



# Conference on the Future of Europe

## SUMMARY RECORD

### **Working Group on 'Digital Transformation', Chaired by Ms Elina Valtonen, national Parliaments (Finland)**

**Friday 4 March 2022, 9:00 to 11:00**

#### **1. Introductory remarks of the Chair**

This fourth meeting of the Working Group was chaired by Ms Elina Valtonen, national Parliaments (Finland), and took place in remote format. The meeting was web streamed. The Chair opened the meeting referring to the shocking events of the last week following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and stressed that all her thoughts are with the people in the Ukraine. She underlined that these events also reinforced the need for the work on the future of Europe.

The Chair explained that this additional meeting was intended to address the last of the three pillars under which the work on Digital Transformation was organised so far, namely 'Strengthening the Economy'. Previous discussions had focussed on 'Protecting our Society' and 'Empowering People'. Discussions would therefore still focus on input from the digital platform this time. The Chair informed that the European Citizens' Panel on 'A stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation' had finished its work and that the Panels' recommendations will be at the heart of the discussions of the Working Group meeting on 11 March 2022. The summary record of the last meeting was approved. A citizen's representative asked to hold any potential additional meetings at a time that does not interfere with working hours (best after 18:00).

#### **2. Presentation of input from the Digital Platform and of ongoing initiatives**

The Chair presented the main themes and ideas from the Digital Platform relating to 'Strengthening the Economy', divided in into three sub-topics: Digital innovation, Digital economy, and Education and training, as well as related ongoing initiatives at EU level.

Under digital innovation ideas relating to blockchain (such as an EU blockchain platform, better regulation for cryptocurrencies or a digital euro), artificial intelligence and data and a European Silicon Valley (mentioning for example GAIA-X or Kickstarter) were mentioned. Under the theme of digital economy, digital infrastructures to support the economy (including various forms of open source and Data as a Service (DaaS)), improving market conditions for enterprises of all sizes, including start-ups (SME's, digital ID for B2B) and a certificate for ethical AI and Tech were mentioned. In relation to education and training, platforms for education and training (online courses, eduTech), a digital platform for skills (certification and recognition of skills, cross-border movement) and digital competence of companies came up.

The Chair then referred to some of the existing initiatives in the area of strengthening the economy. These included the Digital Europe Programme and European Digital Innovation Hubs to boost innovation. The Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, the Artificial Intelligence Act and the Data Act, designed to regulate better the digital economy, were all now in the legislative process. The Digital Compass and the Coordinated Plan for AI set out and promoted the EU's strategic objectives. As regards education and training, the Digital Compass included targets for 2030 in terms of Europe's digital skills, while the Digital Education Action Plan aimed to boost the digital education ecosystem and the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform provided open access to information and resources.

### 3. Discussion

In the subsequent discussion, Working Group members stressed the following points:

- The three pillars of **'Protecting our Society', 'Empowering People' and 'Strengthening the Economy'** were considered useful in ensuring that the digital transformation created a society where everyone feels included.
- It was considered important to bring **democracy into the digital sphere** and to ensure that it reflected **European values**. What is illegal offline should be illegal online. The proposed Declaration on European Digital Rights and Principles was mentioned in this context. The human-centric principle should be the driving force behind the digital transformation. It was also considered that Europe should cooperate with other like-minded countries to create global digital standards with European values at their core and take a leading role in this regard. Ongoing legislative initiatives such as the Artificial Intelligence Act were pointed to as having a dual purpose of promoting innovation, while protecting fundamental values. An ambitious approach was advocated in order to find a **European way to create trust** in the digital world, protect human and consumer rights, and ensure technological developments to enable better participation in society, avoiding control and discrimination.
- The importance of coordinated action to boost the **security and resilience of Europe's digital infrastructure** were raised by several members, in particular in light of the current crisis. Digital security should develop hand in hand with the growth of the digital economy, to ensure its resilience.
- Members also considered that recent geopolitical events highlighted the importance of **ensuring strategic and technical autonomy**, through investment in innovation and strengthening of the supply chain (such as for microelectronics or chip supply chain).
- Several members stressed the importance of **education and digital skills** to ensure society benefits as a whole from technological innovation. In this context the need was raised to involve women and girls in the digital transformation, as well as the need to reach all age groups and types of education, including university research. The example of an Irish programme for primary schools was mentioned, that encourages children to learn about EU culture, languages and history and it could be extended to digital elements. Education can also help to do away with resistance to change and to ensure an inclusive digitalisation.

- Mention of the **'digital first' principle** was made, which requires that services be provided digitally wherever possible, unless otherwise requested.
- The possible **link between the ideas now discussed and the recommendations from the Citizens Panel** was raised, referring in particular to those recommendations on **smart working**, where measures could strengthen the economy by safeguarding against the movement of online jobs outside Europe, and digital skills (recommendations 7 and 8).
- Some members stressed the need for a **strong digital economy**, and underlined that **investment in innovation ecosystems** was needed throughout all regions, to spread the benefits of digital transformation equitably across Europe. Innovation can help to push EU in the future, SMEs should be able to innovate, be agile and free from bureaucracy. Data in the platform economy should be used for the benefit of all, to open up new business opportunities.
- Reference was made also to the **strengthening of the electric infrastructure** to promote the take-up of electric vehicles.
- Experiences in Finland with the **ID and digital wallet** were mentioned as important tools also in cross-border businesses and e-services and in both the public and private sectors.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The Chair thanked all for the fruitful discussion. The Working Group meeting on 11 March would focus on the recommendations coming from the Citizens' Panel and the Chair invited all Members to read them. She also indicated that the work of the Working Group now moves into the process to develop proposals for the Plenary.

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