INTRODUCTION

Transition to a knowledge society based on the need to acquire new knowledge and skills throughout life. Establishment of open and distance education is the right stage of development and adaptation of education to modern conditions. Its appearance may be explained as need of society in a creative, professionally and spiritually self-developing and self-learner's personality in conditions of transition to a knowledge society, on the other hand – they are considered as territorial, economic and cultural factors. The following factors contribute to and promote the success and rapid development of open and distance education:

- the need to guarantee education throughout life (lifelong learning), constantly expanding access to education and professional training;
- increase opportunities to update knowledge, professional training or self-improvement;
- increase the profitability (rent-ability) of teaching resources;
- improve the quality of existing educational services;
- the promotion of equality of access to education of different age groups;
- more inclusive education in different geographical areas;
- the provision of short-term and effective training courses for certain categories of students;
- development as an interdisciplinary educational potential and for individual disciplines;
- the provision of educational services consistent with professional and family lives of students;
- progress in the field of ICT (Internet, Web) that can increase the number of subjects taught at a distance;
- clear awareness of the importance of education internationally (Distance Education, UNESCO, 2006, http://www.unesco.org/bpi/pdf/memobpi38_distancelearning_ru.pdf).

Distance education is the subject of broad interest to different groups of researchers in most countries in Europe and around the world. There are many publications that prove that the benefits exceed the e-learning defects,

and the scale of e-learning implementation increases practically on all levels of education. With the development of information technology, the appearance of new computer tools expands educational possibilities and improves the quality of educational services offered in the distance learning form.

At the same time there are still a lot of questions that have not been answered yet. The articles of the authors included in the monograph try to do it. Among the problems raised in the materials of monograph one can enumerate the following issues:

- Can a modern educational system educate and prepare professionals to successful work and functioning in the knowledge society without e-learning?

- What factors influence the selection of the most effective, optimal, adequate methodology of Distance Learning?

- What are the common features and characteristics and differences between e-learning and traditional teaching methodology?

- Is it possible to improve the quality of teaching by personal teaching in a distance mode?

- What are the most suitable contemporary information tools for the effective distance education?

- How may look like the nearest future of e-learning, what are the new possibilities of e-learning 3.0, and can we model the new trends of e-learning without earlier analysis of its evolution?

- How can you help in rehabilitation, therapy and education of disabled children, including these with specific psycho physical disorders?

- What safety rules should be followed at the time of the organization and implementation of distance learning?

- Whether and what are the formal and legal barriers threatening the global e-learning's implementation?

- How can international cooperation and participation in joint projects help in creating a common informational and educational space and implementation of e-learning?

- Others.

The monograph includes the best pieces of work, prepared and presented by the authors from five European countries during the scientific conference entitled *"Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning",* subtitled: *"Use of E-learning in the Training of Professionals in the Knowledge Society",* which was held on 11-12.10.2010 at the Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn, University of Silesia in Katowice.

The speakers were from University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland), University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), University of Silesia in Opava (Czech Republic), University of Warsaw (Poland), Graal Institute (Portugal), Gdansk University of Technology (Poland), University of Hradec Králové (Czech Republic), Church Pedagogical Institute in Graz (Austria), University of Defence in Brno (Czech Republic), Technical University of Radom (Poland), Cracow Padagogical University (Poland), Rzeszow University of Technology (Poland) and University of Bialystok (Poland).

Among the authors are the well-known scientists, young researchers, PhD students, academic teachers with a many-year training and experience in the field of e-learning, the creators of distance courses, multimedia teaching materials, educational web-sites and others.

I am convinced that the monograph will be an interesting and valuable publication, describing the theoretical and practical issues in the field of distance learning, giving proposals of solution of some important problems and showing the road to further work in this direction, allowing to exchange experiences of scientists from different universities and different countries.

Publishing this monograph is a good example of strengthening international cooperation. I am very grateful for valuable remarks and suggestions which raised the quality of the publication. Here I especially want to thank Prof. Maciej Tanaś – a reviewer of this monograph, Prof. Robert Mrózek for help in the edition of this publication, MA Andrzej Szczurek for an editorial correction. Also I say 'thank you' to the authors for the preparation and permission to publish their articles. All readers I wish a pleasant reading time.

<div style="text-align:center">Thank you.</div>

<div style="text-align:right">Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska</div>