

**Committee of the Regions****EDUC-V-003****86th plenary session
5 and 6 October 2010****OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions
on the
DIGITAL AGENDA FOR EUROPE****THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

- welcomes the Digital Agenda for Europe, one of the seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The overall aim of the Digital Agenda is to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra-fast internet and interoperable applications. The implementation of the Digital Agenda depends on the right level of ambition and commitment, which will empower Europe to build a new economic model based on knowledge, a low-carbon economy and high employment;
- notes that Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) are amongst the main recipients of the agenda's recommendations and can be key drivers for its implementation. The priorities of the Digital Agenda for Europe at local and regional level are prerequisites for the quality of life and social and economic activity of citizens and will stimulate more efficient and personalised public services as well as local businesses;
- emphasises that the Digital Single Market is a cornerstone of the Digital Agenda for Europe that will make it possible to create a growing, successful and vibrant pan-European market for the creation and distribution of legal digital content and online services, as well as giving consumers easy, safe and flexible access to digital content and service markets;
- welcomes the Commission's initiative to simplify copyright clearance, management and cross-border licensing by enhancing governance, transparency and pan-European licensing for online rights management, creating a legal framework to facilitate the digitisation and dissemination of cultural works in Europe;
- points out that, when building the internet infrastructure and developing the services it carries, it will be crucial to ensure that security requirements are met at every level so as to guarantee optimum levels of privacy and protection of personal data. It is important here to prevent any unauthorised tracking of personal information and profiling.

Rapporteur

Markku Markkula (FI/EPP), Member of the Espoo City Council

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A Digital Agenda for Europe
COM(2010) 245 final

I. INTRODUCTION

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the Digital Agenda for Europe, one of the seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The overall aim of the Digital Agenda is to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra-fast internet and interoperable applications. The implementation of the Digital Agenda depends on the right level of ambition and commitment, which will empower Europe to build a new economic model based on knowledge, a low-carbon economy and high employment;
2. notes that Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) are amongst the main recipients of the agenda's recommendations and can be key drivers for its implementation. The priorities of the Digital Agenda for Europe at local and regional level are prerequisites for the quality of life and social and economic activity of citizens and will stimulate more efficient and personalised public services as well as local businesses;
3. underlines that, among the public sector players, LRAs are the closest to ordinary people and are responsible for the most important services that affect citizens' welfare. LRAs urgently need to be able to harness new technological potential, especially in view of the economic crisis and changes in demographic structure and people's needs. Together, LRAs and associated business activities and the third sector may have the best opportunities to exploit innovation. The effectiveness with which the knowledge produced by universities and research centres is applied at local and regional level is of critical importance;
4. recalls that the CoR has always called for investment in ICT research in order to ensure the growth and development of new businesses and believes that only the effective use of ICT can speed up innovation in answering key Europe-wide socio-economic challenges;
5. recognises that online government services have, to date, consisted too much in transferring paper-based bureaucracy online. The EU and Member States should be forerunners, spearheading efforts at European and national level in close collaboration with LRAs to bring about greater change in governmental procedures and structures by using ICT to improve the meaningfulness, quality and productivity of work and efficiency of public authorities and to reduce red tape for the general public and business;
6. considers that the actions proposed in the Communication, as they stand, do not appear to raise any issue regarding their compliance with either the subsidiarity or proportionality principles; stresses, however, that regional and local authorities should be systematically involved in the conception, implementation and governance of the measures designed to put the Digital Agenda for Europe into effect (particularly concerning the action areas Interoperability and Standards, Fast and ultra fast internet access, Enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion and ICT-enabled benefits for EU society for example in relation to e-Government services, climate change and intelligent transport systems).

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective implementation a must

7. welcomes the aim of the Digital Agenda for Europe to make Europe a powerhouse of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth on the global stage;
8. recalls the Council conclusions on the Digital Agenda for Europe (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council meeting on 31 May 2010)¹, which states inter alia that:
 - Europe should encourage the digital economy in order to use its enabling and cross-sectoral capability to increase the productivity and competitiveness of other sectors and to take advantage of ICT to better meet global challenges such as the transformation to a low carbon and resource-efficient economy and the creation of more and better jobs,
 - the Digital Agenda for Europe plays a key role within the "Europe 2020 Strategy" and should be consistent with the other components of this strategy and with other forthcoming flagship initiatives such as the "Innovation Union" and "An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era",
 - Europe's competitive position needs to be strengthened in this important sector through reinforcing efforts on ICT Research and Development and Innovation and boosting the knowledge triangle,
 - the Commission and the Member States are invited to seek ways to enhance horizontal coordination between concerned institutions at both the EU and national level in order to improve the implementation of the Digital Agenda for Europe;
9. recalls the European Parliament resolution of 5 May 2010 on a new Digital Agenda for Europe states: "Europe will only reap the benefits of this digital revolution if all EU citizens are mobilised and empowered to participate fully in the new digital society and the person is placed at the core of the policy action" and "whereas this digital revolution can no longer be thought of as an evolution from the industrial past but rather as a process of radical transformation"²;
10. acknowledges that the Information Society has been a tremendous accelerator of economic and social progress. The required transition from an Information Society to a Green Knowledge Society can even be seen as a type of paradigm shift. The importance of the Digital Agenda for Europe can be illustrated by the fact that the successful implementation of this flagship is a prerequisite for the success of the other EU 2020 Strategy flagship initiatives;

¹ Council conclusions on the Digital Agenda for Europe (Transport, Telecommunications And Energy Council meeting on 31 May 2010) http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/trans/114710.pdf.

² European Parliament resolution of 5 May 2010 on a new Digital Agenda for Europe: 2015.eu. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2010-0133&language=EN&ring=A7-2010-0066>.

11. recognises that the quality of society is largely determined by its capacity to generate genuine learning and working together and to produce new visionary knowledge. This being the case, our society imposes entirely new requirements on work methods, work cultures, information validity, media literacy, etc;
12. notes that digitalisation and globalisation have changed business processes rapidly. OECD studies show that ICT is having far-reaching impacts on economic performance and the success of individual firms, in particular when it is combined with investment in skills, organisational change, innovation and new business creation³;
13. stresses that the implementation of the Digital Agenda for Europe cannot be separated from the development of lifelong learning and human capital and the measures needed to promote them. The key to success is how well and how widely across the EU work communities and the general public, i.e. individuals and different communities, can be encouraged to play an active role in creating a substantially more innovative and productive Europe. To be fully successful, innovative grassroots activities, entrepreneurship, growth-seeking companies, and, in particular, innovative public, business and third sector partnership initiatives require strong political commitment at all levels (EU, Member States, LRAs);
14. emphasises that capabilities to accelerate innovation processes and swift implementation are critical success factors in networked societies. This requires more benchmarking and cooperation between regions and cities in order to be able to meet the challenges with innovative solutions and to apply best practices to local circumstances and cultures;
15. underlines that openness, re-usability and technological neutrality should be the guiding principles when developing public services;

Using Europe's potential to the full

16. stresses that Europe's full potential for developing ICT services in the public and private sectors should be fully exploited and that ICT should be used as a means of improving local and regional authorities' services in fields such as healthcare, education, public order, security and social services. EU-backed public-private partnerships involving local and regional authorities and ICT-development SMEs in the area of public ICT services can serve as an excellent cornerstone for building up local skills and knowledge across the EU⁴;
17. recalls that the Digital Single Market offers enormous opportunities for European citizens, not only as customers but also as entrepreneurs and other knowledge professionals within creative industries and other businesses;

³ OECD, The Economic Impact of ICT – Measurement, Evidence and Implications.

⁴ CdR 156/2009 fin.

18. draws attention to the fact that implementing the Digital Agenda for Europe requires a major Europe-wide change in mental attitude: willingness to work in a horizontal and multidisciplinary fashion, overcoming traditional boundaries, breaking silos and a mindset change towards collaboration. The desired effect cannot be achieved through conventional development projects. Large-scale pioneering projects drawing top European expertise with the involvement of all stakeholders offer a way of achieving the required change. Special attention needs to be paid to the dissemination and implementation of project results at local level;
19. highlights the fact that Europe needs more real-life user-centric research and innovation. Living Labs as a platform for university-industry collaboration are a Europe-wide concept that needs to be further developed with the engagement of end users. Well-functioning service processes enable users to take an active part in research and innovation and encourage all stakeholders to engage in continuous learning. This can have a strong positive impact in renewing local level service processes and increasing regional cooperation. Implementation of the Digital Agenda should include incentives aimed at encouraging LRAs and universities to work together to develop necessary Living Labs concepts;
20. reiterates that access to high-quality broadband at affordable prices can increase the quality of life for citizens and services provided by local and regional authorities while making it easier for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to offer their products for sale. Remote regions and communities, especially the outermost ones, are expected to benefit considerably from more widespread and faster access to broadband services⁵;
21. calls for cities and regions to work together to create the critical mass needed for new innovative solutions. The EU and Member States should create favourable conditions for new types of pre-commercial procurement, thus increasing public sector readiness for incremental as well as radical innovations. Energy efficiency and intelligent traffic are examples of areas where there is a need for new radical developments to assist local applications;
22. points out that management of the built environment and urban planning are sectors with a high impact on the local economy as well as on the quality of the living environment. New developments in information management can play a crucial role in achieving the goal of establishing an ambitious new climate regime. Building Information Modelling (BIM) is actively used in facility management to provide a digital representation of the physical and functional characteristics of a facility. The concepts of BIM should be extended to regional and urban planning. It could then serve as a shared knowledge resource for an area, forming a reliable basis for life-cycle analysis, user-driven business process development and value-creating decision-making;

⁵ CdR 252/2005 fin.

A vibrant digital single market

23. emphasises that the Digital Single Market is a cornerstone of the Digital Agenda for Europe that will make it possible to create a growing, successful and vibrant pan-European market for the creation and distribution of legal digital content and online services, as well as giving consumers easy, safe and flexible access to digital content and service markets;
24. points out that opening access to public sector information benefits society as a whole. The development of new practices using linked open data is a step towards user-centric service processes. Other benefits can come in the form of innovative services, new business models and enhanced public sector efficiency, and therefore welcomes the review of the Directive on Re-Use of Public Sector Information;
25. welcomes the emergence of Europeana, Europe's online library, museum and archive, which is intended to make Europe's cultural and scientific heritage accessible to all on the internet⁶. Accessibility to Europe's cultural heritage is a key instrument in promoting understanding of cultural diversity, strengthening and uniting people in a multilingual, multicultural Europe, and increasing economic potential in areas such as tourism and learning;
26. draws attention to the fact that the lack of common European standards for electronic messages in e-Commerce, especially invoicing, is one of the biggest technical obstacles to the realisation of a working digital single market;
27. supports the proposal to revise the eSignature Directive with a view to providing a legal framework for cross-border recognition and interoperability of secure eAuthentication systems;
28. welcomes the Commission's initiative to simplify copyright clearance, management and cross-border licensing by enhancing governance, transparency and pan-European licensing for online rights management, creating a legal framework to facilitate the digitisation and dissemination of cultural works in Europe;
29. stresses the need to balance the rights of users against the rights of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) owners. IPR protection measures should not hamper users' rights to freely use digital content as they can with content in analogues format. Nor should citizens' rights to access online content or express themselves be limited by content filtering or denying access to the network in the interest of IPR protection;

⁶ COM(2009) 440 final.

Interoperability and standards

30. welcomes the proposal to reform the rules on implementation of ICT standards in Europe to allow use of certain ICT fora and consortia standards, and hopes that the Commission will provide a working definition of those standards, whether they are called open standards or open specifications;
31. agrees that Member States should implement the commitments on interoperability and standards set out in the Malmö and Granada Ministerial Declarations, especially regarding open standards and specifications;
32. stresses that local and regional authorities should be included and actively participate in wide-ranging cooperation to improve the interoperability of public administration and the effectiveness of public service delivery⁷;

Trust and security

33. emphasises that the new participative platforms and interactive co-creation services (Web 2.0 and beyond), in which users have become active players, producers or "prosumers", offer an unprecedented opportunity to unleash the creativity of Europe's citizens. It is essential to create an environment and culture of openness and trust that fosters this development;
34. points out that, when building the internet infrastructure and developing the services it carries, it will be crucial to ensure that security requirements are met at every level so as to guarantee optimum levels of privacy and protection of personal data. It is important here to prevent any unauthorised tracking of personal information and profiling⁸;
35. calls for extensive training for all staff, particularly aimed at specialist technicians (e.g. networks, systems, security, privacy, etc.), staff working directly with security procedures involving different methodologies and staff generally or indirectly involved in innovation and modernisation drives (e.g. teaching digital literacy to consumers) on trust and security related issues;
36. strongly emphasises the responsibility of content producers and the fact that the fight against illegal and harmful content must be conducted without imposing restrictions on the free flow of information (content filtering, which is used by several Member States, also blocks content it is not meant to block, and typically lacks a transparent and accountable process). Ways must be devised of protecting vulnerable users in particular. Similarly, ways must be found of monitoring harmful content and removing it from the internet at source;

⁷ CdR 10/2009 fin.

⁸ CdR 247/2009 fin.

Fast and ultra fast internet access

37. recalls that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in helping to ensure equal and affordable broadband access in areas for instance where the market fails, in leading pilot projects aimed at bridging the e-Accessibility gap, and in developing new approaches towards people-centred public eServices⁹;
38. proposes that funding and other support measures should favour the implementation of open access broadband networks that are based on a horizontally layered network architecture and a business model that separates physical access to the network from service provision. The existing optical fibre networks should be opened to competition;
39. recalls that effective information society infrastructure must be guaranteed to all members of the population regardless of where they live. Fast and operationally reliable communication links, complemented by efficient wireless mobile services, play a key role in promoting regional competitiveness, accessibility and equality between people;
40. stresses the importance of guaranteeing the availability of radio spectrum for wireless broadband services in remote and sparsely populated areas and welcomes the Commission's commitment to coordinate the technical and regulatory conditions applying to spectrum use and harmonise spectrum bands to create economies of scale in equipment markets and allow consumers to use the same equipment and avail themselves of the same services across the EU;

Enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion

41. acknowledges the ongoing transformation of the education system, where changes, even radical ones, are needed. It is no longer the job of education to provide a vast amount of information. Rather, the essence of education is learning to learn, i.e. helping people to improve their learning skills, thus enabling them to acquire and process information themselves. Here digital literacy assumes pivotal importance;
42. underlines that one of the main goals of the Digital Agenda for Europe is to promote accessibility and usability of public information and eServices. The Digital Agenda for Europe should be the driver for full integration of ICT in education and training. Digital literacy, e-skills and e-competencies require specific activities and effective learning settings for all;
43. believes that creating e-skills exchange mechanisms in Europe has the potential to engage and re-skill many additional audience groups that in some cases are currently little addressed by existing commercial or academic e-skills learning facilities. ICT-enabled possibilities for

⁹ CdR 5/2008 fin.

flexible work arrangements and remote working offer significant potential for new ways of employment for these citizen groups. Such initiatives will require public-private partnerships, in particular as commercial services and learning offerings need to be specifically adapted to the needs of individual groups;

44. emphasises the need for European regional and local pioneers in tackling the challenge of demographic ageing by applying new ICT-assisted systemic solutions and calls for innovative ICT-assisted concepts for Europe to be able to take the lead in active ageing in digitalised world;
45. stresses that libraries provide a useful and effective way of providing comprehensive information services to the general public regardless of social status. Best European practice is seen where libraries have been developed as digital cultural and information service centres and are located in places where people pass by on a daily basis, e.g. shopping centres. In view of this, the content of the new services and the new digital media must not only be planned on the basis of economic criteria but must be developed according to social and cultural needs;
46. stresses that effective implementation is only possible if it is acknowledged that the cultural and creative industries provide the content for ICTs and in this way contribute to their further development. The Digital Agenda has a key role in capitalising on the potential of these sectors and in creating a single and secure market for online content and services of a cultural and creative nature. If Europe's cultural heritage is to be better used, there has to be active support to digitalise it;

ICT-enabled benefits for EU society

47. recommends that high priority be given to developing ICT-assisted concepts and methods to disseminate and implement the results of R&D in relation to real-life processes. A good example of this kind of activity is the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme CIP, which is an excellent platform for promoting the roll-out of future internet applications. CIP should be enhanced by giving substantial additional funding for the dissemination and implementation of the results of successful projects at the local and regional level;
48. believes that using digital technology methods as a means of promoting citizen involvement is important. For example, digital discussion and working environments should be created at local and regional level where citizens could participate in the development of everyday services close to them;
49. highlights the fact that the Digital Agenda for Europe has enormous potential to act as an incentive to regions and municipalities to reform their own service and production processes in a framework of European cooperation. Regions and municipalities across Europe should overhaul their own structures, working methods and processes on the basis of benchmarking and cooperation with each other, as well as with universities and businesses. Cooperation and

financing at EU level would also permit much bolder risk-taking. The EU must adopt a new purposeful approach based on the idea that some LRAs are pioneers, active researchers, experimenters and decision-makers who develop new solutions for the future for the benefit of all;

50. strongly emphasises the importance of revamping the service processes in both the public and the private sector to reap the benefits of ICT-enabled process re-engineering. Speeding up e-Invoicing and e-Identification requires pioneers, cooperation and standardisation;

Research and innovation

51. underlines the importance of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and acknowledges that its thematic priorities – the future information and communication society, climate change and sustainable energy – are key to the EU 2020 Strategy. The EIT can have a practical impact on the local and regional level in developing and promoting new concepts and new practices for regional and local innovativeness. This requires that some LRAs be prepared to invest sufficiently in developing their own regions to become test-beds for the EIT and Living Lab activities in which different groups of citizens and communities make an active user-oriented contribution;
52. points out that even small institutions at regional and local level can produce knowledge of worldwide interest in restricted specialist areas, especially when they participate in global networks and collaborate with knowledge-based businesses¹⁰;
53. encourages the Commission to further develop the concepts of the Knowledge Triangle and Living Labs, which increase synergies between different activities, have a strong relevance to real-life challenges and problem-solving and in which the regional dimension is a natural part;
54. confirms the willingness of local and regional authorities to play an increasingly active role in promoting the applications of science, technology and innovation policy, provided that an approach is adopted across all EU programmes and projects in which key funding criteria are the mapping of existing top-level global knowledge in the field of the project and its effective utilisation;
55. suggests that lessons for innovation from university-industry forefront developments need to be applied effectively to strengthen the necessary broad competence base of knowledge professionals throughout Europe;

¹⁰ CdR 247/2009 fin.

International aspects of the Digital Agenda

56. agrees that there is a need to promote the internationalisation of internet governance and global cooperation to maintain the stability of the internet, on the basis of the multi-stakeholder model, and concurs with the Commission in its support for the continuation of the Internet Governance Forum beyond 2010;

Implementation and governance

57. believes that the Committee of the Regions, as a representative of LRAs and with close links to the latest developments and good digitalisation practices around Europe, should be accorded a pro-active role, along with LRAs and their representative associations, in the European Digital Agenda Governance Cycle (for instance in expert groups and in the annual Digital Assembly). LRA players and organisations representing them should be given a strong and prominent role;
58. notes that the Digital Agenda is also crucial to the success of the other flagship initiatives. For that reason, cooperation which cuts across different DGs and programmes must be increased substantially and funding for the implementation of the Digital Agenda must be channelled, in particular, through already existing programmes.

Brussels, 6 October 2010.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Mercedes Bresso

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

III. PROCEDURE

Title	A Digital Agenda for Europe
Reference	COM(2010) 245 final
Legal basis	Title I "The Internal market", Title IV "Free Movement of Persons, Services and Capital", Title VII "Common Rules on Competition, Taxation and Approximation of Laws", Title XVI "Trans-European Networks", Title XVIII "Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion", Title XIX "Research and Technological Development and Space" of the TFEU
Procedural basis	-
Date of Commission letter	19 May 2010
Date of President's decision	24 March 2010
Commission responsible	Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Research (EDUC)
Rapporteur	Markku Markkula (FI/EPP)
Analysis	31 May 2010
Discussed in commission	30 June 2010
Date adopted by commission	30 June 2010
Result of the vote in commission	Adopted with unanimity
Date adopted in plenary	6 October 2010
Previous Committee opinions	<p>Opinion on i2010 – A European Information Society for Growth and Employment, COM(2005) 229 final, rapporteur: Mr Georgakis (EL/PES), CdR 252/2005 fin¹¹</p> <p>Opinion on European e-Inclusion Strategy, COM(2007) 694 final, rapporteur: Mr Szalay (HU/ALDE), CdR 5/2008 fin¹²</p> <p>Opinion on Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations (ISA), COM(2008) 583 final, rapporteur: Ms Ionita (RO/EPP), CdR 10/2009 fin¹³</p>

¹¹ OJ C 192, 16.8.2006, pp. 21–24.

¹² OJ C 172, 5.7.2008, pp. 12–16.

¹³ OJ C 200, 25.8.2009, pp. 58–62.

	<p>Opinion on ICT Infrastructures for e-science; A Strategy for ICT R&D, Innovation and Research on FETs in Europe, COM(2009) 108 final, COM(2009) 116 final, COM(2009) 184 final, rapporteur: Mr Žukauskas (LT/EPP), CdR 156/2009 fin¹⁴</p> <p>Opinion on Internet of Things and Re-use of Public Sector Information, COM(2009) 278 final, COM(2009) 212 final, rapporteur: Mr Enache, CdR 247/2009¹⁵</p>
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¹⁴ OJ C 141, 29.5.2010, p. 22–26.

¹⁵ OJ C 175, 1.7.2010, p. 35–39.