

Dames en heren,  
Mesdames, Messieurs,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Minister Sabine LARUELLE, federal Minister for SMEs, Self-Employed, Agriculture and Science Policy, I am very pleased to be here this morning and to address you at this conference of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which promises to be very interesting and challenging: the ERANET DC-NET project broaches a subject which will only gain importance in the near future

Traditionally, *e-Infrastructures* have been massively used and developed by "hard scientists": physicists, chemists, mathematicians, engineers, and also by life scientists, biologists and physicians. However, they also offer numerous possibilities for social sciences and humanities. *e-Infrastructures* have been increasingly used by libraries, archives and museums during the last two decades, not only for delivering online access to their catalogues and digitized collections on the Internet but also more and more for managerial and organizational purposes, for mass storage of data, preservation, curation, training, networking.

For the cultural heritage sector to be able to take full advantage of the *e-Infrastructures'* offer, a collaboration between the different partners is necessary: *e-Infrastructure* operators and providers, cultural institutions, researchers and research institutions, and the ministerial authorities responsible for research and culture. DC-NET aims to bring about this cooperation,

informally – by initiatives such as this conference, an upcoming concertation seminar in Tallinn next January and several specialised workshops , and formally – by way of new Memoranda of Understanding to be agreed between the parties, and a series of publications which are projects’ deliverables.

BELSPO / STIS fulfills its role within the DC-NET consortium with the active support of BELNET and of the Federal Scientific Institutions :

The Royal Film Archive of Belgium which is also funded by the Federal Science Policy is associated to the project.

A tight concertation and coordination has been established with the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities responsible for culture in our federal country and with their major cultural institutions. The whole cultural sector of the country should indeed be associated with, and benefit of, the project. They participate in today's conference and in expert groups of the project.

The availability of new services offered by *e-Infrastructures* are especially important for us at this moment, when we are preparing for the second phase of the encompassing digitisation plan of the Federal Scientific and Cultural Institutions and the Royal Film Archive.

The Federal Scientific and Cultural Institutions have an immensely valuable collection of an estimated eighty (80) million objects, which attract over one million visitors yearly from all over the world. The first phase of the Federal Digitisation Plan started in 2005 and will end, after being prolonged twice, in December 2010.

In 2004, when the digitisation plan was conceived, only an estimated ten % (10%) of collections was entered in digital catalogues, and a digital image existed of only one % (1%) of the items in the different collections. Six years later, that situation has changed considerably: all the libraries of the institutions contributed to the creation of a central, digital catalogue which is accessible online to the public; and every one of the institutions meticulously prepared for and carried out the digitisation of selected artistic, historical and scientific collections, catalogues and databases. And the work goes on, with many other digitization projects already planned and with financing possibilities out of federal budgets, elaborated during these last years by Minister LARUELLE.

Apart from the activities which are part of the federal digitisation plan, the federal institutions have made important progress, either on their own initiative, or as part of European projects, in the field of online access to cultural heritage

The Federal Science Policy Office itself is one of the fifteen (15) partners in the project *NET HERITAGE*, another ERANET, focusing on a research programme for the protection of tangible cultural heritage.

Furthermore, in April 2010, a new *Joint Programming Initiative* of the Member States promoted by Italy was launched on the theme of “Cultural Heritage and Global Change: a new challenge for Europe”. The European heritage is rich and diverse, an important component of individual and collective identity but also, as a tourist attraction for example, of enormous economic importance for Europe. This Joint Programming Initiative wants to prevent fragmentary research efforts by encouraging coordination and cooperation in research, in order to be able to better address the challenges – in this case to more efficiently protect and preserve European cultural heritage. The Competitiveness Council of October 2010 recalled the importance of this JPI. The Belgian Federal Science

Policy Office and its institutes will also be involved in this initiative, as well as the Communities.

All these projects and initiatives show the Belgian Federal Science Policy's motivation and commitment to preserve and valorize the cultural heritage held by the Federal Institutions, increase online accesss, stimulate high quality research and innovation and maximize the public's enjoyment of cultural heritage.

I wish you all a fruitful conference and warmly thank the speakers who accepted to come here to Brussels share with us their valuable expertise, new ideas, projects and dreams.

Thank you for your attention.