ITU Regional Forum for Europe on Meaningful Connectivity

8 March 2021 – AVK

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to wish you all a happy Women’s Day – the role of women has many faces which are rightfully being recognised more and more.

Now to the event. It is my pleasure to welcome you at today’s Regional Forum for Europe on Meaningful Connectivity.

The Ministry of Public Administration of Slovenia is happy to support this event and foster open discussion on such an important topic.

Connectivity has already changed many aspects of our professional and daily lives. It plays an essential role for a successful digital transformation and it brings many economic and social benefits. Moreover, the unexpected circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis have given connectivity a new dimension. In the past year we have learned that being connected is not a matter of choice or a preference, but a necessity that enables us to go to school, work and communicate with the outside world.

I am glad to have the opportunity to share some thoughts on the subject with you today.

Firstly, allow me to address the connectivity gaps and the need to connect those who have remained disconnected. As I mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalization and the need for a better and wider connectivity. This acceleration has brought us many benefits, but it has also exposed many shortcomings and risks that need to be addressed. In this aspect, I believe it is essential to improve the broadband coverage and ensure the security of the 5G network.

Moreover, connectivity should also be about inclusion and making sure no one is left behind. Only by doing that, we can enable equal connectivity for all.

Secondly, I would like to mention the relevance of cooperation in the area of connectivity. In order to maximise the benefits of digital technologies we need to provide equal access to ICT, foster the development of necessary skills and ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as disabled and the elderly. I believe cooperation is key to expanding our digital infrastructure and increase the use of digital technologies.

Global cooperation under the ITU programmes plays an important role when it comes to systematic approaches and helping national and regional ecosystems advance in digital innovation.

To sum up, digital transformation can only be successful if it is accompanied by the trust of citizens and business. Raising awareness and emphasizing the benefits that digitalisation brings should be of most importance.

As the Slovenian Minister for Public Administration I am happy to say we have several examples of good practices in this area. We have developed our Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Digital Slovenia Development Strategy which encourage companies and public sector organisations to integrate digital technologies into their business processes, products and services.

Our National Programme on Artificial Intelligence has been prepared and we are striving for digitalisation of our public administration, e-commerce, tourism and material sciences. Knowing the importance of the topic, digitalisation will be one of our main focuses also during our Presidency to the Council of EU, which will take place in the second half of this year.

Dear participants,

I believe connectivity is the heart of a successful digital transformation. It needs to be inclusive and significantly contribute to social and economic development. We have a very interesting two-day event ahead of us. I am certain the outcomes will highlight a new perspective on the topic for all of us and provide an important input for future ITU work in this area.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you all a fruitful discussion!