INTRODUCTION

The information society can be most simply defined as a society, where access to and utilization of information plays an increasingly dominant role in the social, economic and political life.[1] Building the Information Society (IS) thus requires that citizens, enterprises and public administration have a universal access to information and have the skills to use it productively. Progress in the development of the IS is believed to lead to a faster economic growth, higher social cohesion and an overall increase in the quality and standard of living.[2]

In this context, the objective of this book is to present a comprehensive picture of the current state and the development prospects for the IS in Poland. The book is based on an analysis prepared within the TIGER economic think-tank as part of a wider project studying the factors and impacts of the IS in the EU new member states and candidate countries.[3]

The first part of the book (Chapters A to I) discusses the country's strengths and weaknesses related to the development of the IS in its economic, institutional, political and social dimensions. It also provides an assessment of the threats and opportunities lying ahead. Each of the chapters starts with a summary and a SWOT analysis to give readers a snapshot of the ensuing detailed discussion on each of the factors driving the IS development.

The second part of the book summarizes the analysis in a diagnosis, which analyzes the interlinkages between the factors contributing to the success or failure of the IS development. The books concludes with a baseline scenario of the future development of the IS in Poland and a list of policy-oriented recommendations.

The key finding of the analysis is that Poland's progress towards the information society has so far been quite uneven. While overall positive macroeconomic performance, changes in the structure of the economy, the enhanced regulatory background, progress in educational reform and shifts in cultural and consumption patters were conducive to the development of the IS, it has been nonetheless stymied by a relatively low penetration rates of Information Society technologies (IST), insufficient institutional capacity, inefficient implementation of IS policies, large urban-rural digital divide and a lack of political support for the IS. The prospects for the IS development are similarly mixed: the baseline scenario assumes a middle-of-the-road pace of progress in the next couple of years. In spite of the projected sustained progress, its slow pace would prevent Poland from taking full advantage of the benefits of the Information Society for its economy and society.

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1 For other definitions of the information society, please refer to
http://cbdd.wsu.edu/kewlcontent/cdoutput/TR501/page8.htm

2 See, for instance, the "eEurope 2005 Action Plan".

3 The study on "Factors and Impacts in the Information Society: a Prospective Analysis in the Candidate Countries" was carried out in 2003 by the International Center for Economic Growth, European Center (ICEG EC), Budapest, Hungary and a consortium of eleven other research institutes as sub-contractors to the Institute of Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS), Seville, Spain, of the Directorate General Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. On the basis of the country studies, a Synthesis Report is prepared in the framework of the project. The Synthesis Report offers an integrating and prospective view about the future outlook for IS in the new EU member states and candidate countries. The original report on Poland is available for free download at http://www.tiger.edu.pl/onas/piatkowski/Information_Society_in_Poland_A_Prospective_Analysis.pdf

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The book is based mostly on data available as of the end of 2003.

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