on the accuracy of the diagnosis and the effectiveness of the treatment. Increased convergence in the communication technologies and the audio-visual sectors poses even greater challenges for policy-makers, makes more ambiguous the relative roles of the social actors, and further complicates the process of governance. As one EU DG IS official put it, '*The development of technology is always, always faster, and this is why sometimes we would actually prefer to leave it to the market and to the industries*' (Personal interview, 2002). However, the dominance of market forces and the concentration of economic power in the spatial concentration of businesses can fragment the infrastructure *and* superstructure, which is counter-intuitive to the EU idea of further social unification. To reach the goal of a true 'communication society', policy-making that prioritizes social and cultural determinants – and research to identify these factors – as well as a socially adapted infrastructure, is a must, not a choice.

Notes

1   Here, I mean the taken-for-granted meaning of 'Information Society', a technocratic vision, as constructed within the international policy and media discourse, and do not suggest that it exists or is desirable as such. I comment on this point later in the chapter.

2   Interviews conducted between February 2002 - June 2003 in Turkey and Belgium.

3   Law: no 4067, The Ministry of Transport.

4   Turkey is adopting EU policies in accordance with the approach adopted in the following documents:

   •   The Association Agreement between the European Community and Turkey (1963) and The 1970 additional protocol;

   •   The Commission's communication on a European strategy for Turkey (4 March 1998);

   •   The Commission's Regular Reports on Turkey's progress towards accession;

   •   The Council Decision of 8 March 2001 on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with Turkey (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

5 TT is the incumbent operator in Turkey.

6 Founded in 1924.

7 Until 2001, some failed attempts took place toward privatizing Turk Telekom. Although the target date for finalizing the privatization of TT was the end of 2001, the tender did not go through due to lack of bidder interest and disagreements between the government and the military over the size of the stake at the time of the bidding. The recent depression in global stock markets, which hurt the telecom sector seriously, was among the factors that led to a lack of bidder interest in TT. Economic crisis and political instability at the time of the bidding made the telecom market in Turkey particularly risky for potential buyers and privatization was delayed until after the liberalization of the market in January 2004.

8 My interview with this informant took place on 23 July 2002.

9 Other major developments within the scope of these recent initiatives worth mentioning here briefly are: Electronic Signature Law 5070 issued on 23 January 2004 (to become effective on July 2004); Law Regarding Right of Information issues on 24 October 2003, to ensure transparency, openness and equality of public management; National Information Security Law and Personal Data Protection Law which were to be issued in 2004; and Secondary Legislation regarding Consumers' Protection Law to protect online consumers issued on 13 June 2004. Indicator data for the measurement of the success of implementation of the above goals is not available in Turkey most part, which remains a major problem. However, to cite some basic figures available in the recent *Progress Report*: *Contribution of Turkey to E-Europe+* (SPO, 2004a) dated January 2004: population: 71,251,000; PSTN penetration 26.3%; mobile phone penetration 39.3%; household income per month $610; Average cost of computer $600; percentage of people with PC 3.78%; percentage of people with Internet access NA; and Internet penetration 8.4%, all of which are well below EU averages.

10 All terms commonly used by the various stakeholders during the interviews.

11 The fact that the GSM operator formerly called ARIA, now Avea after merging with TT's own GSM operator Aycell, is the biggest foreign direct investment in Turkey through Telecom Italia is a serious indicator of the significance of telecom and IST sector in the general political economy of the country.

12 Not in the sense that the EU's IST policies directly discriminate against certain social and cultural groups, but in the sense that there are not multiple but one approach to the ISTs.

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