

## Efthymiou Petros

### Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs



*Born in 1950, Mr. Efthymiou is a graduate of the School of Philosophy at the University of Ioannina. He has taught at secondary level schools (1974 -1979), and as visitor professor at the Panteion University of Athens (1994 –1995). He was special advisor on educational issues, at the Ministry of Youth (1982-1985). In 1985, he was Secretary General of Media, in the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization. Mr. Efthymiou was a member of the Managing Board of the National Center for Social Research, a fundamental concern of which involves educational research (1993-1995), and of the Managing Board of The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (February 1998-April 2000). As Member of the European Parliament, he*

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## From digital divide to digital opportunity

**In the era of rapid technological advances, in the era of knowledge society , the access to digital technologies is a prerequisite to policies seeking equal opportunities for all (access to job market , access to information , etc); in fact it is equivalent to the right of democratic participation.** Access to computers and the internet , as well as the ability to use digital technologies effectively, are crucial for full participation in world economic, political and social life. Unequal access to technology and high-tech skills by income, educational level, race, and geography could deepen and reinforce the divisions that exist within the world society and within the societies in each country. **Digital technologies can change radically the way teachers teach and students learn. Thus, schools are not only the special field for technological and pedagogical innovation, but also the privileged agents for promoting equal access to all, for transforming the digital divide to digital opportunity.**

The steps taken in Greece to face up to this challenge include :

- Broadening the access to technologies ( computers, internet and high-speed networks);
- Developing initial and in-service training courses for teachers;
- Promoting applications that will empower all people to use new technologies to their fullest potential (e. g.- public health information systems that raise childhood immunization rates in inner –cities, tele-mentoring for at-risk youth, and electronic networks that strengthen local communities by fostering communication and collaboration).

More specifically, schools are rapidly equipped with computers and their access to the internet is secured. For the time being, 933 (51%) of the lower secondary schools (Gymnasia), 264 (22%) of the upper secondary schools (Lykeia) and 124 Technical Vocational schools are already connected. By the year 2003, all secondary schools will be connected, while the same target will be achieved, for primary schools, by the end of 2006. Furthermore, priority is given to the development of software of high technological and pedagogical standards for the teaching of all school subjects. Indeed, during the last five years, consortia of Greek Universities, Research Centers and private firms have developed more than 100 multimedia titles, which are already in use at schools. *✍*