Ministerial level meeting on the Digital Community

18th October 2016, Brussels, Belgium

Joint Statement

Günther H. OETTINGER, European Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society, Johannes HAHN, European Commissioner for the European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations and the Ministers in charge of the Digital Economy of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Slovak Republic representing the Presidency of the Council of the EU, met in Brussels on 18th October 2016 to continue the discussion on deepening their collaboration in the area of the digital economy and society. Representatives of International Financial Institutions, as well as representatives of the partners' private sector and the civil society were also present.

The debate contributed to shaping the participants' common vision of a Digital Community, where the benefits of the EU's Digital Single Market (DSM) could be extended to the eastern European partner countries, and possibly to other EU neighbours. The participants affirmed that their vision of a Digital Community is fully in line with the Riga Summit conclusions to deliver concrete and tangible results for citizens in four key areas.

The participants welcomed the progress made in their cooperation since the 1st Eastern Partnership (EaP) Ministerial meeting on the Digital Economy on 11th June 2015.

In particular, the participants welcomed the establishment in October 2015 of the Panel on the Harmonisation of Digital Markets (HDM Panel) and called for the implementation of the HDM action plan for 2016-2017. The participants also welcomed the completion of the first gap analysis, assessing the state of the digital practice in the partner countries as compared with EU norms and the regional harmonisation recommendations.

The participants endorsed the operational conclusions of the 2nd HDM Panel, held on 17th and 18th October 2016, which reflect their cooperation priorities.

The European Commission announced the launch of EU4Digital as the vehicle to support the implementation of the roadmaps established under the Digital Community.

The participants supported the creation of EU4Digital Networks of correspondents from the partner countries and the EU Member States on jointly agreed priority topics. The networks serve as platforms for sharing best practices and experiences among partners and with the EU, promoting synergies and developing joint projects.

The participants expressed support for the work done by the network of regulators for electronic communications and its expert working groups on benchmarking, spectrum and roaming. The participants noted that Roam-like-at-home (RLAH) is being introduced in the EU as of 15 June 2017, while first data on markets' reactions are expected in spring 2018. The participants agreed that this would be the right time to start discussions on the issue of Roaming in the context of the Digital Community. Ukraine has accepted to coordinate work on Telecom Rules.

The network *EU4Digital : Trust & Security* will focus on electronic identification, digital trust services, network and information security and cybersecurity, all necessary building blocks for interoperable cross border eGovernment services; Moldova and Estonia have accepted to coordinate this work.

The network *EU4Digital : eSkills* will promote national digital skills strategies in the partner countries, notably by establishing national coalitions for digital jobs, taking into account the EU's "digital skills and jobs coalition"; Armenia and Latvia have accepted to coordinate this work.

The network *EU4Digital : ICT Innovation* will promote ICT research & innovation ecosystems in the partner countries, taking into account similar efforts in the EU under "Horizon 2020" and the "Start-up Europe" initiative. The work of this network is expected to improve sharing of research excellence and cross border investments, while offering partners' start-ups easier access to EU markets and vice versa. In this context, the participants welcomed the progress made with EaPConnect, the EU funded project which started in June 2015 and which aims to connect the research and academic communities of the partner countries with the pan European research and education network GEANT; Azerbaijan will coordinate work on ICT research & innovation.

The network *EU4Digital : eTrade* will promote interoperable electronic trade services and processes among the partners and with the EU, comprising eCommerce, eCustoms and eLogistics. In connection to this, the participants endorsed the launch of a new study to perform gap analysis in the partner countries on eTrade and eLogistics/Digital Transport Corridors, and produce regional harmonisation recommendations on these topics; Belarus, Lithuania and Azerbaijan have agreed to coordinate this work.

The participants supported the organisation of an *ad hoc* regional workshop on eHealth, aiming to identify common challenges for the partner countries and issue regional harmonisation recommendations for the Eastern Partnership; Georgia will coordinate the work on eHealth.

The participants underlined their strong commitment to deepen and intensify their digital collaboration, under a flexible governance model, and based as much as possible on existing structures and processes. In particular, the participants agreed that thematic coordination should be effected by the five regional networks. Overall progress of the digital cooperation, as well as future plans should be discussed and assessed by the HDM Panel under the corresponding EaP Platform. Political steering should be done via EaP ministerial meetings. Ministerial level meetings with the European Commission, the partner countries and the Presidency of the Council of the EU could prepare the grounds to EaP Ministerial meetings when deemed necessary.

As a next step, the participants proposed that each of the EU4Digital Networks develop a roadmap for the period 2017-2019 in their respective thematic area, focusing on concrete and achievable deliverables, which aim at improving the life of citizens and the competitiveness of businesses. Each roadmap should include annual milestones, the first being in June 2017 before the next EaP Summit. The proposed roadmaps, as well as preliminary achievements, corresponding to the first milestone, should be presented in the 2nd EaP Ministerial Meeting on the Digital Economy to be held in early summer 2017.