Foreword

The vital role played in modern society by information and communication technologies (ICTs) is nowadays recognized by both businesses and governments alike. The UN openly acknowledges the importance of the digital environment as a tool for economic and business development,[1] and in Europe numerous EU initiatives[2] actively promote and monitor the adoption of ICT-supported practices in order to raise productivity and growth.

The changes brought about by the corresponding increasingly networked society have been many, with the last dozen years or so witnessing countless profound changes at societal, industry-sector, organizational, and individual levels. In this day and age, many of us now routinely make use of ICT for both work and leisure purposes, with speed and convenience of information exchange encouraging us to conduct transactions and communicate electronically with employers, work colleagues, friends, family members, businesses, and government agencies.

As a result of the emergence and regular use of a wide variety of ICT-supported ways of doing things, we have witnessed terms such as e-business, e-government, e-health, e-learning, message boards, chat rooms, and blogging become part of our recognized vocabulary. However, the continued adoption and widespread use of ICT in daily life depends heavily upon the availability of reliable high-speed networks, and there is no doubt that broadband is a key enabling technology that allows such activity to occur reliably and at acceptable speeds.

This obvious significance of broadband has been recognized by governments around the word, and despite the massive investments required in terms of the provision of new network infrastructures, many have introduced policies to promote broadband availability and uptake. Indeed, the availability of affordable broadband was a key objective of the e-Europe action plan, and the current strategic framework for the European Information Society (i2010) places particular emphasis on broadband coverage and reducing the digital divide. The social and economic importance of broadband availability[3] is such that broadband diffusion is often viewed as a means by which international competitiveness and economic development may be benchmarked.

It is within this context of widespread recognition of the significance of broadband and its corresponding promotion and take-up that this publication has been produced, and I am delighted to have been provided with the opportunity to write the Foreword to the *Handbook of Research on Global Diffusion of Broadband Data Transmission.*

The handbook is clearly a valuable resource, providing a timely and relevant collection of chapters addressing a variety of issues pertaining to the adoption and use of broadband and the reduction of the digital divide at both macro and micro levels. It is divided into five sections, each comprising a number of chapters and each addressing a different theme of broadband adoption. The international nature of the issue and its treatment within the handbook is clearly illustrated in the first section, which examines national policies affecting broadband deployment and diffusion in a range of countries including Aus-

tralia, Bangladesh, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States of America. The second section focuses upon demand-side (i.e., consumer-related) factors influencing broadband adoption and use in countries such as Australia, Brazil, Chile, France, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The third section is dedicated to examining issues of broadband use in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Italy, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, while the fourth and fifth sections are devoted to examining the impact of broadband on emerging ICT applications and business models (including those in the entertainment and health industries) and macro and micro supply and demand factors in Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Greece, India, Latin America, Sweden, and the United States of America respectively.

I am pleased to be able to recommend the handbook. It will prove highly useful to readers who are looking for substantive material on broadband promotion and adoption, and I should particularly draw attention to the variety of international perspectives presented. Overall the handbook provides an appealing treatment of the area, and I am sure it will be viewed as a valuable information resource on what is a highly topical and relevant subject.

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ENDNOTES

[1]   General Assembly Resolution 56/183 endorsed the need to develop the so-called *information society.*
[2]   See for instance, the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, e-Business W@tch, and the e-Business Support Network.
[3]   *Broadband Access: The New Highways to Prosperity—*speech delivered by Vivian Reding, the member of the European Commission responsible for information society and media, at the "Bridging the Broadband Gap Through EU Spectrum Policy" event, Brussels, March 2006.

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