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CONTENT, NOT CONNECTIONS

As internet access grows in Turkey, many are warning that to develop a true information society far more is needed than simple connections to the web.



Professor Yasar Tonta, an informations systems expert at Hacettepe University in Ankara, argues that people must have the skills to navigate the internet successfully and there must be valuable and useful content for them to find.

"It is not all about penetration rates for the internet. It's not enough just to be connected, there has to be content there and information literacy, the skills needed to find information, is also very important," he says.

"Governments should do more to drive this process and ensure that the internet offers quality information and services that can be easily accessed," he says.

Professor Tonta recently returned from a British Council conference building information societies in Europe held in Bucharest.

"Towards an Information Society for All" TISA4: Better lives, better communities built on the three successful British Council conferences held in 2001 in Bologna, in 2002 in Berlin and in 2003 in Paris where practitioners and policy makers from around Europe met to consider the present state of development of the emerging Information Society across Europe.

Professor Tonta represented Turkey and southeast European countries at the conference and addressed the specific problems of that region.

He said that in addition to low internet penetration rates in southeast Europe, development of the internet there was also limited by the division of the area into small markets each with their own particular language and needs.

"The market in southeast Europe is small and fragmented so local entrepreneurs cannot develop content for their own small markets," he said.

"Additionally there is the problem of skills," he said. "Internet penetration in Turkey is around 6.8 percent but I am not sure that all of those are people who can easily surf and navigate in English. These issues concern me more than penetration rates."

But Tonta said he found much to encourage him at the Bucharest conference, particularly through small projects such as a Romanian drive to provide internet services to isolated schools in mountain villages.

"The conference was very useful for me. I saw a number of small projects from Romania and Hungary that provide meaningful internet access and helped meet a need."

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