

Opening speech by Vice-President Ansip at the Digital Day 2018

“Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming today.

Mariya, thank you for chairing this Digital Day.

Many of us here remember the day one year ago when we met in Italy to hold Europe’s first Digital Day.

It was part of the celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. A good opportunity to reflect on the future of the European Union. Its digital future. We achieved a great deal in Rome. EU countries signed up to going further on digital – to make the most of new technologies, recognising their value for progress and prosperity. We focused on supercomputing, digital industry and connected and automated driving.

Today is the time to look at the progress made over the last year. How to keep up the momentum, to build on our Rome success, and go further in other important areas of the Digital Single Market.

This year, I will again ask countries to commit to Europe’s digital and data-based future – with a focus on artificial intelligence (AI), digital healthcare and blockchain technologies.

But first, I think we should recall what our Digital Single Market project has achieved so far.

I say that because: without removing barriers that prevent digital growth; without the right legal environment; without adequate investment – Europe will not have much of a digital future.

As we speak, a strong and functioning Digital Single Market is under construction. More than that: a new legal environment is falling into place and into effect.

On data protection and security, we have the GDPR about to enter fully into force across all EU countries. We have the NIS Directive; we are strengthening cybersecurity in general. We are creating ways for data to flow more freely across Europe.

Roaming surcharges have gone. Soon it will be the turn of unjustified geo-blocking to disappear. Since April, people can have access to their video and music subscriptions when they travel around Europe.

In the coming weeks, EU countries should agree on a new telecoms policy that will help 5G to become a reality for millions of people and businesses. In short, the Digital Single Market is really starting to happen on the ground.

It will permit and promote the development of technologies like AI – and I am

pleased to see AI come onto the political agenda in many EU countries. A few weeks ago in France, President Macron presented a national plan to spend €1.5 billion over five years to support AI, and joint projects with Germany. This is exactly the kind of cooperation that Europe needs for its digital success.

It gives me confidence that in this area, Europe has a solid basis for the future.

According to Atomico, we are home to the world's leading AI research community. And the European tech sector identifies AI and blockchain as the areas where Europe is best positioned to play a leading role. However, it is no secret that we have to invest – both politically and financially. There is quite some ground to catch up. Other continents are moving ahead quickly.

Today, I encourage those EU governments represented here to sign a declaration to work together more on artificial intelligence. This includes pledges to:

- invest in AI development and deployment;*
- align national research agendas as much as possible;*
- make AI available to all companies and more public sector data available;*
- work together on ethical, legal and socio-economic aspects of AI.*

I would like to see EU countries make a similar commitment to blockchain technologies – now moving out of the lab and going mainstream. As with AI: we should make the most of this new opportunity to innovate.

Let me turn now to healthcare, where I have often stressed the need to digitise. Here too, I would like to see as many EU countries as possible make a formal commitment.

Why? because digital technology can help save lives, encourage healthy living, bring innovation, as well as increase efficiency. Again, the driving force is data.

Ladies and gentlemen, I said earlier that the Digital Single Market creates the right conditions and infrastructure for a functional digital Europe. But none of this comes for free.

With financial support, the EU does what it can. But our public purse only goes so far. It represents about 1% of the wealth that EU economies generate every year. National governments and the private sector need to contribute too.

The future-oriented areas I have mentioned today require significant funding if we are to make the most of them. Funding not only for today and tomorrow, but far into the next decade as well. As you know, when the EU approaches the end of its multi-annual budget period, EU institutions discuss and negotiate how the next one should look. Inside the European Commission, the preparation

is underway. For the Digital Single Market to work for people and business, to advance on our digital priorities, to make sure that Europe is a world digital leader: we need hard cash.

Blunt, perhaps. But there is no other way of putting it. For that, we need your support: to fund Europe's digital future starting from 2021 in the next budget. For me, the priorities are clear. I have already mentioned AI – and for this we will also need increased funding for supercomputers.

With cybersecurity, we are working to create a Network of Cybersecurity Competence Centres in the Member States – bringing together academia, industry, and the public sector. Its aim is to transform research into specific products and services that will directly strengthen Europe's cybersecurity. To achieve this will require more EU funding: to develop strong cybersecurity capacities that will protect the Digital Single Market and defend our security more broadly.

Along with the commitments that I would like to see EU countries make today, this is the one message I want to convey. So please spread the word on funding: to your governments, industry and business sectors, civil society and consumers.

Europe needs digital. We all need digital.

And we need a solid investment in Europe's digital future.

I know that this is the message that Mariya and Günther will also give today.

Thank you and I wish you a successful Digital Day."

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