



Conference on the **Future** of **Europe**

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD

**Working Group on 'Digital Transformation', Chaired by Ms Elina Valtonen, national
Parliaments (Finland)/Ms Riina Sikkut, national Parliaments (Estonia)**

Friday 25 March 2022, 9:00-11:30 and 14:00-16:00

1. Opening by the Chair

The Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss and elaborate on each of the five draft proposals, comprising an overall objective and accompanying specific measures, which had been circulated before the meeting. These proposals were mainly based on the recommendations made by the European and national citizens' panels; ideas from the multilingual digital platform, previous discussions in the Working Group and the Conference Plenary were also taken into account. The Chair informed that a revised version of the proposals will be prepared on the basis of the discussions in the Working Group and the Plenary, for further discussion by the Working Group in two weeks' time.

2. Intervention by the Spokesperson

The Citizens' Spokesperson briefly introduced the five proposals, which covered the four clusters of issues addressed by the work of the Digital Transformation Working Group, namely: I Access to digital infrastructure (1 proposal), II Digital skills that empower people (1 proposal), III Safe and trustworthy digital society (2 proposals), and IV Digital innovation to strengthen the economy (1 proposal). He suggested that each concrete measure proposed should be cross-referenced to the relevant citizens' recommendation from which it was derived, as this was not always clear.

3. Presentation and discussion on the draft proposals with a view to presenting draft proposals to the Plenary on 26 March

In the following discussion there was overall support for the proposals, with many suggestions being put forward to develop them further. Several members underlined that the tragic events in Ukraine reinforced the importance of the issues covered for Europe today.

Proposal 1 - Access to the internet and to digital services/Sovereignty of the EU's digital infrastructure

In the discussion the following issues were addressed and suggestions made:

- A reference to digital infrastructure as an essential enabler of **electric and autonomous vehicles** should be added and coherence with work in other Working Groups ensured.
- Reference was made to the proposed **Declaration on European Digital Rights and Principles** and the Digital Decade Policy Programme. The importance of the necessary access to

connectivity and data processing for a new type of digital 'society without distance' was stressed, in which citizens can work and study and interact socially anywhere.

- The need to ensure **access to the infrastructure needed to produce digital products**, such as computing, microprocessors, data storage and data mobility was underlined. Digital autonomy did not mean a closed society, but rather having democratic control over digital tools, independent from those parts of the world, which did not share European values.
- It was suggested to use the term '**digital sovereignty**' in this proposal rather than 'autonomy' or 'independence'.
- Emphasis should be on investment in **European technologies**, to strengthen the European technology sector and its competitiveness.
- It was suggested to add references to '**sustainability**' of infrastructure in specific measure 1.
- The aspect of '**affordability**' of access to the internet should also be covered in the proposal.
- There was a suggestion to reorder the measures (1, 2, 6, 5, 7, 4).
- More precision was needed in wording of specific measure 2 with regard to the elimination of the digital divide, both as regards the **conditions in different Member States** and between **urban and rural areas**, where funding was most needed.
- Different views were expressed in relation to specific measure 3 regarding use of dedicated funding. While some suggested more specific wording, overall it was considered that this was a general principle applying to all proposals in any event and did not add value; there was more support for dropping it or having it somewhere general.
- A request for clarification of the precise meaning and scope of specific measure 6 was made. An example was given by the Chair: if one wants to set up a business and deal with authorities be able to do that digitally and to improve that process.
- It was suggested to ensure that the proposal covers not only a right to access, but also a guarantee of actual access to digital infrastructure. There was a query whether access to cloud services should also be covered.
- It was suggested to also consider **data concentration and information monopolies** in specific measure 4.
- Include equal access in the proposal and broaden specific measure 5 to include a wider range of **vulnerable people**, and to strengthen specific measure 6 to make it more inclusive, in particular for hard-to-reach segments of society.
- Make reference to the role of the regions, e.g. in relation to financing, and to avoidance of dependency on undemocratic countries that do not respect European values and human rights. Refer to participation of citizens in decision-making process at regional, national and European levels.
- Include reference to **Roam Like At Home** principle for international roaming charges.
- Making sure citizens had secure and **user-friendly access to public services online** was also of crucial importance, as was now so clearly highlighted by the needs of the many refugees from the war in Ukraine.

Proposal 2 - Ensure that all EU citizens can benefit from digitalisation/empowering them with the necessary digital skills and opportunities

In the discussion the following issues were addressed and suggestions made:

- It was essential to address the human dimension of digitalisation, giving priority to the development of **digital skills**.
- Refer more specifically to, and **build on existing instruments** dedicated to improving education and skills training. Clarify what actions covered by specific measure 5 were **already implemented at EU level**, to avoid duplication.
- Include reference to the need for respect for **platform workers' rights** and the responsibilities of platforms as employers, as well as an obligation to inform and consult workers prior to introduction of digital technologies that impact their working conditions.
- Include reference to ensuring access to minority languages (the native tongue of 10% of EU citizens is not an official EU language).
- Add emphasis on **enhancing digital competences and skills for SMEs**, to help them enter the digital age. Reference to recent proposals on micro-credentials. Suggestion to cluster measure 1 and 5.
- Clarify that digital education and training should be compatible with the **healthy development of vulnerable groups**, particularly children (specific measure 1). Address the gender gap specifically in the proposal. Recognise access to the internet to be a human right.
- Expand references to needs of **vulnerable groups**, including e.g. refugees. Stress importance of training for teachers and public administrations.
- Clarify meaning of reference to EU certification in schools.
- References to older people could be combined into a single specific measure to give them more prominence, and include reference to all categories of vulnerable people.

Proposal 3 - Enhance cyber security, deal with illegal content and cyber criminality and address disinformation

In the discussion the following issues were addressed and suggestions made:

- Clarify **role and capacities of Europol/European Cybercrime Centre** (referred to in specific measure 1).
- Need to go further to strengthen European institutions, e.g. ENISA, to protect citizens from cyberattacks. Switch from **reactive to proactive approach**.
- The relationship between citizens and social media was seen as critical to avoid people's perceptions of reality being distorted by propaganda and **disinformation**, while preserving society's openness and democratic values. Proposals on the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act addressing the responsibilities of very large platforms were referenced.
- Regarding specific actions 4 and 5, the question was raised whether it was reasonable to expect that algorithms can be relied on to rate the trustworthiness of information or that a platform can reliably rate other information sources without bias or censorship?
- Important to maintain a **human centric approach** that keeps human beings in ultimate control of decision making processes involving algorithms
- Add references to enforcement of sanctions (specific measure 2), hate speech (specific measures 3 and 4). Stress role of awareness raising and coordination in addressing disinformation rather than reliance on platforms and algorithms to rate trustworthiness of information sources.

- It was necessary to focus more on **cyber defence** in the light of **the Russian attack on Ukraine** or recent attacks on health care systems. Europe should invest in its own infrastructure, including **digital defence**, to protect against illegal attacks and content. Specific measures should **focus on better implementation of existing law**, as some proposals already enshrined in EU law.
- Include reference to **local and regional cybersecurity centres and authorities** and their role.
- The proposal should address the uses of data and algorithms that threaten the fundamental rights of workers.
- Add reference to the need to avoid the negative impacts (including on health) of intrusive digital controls and checks in the workplace and require a collective agreement and/or workers' informed consent. Use of algorithms to take decisions on employment issues should not undermine workers' rights.

Proposal 4 - Better awareness and more efficient implementation, and enforcement of existing data protection rules (GDPR)

In the discussion the following issues were addressed and suggestions made:

- Strong recommendations that GDPR/informed consent should be better explained, written in **clearer language** and further harmonised across the EU.
- Observation that most measures relate to **existing legal obligations** and that **focus on implementation and enforcement** should be strengthened.
- There should be a specific timeframe after which personal data is deleted
- Clarify reference to 'mandatory courses' in specific measure 3.
- Regarding specific measure 8, caution was needed to ensure that the **costs of certification of GDPR compliance** referred to did not push **SMEs** out of the market and reduce consumer choice.
- On specific measure 9, clarification was needed as to the role of the proposed independent pan European Agency, given the **existing functions of the European Data Protection Supervisor and national agencies** in this area.
- Reference to 'limitations of companies' operations' in specific measure 9 needed further clarification.

Proposal 5 - Digitalisation measures which strengthen the economy/human centric approach

In the discussion the following issues were addressed and suggestions made:

- There was a need expressed to be **more ambitious** in Proposal 5, if we want Europe to be a **world leader in digital connectivity, social responsibility, and sustainability in economic and social terms** and to reach our Green Deal objectives.
- Include the need for **ergonomic equipment** for telework.
- Need to reinforce the importance of human oversight of decision-making processes involving Artificial Intelligence.
- Add reference to the '**digital first**' principle as an EU-wide principle. The scoreboard in specific measure 4 could be expanded to EU public services, not just businesses.

- The reference to **European digital ID** in specific measure 8 should be brought higher in the list of specific measures.
- Refer in specific measure 5 to the existing Digital Innovation Hubs and to the integration of other networks with them to strengthen outreach to SMEs.
- Digitalisation of procedures helping SMEs do business in the EU, and on support for start-ups to reduce technological dependencies.
- In proposal title, **emphasize fairness**, e.g. to strengthen economy in a fair way. In specific measure 2, refer to social responsibility and the '**right to disconnect**'. Refer to the ban on social scoring as in the Artificial Intelligence Act. Add reference to maintaining availability of information in analogue form when this is still needed by citizens.
- Reference to the **damage done by fake reviews and assessments on social media** should be made in the context of disinformation. Consideration should be given to establishing a European payment system to promote digital innovation and growth.
- With regard to specific measure 7, **open source software should also be used in education** and training, to facilitate a smooth transition to the work environment.
- Add references to fair taxation of the digital economy across the EU, **dedicated funding for open source software**, and regulation to tackle the precariousness of platform workers' jobs and their lack of social protection.
- The same guarantees of security and privacy, which affirm European values in a human centric manner, should apply in the digital world as in the material world. The proposal to update the European digital identity framework was very important in this context.

At the end of the debate the chair enquired whether members wanted to address the perceived lack of ambition by adding a short text to the document formulating the vision of Europe as a digital society following a human centric approach and aspiring to be a world leader in the digital age. She also asked whether members agreed that the document should address the situation in the Ukraine and the need for an increased focus on cyber defence and protection against disinformation. There was broad support for both of these suggestions from participants in the meeting. In particular, there was a recognition that it was impossible to ignore the events of the last month in Ukraine and that a clear statement was needed, particularly in view of the impact of those events for Europe as a whole. Particular consideration was needed of how to address the long-term consequences of the seizure of personal information in an armed conflict and the illegitimate use of that data in the future. This was an issue that would remain even after the end of hostilities.

4. Closing by the Chair

The Chair explained that there would be a presentation of the broad lines of the proposals and their specific measures at the plenary meeting the following day. A revised draft of the proposals would be prepared reflecting the input from the meeting, for further discussion at the next meeting of the Working Group in two weeks' time.