



Extending the Digital Agenda in the developed world

Barcelona, 02 March 2015

Speech by Vice-President Ansip at the Mobile World Congress

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Ladies and gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be with you in Barcelona at this major event.

Everyone here knows how much digital technologies can benefit society, our economy, media and daily life.

Every economic and social sector uses digital tools and networks.

The whole world is going online.

But not everybody – and not everywhere.

Take Europe, where there is a digital divide, as in some other developed regions of the world. It comes from poor connectivity. Or, in some cases, none at all.

One hundred million Europeans are digitally excluded, and the percentage of people who have never used the internet is still very high.

There are huge differences in internet usage between young and old people, and similar differences between those with high and low levels of education.

High-speed broadband is often only accessible in urban areas, not in remoter parts of the countryside.

I could give many other examples of digital exclusion. Like the fact that only 29 out of every thousand female graduates have a computing or related degree. Only 4 go on to work in ICT-related activities.

This has an impact not only on individual lives – income, health, education - but also on families, communities, on political process, democracy, public services.

If we want a fully functioning Digital Single Market, every European must be able to enjoy digital content and services – wherever they are in the EU, and whatever their personal circumstances – for their work, leisure and education.

It is the digital equivalent to the right to non-discrimination.

They should be able to understand the benefits of the internet and have the skills to access it, as well as the means.

They must be able to have trust and confidence in the online world, with a sufficiently high level of security that protects their personal data. If that is lacking, they may choose not to go online at all, or to use e-services.

These are also some of the fundamental principles that underpin our project of creating a Digital Single Market for Europe.

I could not possibly come to an event such as this without updating you on what we are doing in this vital area – because, unsurprisingly, it is all built on the backbone of telecommunications.

Our work to build a Digital Single Market relies on access to world-class networks and communication services.

Fast, reliable, secure connectivity – everywhere.

We cannot make much progress in building the Digital Single Market without progress on telecoms, and making sure that high-quality connectivity becomes more widely available in all corners of Europe.

It is why the Telecoms Single Market package is so important.

This week will be very significant in this regard as Member States finalise their political positions before

starting negotiations with the European Parliament.

Europe's businesses and people have waited a long time to see progress made towards this. Frankly, they now want to see some tangible results.

I do not want to pre-judge the work now being done.

But it does concern me that we may end up with a lack of provisions for spectrum and not enough ambition on roaming and net neutrality.

An outcome which would not reflect the significance, ambition and urgency that EU heads of state gave to the single European telecoms market in October 2013.

Ending roaming surcharges in the EU remains a priority.

We need a solution that can be put into effect as soon as possible so that people really feel the gain and benefit. We should not disappoint them.

Open spectrum is the basis for a digitally enabled society.

The more that this natural resource is divided, the less efficient it is. That is the situation we have today. It is holding back Europe's wider economy and digital society – and not helping to bridge the digital divide.

Further coordination of spectrum is vital for the future Telecom Single Market.

It will help to attract much-needed investment into access and also make the next 5G mobile communications generation a success. This is a fantastic opportunity for European industry.

Lastly, on net neutrality, this is something that we really need to get right, to stimulate innovation and investment in networks as well as an open internet, where nobody should be unfairly blocked or slowed down.

Putting the principle of net neutrality into EU law will give clarity and uniformity of approach on telecoms regulation, instead of the patchwork of 28 different approaches that Europe has today.

Ladies and gentlemen

What Europe needs now is a clear long-term strategy to stimulate the digital environment, to minimise legal uncertainty and create fair conditions for all.

The European Commission is working on this and will present its strategy in May.

My vision is for a digital area where goods, people, services and capital can move freely.

- a digital market where everyone can access and carry out online activities, across borders and with complete ease, safely and securely;
- and a digital space where there is fair competition, regardless of nationality or place of residence, underpinned by a clear legal structure.

It is about giving people and businesses the freedom and chance to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the internet and digital technology.

How can we do this?

By providing the appropriate regulatory environment, which we plan to achieve by building the Digital Single Market - and also by incentivising and leveraging more private investment.

I am turning to you to help us achieve all these goals.

As a major GDP contributor to the global economy, the mobile industry is a powerful force for positive change in sectors like health and education.

It has an important role to play in tackling all these challenges, and in raising digital and social inclusion, which is where I would encourage you to support the development of innovative, user-friendly and affordable ways of doing this.

For me, connectivity and digital inclusion are fundamental values, a right that we should protect, a major principle underpinning the Digital Single Market.

The guarantee that everyone has access to digital services.

Nobody should be left behind in the digital age.

All Europeans should have the opportunity to use the internet and digital tools to benefits from the single market, enhance their quality of life, work, education and social engagement.

Working together, I know we can achieve a great deal for the people of Europe, to make the most and

best of all that the online world can offer.

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