European Economic and Social Committee

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the mid-term review on the implementation of the digital single market strategy – A connected digital single market for all
[COM(2017) 228 final]

Rapporteur: **Antonio LONGO**

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Consultation	European Commission, 05/07/2017
Legal basis	Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Single Market, Production and Consumption
Adopted in section	04/10/2017
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Plenary session No	529
Outcome of vote	
(for/against/abstentions)	111/0/0

1.   **Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1   The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) supports the proposal to revise the *digital single market strategy* and acknowledges the considerable efforts made by the Commission in legislative initiatives to achieve the EU's objectives for technological, economic and social growth.

1.2   Nevertheless, the EESC voices its concern at delays in the adoption and implementation of the 35 actions and legislative initiatives submitted, which could widen the *gap* in technology and in the EU's competitiveness vis-à-vis global competitors.

1.3   The EESC backs the Commission's proposal to incorporate three new legislative initiatives on online platforms, the European data economy and cybersecurity into the digital single market strategy. The Committee recommends an integrated approach to this that takes on board the need to boost competitiveness and protect digital rights in both the internal market and third countries.

1.4   The EESC stresses the need to strengthen the *social dimension*[1] of the digital single market strategy. It is only through European-level governance involving national governments, the social partners and civil society as a whole that it will be possible to tackle the challenges and risks inherent in the digital revolution, in the process safeguarding vulnerable people and offering greater opportunities to individuals and businesses.

1.5   The EESC hopes that, whilst respecting national competences here, the EU will launch a major plan for digital education and training, providing everyone with the cognitive tools they need to cope with the transition. The plan should cover education of all types and at all levels, from teacher training to curriculum revision and teaching methods, and should be closely linked to a system of lifelong training designed to update or convert workers' skills. Special attention should also be paid to managers, by launching advanced training courses in collaboration with universities.

1.6   The digital revolution will transform every aspect of work: organisation, the place of work, tasks, timing, conditions and contracts. In the EESC's view, social dialogue can play a key role in this process and it would call on the Commission, together with the social partners, to set the ball rolling by exploring the medium- and long-term prospects and identifying robust strategies to guarantee decent wages, good jobs, a sound work-life balance and widespread access to social security.

1.7   The EESC welcomes the recent successes notched up in the digital sector, but calls on national and European institutions to make sure that regulations (such as *the abolition of retail roaming surcharges*) are properly and fully implemented and to push on with work to reduce fragmentation and distortion. In this respect, the EESC would advise the Commission to publish at the earliest opportunity a regulation enabling portability of online content.

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[1]   OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 10, points 3.8 and 3.9.

1.8   The Committee stresses the importance of closing the infrastructure, regional and cultural *digital divide* as soon as possible, as it now acts as a brake on the EU's economic and social development and a source of inequality in the living conditions and opportunities for individuals and businesses. The funding offered so far is substantial, but not enough to cover all the EU's development needs.

1.9   The Committee reaffirms that internet access is a fundamental right for everyone, as well as an indispensable tool of social inclusion and economic growth, and so must be ranked among universal services with no further delay.

1.10   The EESC calls on the Commission to speed up implementation of the e-Government and e-health strategies, both because these are a prerequisite for European digital development and because of the positive impact they will have on the quality of services and people's lives.

1.11   The Committee thinks that SMEs should be given more help, since using digital is already a sine qua non for staying in the market. Moreover, support for companies cannot fail to include an ad hoc strategy for *start-ups* based on three key objectives: simpler rules, networking and easier access to financing.

1.12   The Committee calls on the Commission to bolster consumer rights protection across the EU, while ensuring that harmonising legislation does not result in lower standards of protection where this is already established and satisfactory.

1.13   The EESC considers cybersecurity to be a priority for European sovereignty and competitiveness, as it affects every aspect of the digital environment. The Committee recommends that the Commission proposal stipulate a marked improvement in standards of prevention, deterrence, response, crisis management and resilience with regard to EU fundamental rights, laying the groundwork for stronger cooperation between Member States and with third countries.

2.   **The state of play in the digital single market**

2.1   The European Commission has drawn up 35 legislative proposals set out in the digital single market strategy[2] since May 2015, many of which have yet to be implemented as they are either still being negotiated by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council or they have not yet been put into effect in the individual Member States. The communication on the mid-term review of the digital single market strategy takes stock of the initiatives undertaken and the results achieved.

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[2]   COM(2015) 192 final.

2.2   The most significant initiatives already implemented or yet to be implemented include:

- the *abolition of retail roaming surcharges*[3] from 15 June 2017;
- *cross-border portability of online content services*[4] from the first few months of 2018;
- the *removal of unjustified geo-blocking*[5] detrimental to consumers.

2.3   The Commission considers that it is of paramount importance to implement the *connectivity package*[6], which will promote the delivery of high-quality digital infrastructure throughout the EU so as to extend the benefits of the digital revolution to all businesses and individuals.

2.4   With a view to encouraging cross-border e-commerce, it will be important to adopt the Commission's proposals to harmonise *rules on digital contracts*[7], step up cooperation between national consumer protection authorities[8], ensure affordable cross-border parcel delivery services[9], simplify the procedures for declaring VAT[10], combat unfair commercial practices and safeguard intellectual property rights, including copyright[11].

2.5   In order to reach higher standards in terms of *data protection*[12] and *confidentiality of electronic communications*[13], the Commission has adopted two ad hoc regulations which should be implemented in 2018.

2.6   The legal framework for the audiovisual sector[14] will be adapted to the requirements of the digital era by revising the *rules on copyright*[15] in order to facilitate cross-border access to content and extend the possibilities for making use of content protected by copyright in the field of education, research and culture.

3.   **Summary of the Commission's new proposals**

3.1   Given the inevitable developments in the digital world, which will entail constant updating of both infrastructure and regulations, it is vital that all users are guaranteed a safe, open and fair

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[3]   COM(2016) 399 final.

[4]   COM(2015) 627 final.

[5]   COM(2016) 289 final.

[6]   COM(2016) 587, 588, 589, 590, 591 final.

[7]   COM(2015) 634 and 635 final.

[8]   COM(2016) 283 final.

[9]   COM(2016) 285 final.

[10]   COM(2016) 757 final.

[11]   COM(2016) 593 final.

[12]   Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

[13]   COM(2017) 10 final.

[14]   COM(2016) 287 final.

[15]   COM(2016) 593 and 594 final.

digital environment. Only then will people start to have more confidence, the lack of which is still curbing the expansion of the digital single market[16].

3.2 The Commission has identified three sectors in which more decisive action by the EU is necessary and regarding which it intends to present legislative initiatives in the near future: 1) **online platforms**, 2) **the European data economy**, 3) **cybersecurity**.

3.3 *Online platforms*[17] are reshaping the digital single market to such an extent that they are taking on the role of *internet watchdogs*, as they control access to information, content and transactions. In 2017, the Commission will therefore be preparing an initiative to involve them in – and make them accountable for – internet management. This initiative will tackle in particular the issue of unfair contract terms and improper commercial practices in the relations between platforms and businesses. The taking down of illegal content will also be made quicker and more effective with the introduction of a formal *notice and takedown* system.

3.4 The *data economy* will be increasingly important for businesses, individuals and public services. In 2017, the Commission will issue two legislative initiatives on the *free movement of non-personal data across borders* and on the accessibility and *re-use of public data* and data collected using public funds. Lastly, in order to prepare the digital market for the development of the *Internet of Things*, principles will be identified to determine who is liable in the event of harm caused by high-intensity data products.

3.5 In 2017, the Commission will review the *EU's cybersecurity strategy*[18] and the mandate of the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) so that they are able to deal with the new challenges and risks. Further measures will be proposed regarding rules, certification and labelling for cybersecurity in order to protect connected devices more effectively from cyberattacks. This process will strengthen the public-private partnership.

3.6 In order to improve digital skills and employability, the Commission has called for the *New skills agenda for Europe* and the *Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition*[19] to be implemented promptly[20]. In 2018, the Commission will also be initiating the *Digital Opportunity* project to give graduates the chance to carry out cross-border traineeships in the digital sector.

3.7 The *strategy on digitising European industry*[21] will encourage cooperation and the exchange of best practice. This initiative is supported by Horizon 2020 resources (EUR 5.5 billion) and private and national investments, drawing on the public-private partnership. A number of key sectors such as energy, transport and finance will undergo significant changes, in line with sustainability and efficiency criteria.

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[16] Special Eurobarometer survey 460.

[17] COM(2016) 288 final.

[18] JOIN(2013) 1.

[19] COM(2016) 381 final.

[20] 2016/C484/01.

[21] COM(2016) 180 final.

3.8 The *e-Government 2016-2020* plan[22] will assist the digital transition of public services at national and European level. The Commission expects to see the biggest changes in the health sector, as a result of the right to seek treatment in any EU country (digital medical records and prescriptions) and the increasing use of technology to support doctors (for analysis, operations, treatment, etc.).

3.9 In order to strengthen its position in the global arena, the EU has earmarked more funds for research and innovation (R&I) and launched two major technological initiatives: *cloud computing* for sharing and re-using knowledge, and *quantum technologies* for solving calculations more complex than those currently tackled by supercomputers.

3.10 The Commission believes that the digital single market strategy will become increasingly important in relations between the EU and third countries: it will safeguard new digital rights, combat digital protectionism and promote initiatives to combat the global *digital divide*.

4. **General comments**

4.1 The EESC acknowledges the considerable efforts made by the Commission in legislative initiatives to achieve the digital single market strategy's objectives for technological, economic and social growth. The Committee considers that this mid-term review is crucial for promoting the implementation of this strategy by making it less fragmented and reducing distortions.

4.2 The EESC welcomes the results achieved recently, such as the abolition of retail roaming surcharges[23], cross-border portability of online products[24] and the removal of unjustified geo-blocking[25]. These initiatives will help improve the EU's image, although many problems have yet to be resolved in order to guarantee consumer rights and a level playing field for businesses.

4.2.1 However, the Committee notes that in many Member States the process of abolishing roaming surcharges is patchy and uneven, which manifestly harms consumers and the EU's image. In a number of countries, consumer associations complain of attempts to get round the ban, mainly by restricting the amount of gigabytes available for surfing. The EESC therefore calls on the Commission to scrupulously monitor this process and bolster and speed up methods and deadlines for implementation.

4.2.2 As regards cross-border portability of online content, the EESC hopes that the provisional agreement between the Council and the Commission, adopted by the European Parliament on 18 May this year, will soon be implemented in practice. The agreement includes a regulation introducing a common EU approach to portability of online content, so that subscribers will be

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[22] COM(2016) 179 final.

[23] OJ C 24, 28.1.2012, p. 131; OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 162.

[24] OJ C 264, 20.7.2016, p. 86.

[25] OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 93.

able to access and use this when they are temporarily in a Member State other than the one where they are resident.

4.3 The EESC is concerned that only a few of the legislative proposals presented by the Commission with regard to the digital single market strategy have actually been implemented. This is a significant curb both on the assessment of the strategy as a whole and on the EU's realistic prospects for growth and competitiveness. The Committee calls on all the institutions involved in the *co-decision* process to speed up negotiations and trusts that the Member States will implement the rules in a timely and consistent fashion.

4.4 The EESC maintains that the digital revolution will dramatically change people's lives and the way of doing business, producing and marketing, with long-term effects that are difficult to foresee at this time, in particular on the labour market and employment. Digitisation will change work organisation, the place of work, tasks, times, conditions and contracts. The Committee therefore stresses the need to strengthen the *social dimension*[26] of the digital single market strategy. Only then will it be possible to see all the challenges and risks inherent in the digital revolution and give everyone the chance to reap the benefits and opportunities.

4.5 The EESC considers it crucial to launch at the earliest opportunity a major plan for digital education and training, providing everyone with the cognitive tools they need to cope with the transition. Whilst it is aware of the specific national remit in this area, the EESC hopes that the programme will start in schools, building on teachers' knowledge, adapting curricula and teaching methods to digital technologies (including *e-learning*) and providing all pupils with high-quality training. The programme will naturally include provision for lifelong learning with the aim of adjusting or updating all workers' skills[27].

4.6 In the Committee's view, the business world will have to act swiftly to adapt its own digital skills, paying particular attention to cybersecurity issues. In this respect, the EESC thinks that the EU should assist firms providing high-level training for managers by drawing on the support of academic experts, so as to enhance knowledge and awareness of the risks of data theft and computer crime. The EESC also believes it is important to support the training of IT technicians responsible for security by providing special platforms for simulating cyber-attacks and testing their response capability.

4.7 Despite the recommendations issued in 2015[28], the EESC notes that a number of key challenges for the delivery of the digital single market have not yet been addressed properly. Improved digital skills, IT literacy, the digitisation of businesses and *e-Government* are still prerequisites for full, shared and balanced development.

4.8 The EU has invested – and is continuing to invest – many billions in research and innovation, as well as in the digital sector. Even so, set against the Commission's estimates of what is needed

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[26] OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 10, points 3.8 and 3.9.

[27] SOC/561 – The role of social partners and CSOs in new forms of work, rapporteur: Salis Madinier (not yet published in the OJ).

[28] OJ C 71, 24.2.2016, p. 65, *A digital single market strategy for Europe*, points 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.8.

(about EUR 155 billion), we fall far short of the investment levels needed to ensure sturdy and even development in the digital sector to match the main global *competitors*. This is why the Commission has often said that it intends to turn to Public Private Partnerships (PPP) to plug the investment *gap*.

4.8.1 The EESC believes that, while PPPs are unquestionably an important lever for development and innovation, they cannot be expected to solve every problem. It therefore calls on the EU institutions to be more energetic in terms of action and financing in areas that are *less geared to the market*, as well as in all those initiatives (such as the CEF programme) designed to establish high added value infrastructure that may, however, only provide a return much later.

4.9 Taxing digital multinationals has been hotly debated and the subject of robust institutional initiatives for some time now. National tax systems, in particular, seem not always to properly tax the profits these companies generate within the EU. The Committee calls on the Commission to find responses that, while complying with the subsidiarity principle, will strike a balance between the need to tax profits fairly and the need to avoid hamstringing innovation and development.

4.10 The EESC reiterates the importance of bridging the *digital divide*, which runs the risk of becoming one of the main factors of economic, employment and social exclusion. The EU strategies on digital education and training (the *New Skills Agenda for Europe* and the *Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition*) therefore need to be implemented promptly. With this in mind, the EESC would urge the Commission to ensure that the Member States implement this process swiftly and correctly.

4.11 The Committee reaffirms the principle that internet access is a fundamental right for everyone, as well as an indispensable tool of social inclusion and economic growth. For this reason, high-speed internet access must be ranked among universal services with no further delay[29]. The EESC also believes that the phenomenon that is the digital revolution can only be mastered with the active involvement of the public, who need to be conscious of the opportunities and risks the internet provides.

4.12 It is therefore important that the EU actively support and participate in the annual Internet Governance Forum, which will meet next in Geneva in December 2017 under the heading *Shape Your Digital Future!* to discuss how the opportunities afforded by the internet can be maximised while facing up to emerging risks and challenges.

4.13 The EESC endorses the *connectivity package*[30] and particularly welcomes the initiatives to reduce the regional *digital divide* (Wifi4EU) and guarantee good quality digital communications (5G). Specifically, the Committee thinks WiFi4EU is crucial to ensuring that the digital single market really reaches everyone. It therefore hopes that this pilot project, for which

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[29] OJ C 161, 6.6.2013, p. 8.

[30] The EESC has drawn up an opinion on each of these proposals, grouped together to ensure consistency in terms of approach and content: OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 51; OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 56; OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 65; OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 69; OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 74.

EUR 125 million has been allocated so far, becomes a structural component of EU policies, with its budget adjusted so as to guarantee that everyone, including people living in areas that are of little interest to the market (islands, mountainous and remote areas, etc.) has a good internet connection.

4.14   The EESC endorses the proposal to involve **online platforms** in a wide-reaching project to make them responsible players in a fair and transparent internet ecosystem. However, this process cannot disregard the need to reduce legislative fragmentation, taking into account the impact on businesses (unfair competition), workers (contracts) and consumers[31] (cross-border disputes) and maintaining the standards achieved.

4.15   The EESC considers that the **European data economy** is one of the sectors in which the gap between the EU and global digital innovation leaders is clearest. The Committee supports the proposal to establish a legislative framework, provided that this framework is also geared to *cloud computing*[32]*, artificial intelligence* and *the Internet of Things*, *takes account of contractual freedom – removing obstacles to innovation –* and receives appropriate EU funding.

4.16   The EESC considers **cybersecurity** to be a priority, since it affects all fields of the digital environment and is crucial to ensuring European sovereignty, something that cannot be achieved without *digital autonomy* in both data collection and management and the equipment actually used to control and monitor this process. Given the vast range of areas affected, the EESC believes that funding for cybersecurity needs to be substantially increased so as to transcend obstacles to research, bring sensitive industrial sectors (transport, manufactured goods with a high added value, etc.) on board and help Member States to shore up their digital defences.

4.17   Cyberterrorism and cybercrime are now a danger for all economies and governments. The Committee recommends that the proposed review of the cybersecurity strategy stipulate a marked improvement in standards of prevention, deterrence, response, crisis management and resilience with regard to EU fundamental rights, laying the groundwork for stronger cooperation between Member States and with third countries.

4.17.1 The EESC supports the approach taken by the Commission, believing that all digital products and connected systems must be secure from the moment that they enter the market, and would like to see the swift adoption of the measures announced.

4.17.2 The Committee endorses the Commission's proposal to extend the mandate of ENISA[33] and adapt it to the new global threats. In particular, the EESC considers that the revision of European strategies on cybersecurity requires ENISA to communicate more openly and transparently with the public and organised civil society in order to enhance its initiatives and work.

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31   OJ C 75, 10.3.2017, p. 119.

32   OJ C 487, 28.12.2016, p. 86.

33   OJ C 75, 10.3.2017, p. 124.

5. **Specific comments**

5.1   Although 90% of European businesses require digital skills, in 2016 only 44% of Europeans and 37% of workers had them at adequate levels. Furthermore, almost half of European businesses fail to provide further training for their employees, thereby harming workers and undermining the competitiveness of the business[34]. The EESC therefore reiterates the urgent need to use ad hoc resources to fund a major strategy in the area of education and digital training[35], with particular reference to the gap separating *digital natives* and older people[36], and more generally supporting and guiding anyone who is not yet "digitised", whatever their age or condition.

5.2   When it comes to the fallout on jobs, there is also a real possibility that robotisation will lead to an overall reduction in jobs, progressively taking over all repetitive and "less" creative work[37]. The EESC therefore calls on the Commission to use the European social dialogue to explore ways to guarantee decent wages, a sound work-life balance, good jobs and widespread access to social security[38].

5.2.1   To meet the challenge of digitisation, it will be essential to take action on education and training, coming up with ad hoc Europe-wide mechanisms to redeploy workers whose jobs are given to machines or rendered obsolete by robotisation and providing adequate social safety nets to guarantee that they can live decently while retraining. It will also be crucial to include these measures in a broad, elastic and resilient strategy that can respond swiftly and effectively to changes caused by the digital revolution so that we control it rather than being controlled by it.

5.3   The EESC reiterates its support for the action plan on *e-Government*, which aims to provide user-friendly, personalised and cross-border digital services. However, the Committee is of the view that these objectives cannot as yet be achieved given the delays in implementing the strategy at national level and the absence of a comprehensive and *interconnected* Europe-wide digital infrastructure. The Committee notes the persistence of problems with the "*one-off*" principle and delays in establishing a *single digital gateway*. The Committee also reiterates the requirement to guarantee *updates* in line with the most up-to-date technology and the need for more openness towards users as regards the possibility to change or delete their own data (*right to be forgotten*)[39].

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[34]   European Commission, *Digital Transformation Scoreboard*, 2017.

[35]   OJ C 173, 31.5.2017, p. 1, OJ C 173, 31.5.2017, p. 45.

[36]   OJ C 389, 21.10.2016, p. 28.

[37]   "The Risk of Automation for Jobs in OECD Countries: A Comparative Analysis", OECD, 2016. A lively debate is being waged about the impact of the digital revolution on employment levels. While the OECD estimates a 9% fall in the number of jobs (those deemed most repetitive), other studies – such as those of the World Bank and other institutions – see either an increase in the number or new jobs making up for those lost. All the studies, however, accept the principle that the world of work will undergo major changes and agree on the need to adopt timely and resilient countermeasures.

[38]   OJ C 13, 15.1.2016, p. 161.

[39]   OJ C 487, 28.12.2016, p. 99.

5.4   The Committee has identified similar problems in *e-health* and *e-Government*. The EESC therefore proposes to encourage the roll-out of advanced digital infrastructure, develop cooperation with R&I and ensure that users and medical professionals are more involved[40].

5.5   The EESC supports the communication on *digitising European industry*, pointing out that no Member State on its own is in a position to exploit all the opportunities of the digital revolution. Conversely, the EU can stand up to its main global *competitors* provided that it prepares a common strategy to reinforce Europe's industrial base (*Industry 4.0*) as an independent component of competitiveness, attract investment, increase the number of jobs and stay focused on the objective of industrial output comprising 20% of European GDP by 2020[41].

5.6   The Committee calls on the Commission to support digital innovation in all companies, with particular attention to SMEs which could reap considerable benefits (simplification and less red tape), but points out that without adequate support and help they risk being squeezed out of the market. Digitisation is in fact already a sine qua non for every company to stay in the market – although this will not be sufficient in itself – and SMEs, which have fewer instruments and resources, could find it more difficult to cope with the change.

5.7   The EESC considers that *start-ups,* which are important for digital innovation, economic growth and jobs, need to be supported with help for development and *scaling up*. In particular, the Committee recommends a cross-cutting approach to the various types of business, based on three key objectives: simpler rules, networking and easier access to financing[42].

5.8   The EESC considers that cross-border e-commerce is one of the key sectors for the development of the digital single market. The Committee reiterates its request for more decisive action to make parcel delivery services affordable for everyone[43]. It also recommends harmonising the rules on digital contracts more effectively, owing to the choice of legislative instrument (two directives), which might lead to confusion without actually simplifying the regulatory framework[44].

5.9   The EESC welcomes the information provided by the Commission on the results achieved with regard to consumer protection through the *Online Dispute Resolution Platform*[45], but considers that much remains to be done to increase awareness of the platform and bolster consumer confidence in e-commerce. In particular, the EESC would like to see out-of-court – especially cross-border – resolution tools made stronger. Measures are also needed on data protection[46],

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40   OJ C 13, 15.1.2016, p. 14.

41   OJ C 389, 21.10.2016, p. 50.

42   INT/812, *The Start-up and Scale-up Initiative*, Erik Svensson and Ariane Rodert, 2017, not yet published in the Official Journal.

43   OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 106.

44   OJ C 264, 20.7.2016, p. 57.

45   According to the Commissioner, Ms Jourova, more than 24 000 disputes were resolved in the first year. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-727_en.htm

46   OJ C 288, 31.8.2017, p. 107.

audiovisual media services[47], combating fraud and upholding copyright[48], with a focus on safeguarding users – particularly the most vulnerable – from cyberbullying, *fake news* and all forms of incitement to violence.

5.10 The Committee also welcomes the process initiated by the Commission to harmonise consumer protection at European level, provided that this does not drag down high standards of consumer protection and aims to secure an overall improvement in digital consumer protection in the EU.

5.11 The EESC calls on the Commission to make the digital single market strategy increasingly cross-cutting, integrating it into other sectors and strategies which are critical to Europe's development, such as energy, the circular economy[49] and transport[50] within the broader context of the United Nations' sustainable development goals. It could in fact be key to achieving the objectives of sustainability, simplification and greater efficiency.

5.12 The EESC believes that the EU needs to boost investment in R&I in order to be able to compete with digital innovation leaders. The initiatives to strengthen the infrastructure are important but not decisive. Specifically, Europe must roll out *cloud computing*[51] as soon as possible, in line with the *Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World* strategy. The Committee also supports the move to keep developing quantum technologies and artificial intelligence[52].

5.13 The EESC endorses the Commission's decision to develop the external dimension of the digital single market strategy, but feels that so far very little has been done in this sector. It would particularly like to see action taken on two levels:

– *a definition of new relationships with digital competitors.* The EU must protect digital rights, combat digital protectionism and be at the forefront of a global alliance to promote cybersecurity. This process will play a key role in the definition of new global governance;

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[47] OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 157.

[48] OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 27.

[49] OJ C 264, 20.7.2016, p. 98.

[50] TEN/621, *Cooperative Intelligent Transport Systems*, 2017, not yet published in the Official Journal. TEN/632: *Implications of the digitalisation and robotisation of transport for EU policy-making* (not yet published in the Official Journal).

[51] OJ C 487, 28.12.2016, p. 86.

[52] INT/806, *Artificial intelligence*, 2017, not yet published in the Official Journal.

– *promotion of digital development*. Digitisation can be an important driver of growth capable of combating the causes of war, poverty and migration. The EESC also considers that meeting most of the UN sustainable development goals requires full-scale and widespread use of digitisation that actively involves countries and individuals, and not only the richest and most advanced. Reducing the technology gap, therefore, must be a priority for the EU at global level and not just in terms of cross-border cooperation.

Brussels, 18 October 2017

Georges DASSIS
The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

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