Thank you very much

Dear Chair De Sutter,

Honorable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you very much for receiving me today.

It is a pleasure for me and my team to start a constructive and comprehensive exchange of views with your distinguished committee.

Honourable Members,

The digital transformation of our economy and our society advances at an unprecedented speed. We have achieved much in the previous mandate but today, we must build on this and, in the words of President von der Leyen, we must strive for more.

A Europe that strives for more is one that grasps the opportunities from the digital age within safe and ethical boundaries, placing the citizens in the driving seat.

As you all well know, the world is transformed at an unprecedented speed by digital technologies like the data and artificial intelligence, the increasing ubiquity of mobile devices, the growing reach of social and collaborative networking, the power of cloud and the increase of computational performance.

The European Union already sets the standards at a global level in terms of telecoms and data regulation, as well as the citizen-centred and ethical approach to AI.

It is therefore high time for us to accelerate the digitalisation of European public administrations at all levels, if we want to ensure the success of our ambitions for a Europe fit for the digital age.

It is our conviction that we must preserve and consolidate the achievements of the Digital Single Market Strategy and with this as a basis, build and shape fully digitalised public administrations across our Union, as an essential foundation and enabler of a Europe fit for digital.

Technological advancements give us the means like never before to reach out to the citizens. Thanks to technology, we can address the needs of citizens and of communities, in particular the most vulnerable and excluded. In this sense,

digital has the potential to transform public administrations and enable them to deliver their services in a stable, reliable and secure manner, with a citizen-driven approach at their core.

This is an opportunity to transform traditional public administrations. We can enable cost effective public administrations that will help complete the single market, by allowing businesses to operate securely across borders and by giving individuals a trusted access to services. This will help to make the four freedoms a reality internally, and reinforce the European Union's position in the global competitiveness landscape.

We can build responsive public administrations, which are close to citizens thanks to user-centric services, for which interoperability is a key enabler. This will strengthen trust and cohesion and will close the gap between citizens and institutions.

Finally, we would ensure more accountable and transparent public administrations in their policymaking and delivery functions, which will enable a dialogue between institutions and stakeholders based on evidence, fairness and trust. This will help to fight disinformation and contribute to inclusive political discussion and decision-making.

With this perspective, Commissioner Johannes Hahn received the mission to champion the objective of Digitalising European Public Administrations, starting by the European Commission itself.

The Commission will lead by example. Our own digital transformation is a unique opportunity to exploit the potential of digitalisation, to create innovative solutions for a more trustworthy, effective, efficient, transparent and secure Commission.

In this, we will concentrate on actions that will accelerate this transformation so that the Commission becomes a digital organisation, ready for the challenges of the digital era. The Digital Strategy and the Synergies and Efficiencies initiative have set a roadmap to build a digital eco-system by 2022 with the following features: secure by design, privacy by design, interoperable by design, digital by default, cross-border by default and open by default.

Further, we aim to use the internal digital Commission agenda at the service of the reform of the European public administrations. Most systems in the

European Commission link our institution to the Member States, enabling data exchange and services in different policy domains.

For instance, interoperability is seen as a priority in sectors like transport, border control and security, justice and health. The harmonisation of digital infrastructures and standards, the adoption and reuse of building block solutions and interoperability models are crucial drivers of digitisation to build cross-border digital services.

Therefore, it is important that these priorities be reflected in the next MFF so that we can continue to assess and promote existing common specifications and standards, create new ones where needed, and oversee the implementation of the European Interoperability Framework.

Our vision is to accelerate and improve the digitalisation of public administrations across the Union. This is valid for the European Commission, for the European Institutions and for European public administrations at all levels.

Our main priority must be to simplify the complex processes citizens have to deal with in their daily lives, for example cross border tax declarations, electronic ID, register themselves in a different Member State, applying for social security benefits, etc. This goes across sectors and levels of government, for example when a baby is born, and across borders for people who study or work abroad. Well-functioning digital public administrations will also cut red tape for businesses, contributing to a dynamic and competitive internal market.

We have developed a solid know-how in the past years. The European Commission has taken action on several fronts: we have directly supported public administrations across Europe in their digital transformations. We have different tools in this work: the Connecting Europe Facility and the ISA[2] Programme provide financial support. Moreover, we provide guidance, coordination and promoted standards and best practice through the EU eGovernment Action Plan and the European Interoperability Framework.

Now, it is time to look forward and see what the best next steps are, and we want to do this with you, the European Parliament.

European public administrations must take the next step towards data driven public administrations so that they are enabled to use and share data in a secure, efficient and trustworthy way. This is a key condition for the introduction of

artificial intelligence tools and better cross-domain and cross-border data availability. It is also a pre-condition to create value for citizens and businesses across Europe and for the further development of the Digital Single Market.

In a functioning internal market, public services need to be able to "follow" their users' needs across administrative entities, policy sectors and borders. This means articulating processes with the help of digital solutions in the public administrations at all levels.

The same challenges exist in different flavours in every setting across the EU and at all levels of public administration. In the Commission and in Member States, a lot of efforts and resources are deployed to address these challenges. But there is a lack of coordination which leads to duplication, fragmentation, higher costs, lower quality solutions, and sometimes new barriers for data sharing. At the core, the challenge is the same. This is why common standards and shared solutions can solve many similar issues and reduce problems of delays, cost overruns and incompatible digital solutions.

Even though the overall eGovernment and interoperability performance is moving in the right direction, the transformation and digitalisation of public administrations requires accelerated efforts, in particular regarding 'digital capacity' building, the provision of reusable and interoperable digital tools for the efficient implementation of EU policies and legislations, and improvement of the administrative and judicial cooperation.

The European Commission aims to work closely with Member States for the modernisation of public administrations in the Union, use technology to bring government closer to citizens and businesses, and to simplify public administrations' modus operandi. The four key areas where further action is needed are cross-border interoperability, user-centric public services, streamlined administrative processes and open data.

For all these reasons, we come to you today, to open paths of cooperation, as we consider that the role of the European Parliament to achieve these objectives is crucial. I therefore end by concluding that we would like to work with you and listen to your proposals, learn from your experience in your constituencies and invite you to join efforts with us to make all this happen.

Thank you very much