

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Greek Presidency of the EU places high priority on digital job creation and boosting eSkills in order to tackle unemployment at home and across the EU**

**Athens, (May 6, 2014)** – ICT is helping Greece turn the corner after experiencing the worst economic downturn in a generation. The Greek government has used its six months at the helm of the European Union to maximize this trend, not only for its own unemployed workforce, but for all 28 EU member states.

Efforts to equip people – especially young people – with the skills needed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT were discussed in a conference in Athens on Tuesday, hosted by the European Commission in collaboration with the Greek government, and supported by a wide range of technology companies.

European Commission Vice President, Neelie Kroes, responsible for the digital agenda, said: "Soon, Europe could face a shortage of nearly one million ICT professionals. Wouldn't it be crazy not to exploit this opportunity – a technology market in constant need of new skills? Wouldn't it be crazy to continue to let down our young people, not equipping them to take advantage? I hope this conference helps us all take home some new ideas for how to plug Europe's skills gap."

"ICT can enhance all branches of the economy and create new jobs," said Kostas HATZIDAKIS, Minister of Development and Competitiveness, Greece in a keynote speech at the event.

He said that during the next programming period his government would double its budget for innovation, create new incentives to expand youth entrepreneurship, and sign a national coalition for digital jobs for Greece.

Greece offers a dramatic example of the skills gap in practise. While its overall unemployment rate remains the highest in Europe at over 24%, many world famous technology firms are lining up to hire staff to fill new jobs they are looking to create in Greece.

They are attracted to Greece partly because of the country's excellent reputation for training electronic engineers. But in spite of this, ICT jobs account for just 1.6% of total employment. The average for the EU is 3.4%, leaving Greece with one of the smallest ICT sectors – as a proportion of the wider economy - in Europe.

"While around a quarter of Greece's workforce is unemployed, the number of ICT job vacancies is actually rising," said John Higgins, Director General of DIGITALEUROPE.

"We see this trend at the European level too – stubbornly high levels of general unemployment, but at the same time a shortage of applicants for technology-oriented

positions. This is the skills gap that the technology industry is trying to help governments to address,” he added.

An estimated 1,200 ICT jobs remained unfilled in Greece last year, according to the researcher Empirica. That figure is expected to rise to 1,800 by 2020.

Many household names from the ICT industry are setting up operations in Greece. Microsoft recently set up a call centre, creating 750 jobs in the process. Huawei is considering opening an innovation centre in Athens. IBM has recently announced the creation of a centre of excellence for big data and business analytics, also in the Greek capital. HP is creating a call centre for its dealers and partners in the region, creating 100 jobs. And SAP has announced plans to create an Innovation & Value Engineering Centre in Greece.

The positive impact on jobs from ICT doesn't only come from the big corporations. Last year saw a sharp rise in the number of start-ups in Greece: 144, compared with less than 15 just two years earlier when the crisis was at its peak. The vast majority of these new enterprises are technology-oriented firms.

The Greek government has thrown its support behind the European Commission's e-Skills for Jobs 2014 campaign, because it sees technology as an important part of the fight to bring down unemployment.

The eSkills for Jobs 2014 campaign is part of the Commission's Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs - an EU-wide multi-stakeholder partnership designed to address a shortfall in the number of European citizens with ICT professional skills, and to exploit the employment creation potential of ICT.

The main focus of the campaign is to raise awareness of the education, training, jobs, and other opportunities that are available to people with eSkills – those who know how to effectively use digital technologies. It will inform students, unemployed people, ICT professionals and SMEs about the vast range of opportunities that ICT-related jobs present. During the course of 2014, the e-Skills for jobs campaign will run in 30 EU countries\*.

The campaign is coordinated by DIGITALEUROPE and European Schoolnet in conjunction with hundreds of national and pan-European partners including, SEPE (partner for Greece), the European Centre for Women and Technology, JA-YE, Telecentre Europe and many major IT industry partners.

Marc Durando, Executive Director of European Schoolnet, said: "The latest data indicate that secondary school students are still insufficiently aware of the importance of IT skills for their future jobs\*\*. We are committed to ensuring that Europe's young people are prepared to engage in Europe's digital future and be equipped to work in the digital age."



Find out more about eSkills for Jobs here: <http://eskills-week.ec.europa.eu>

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\*Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, UK.

\*\* European Schoolnet Briefing Paper number 6  
<http://www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools/>