



Open Letter to the *Spitzenkandidaten* (Lead Contenders) for
President of the European Commission

‘The Next European Commission President Needs to be a Digital President’

European Union Digital Champions call on presidential candidates
to present a digital strategy fit for the 21st century

To the *Spitzenkandidaten* for President of the European Commission:

We are writing to you in our capacity as advisers to the European Commission in the field of digital agenda. Against this backdrop, we firmly believe that the next president of the European Commission needs to be a digital president, uniting behind this four-point agenda.

1. There is no “digital economy” – the economy is digital. The Internet and digital communications are general-purpose technologies, transforming our economies as profoundly as the steam engine did in the 18th century or electricity did in the 19th century. This calls for the next European Commission leader to streamline the digital portfolio across all key dossiers – and ultimately taking the responsibility for success in this crucial area.
2. There can be no convincing strategy for delivering growth and creating jobs without significantly accelerating Europe’s performance on digital advancement. Digital technologies and the Internet contributed to over 20% of economic growth in the world’s most advanced economies in the period 2004-2009, and looking forward, the digital sector is expected to grow seven times faster than overall European Union (EU) gross domestic product in coming years. It is also key to solving Europe’s unemployment problem: despite a record number of people out of work, employers are scrambling to find candidates with digital skills – by 2020 there will be up to one million unfilled vacancies for information and communications technology (ICT) practitioners across the EU. Closing this skills gap – and

connecting it to a generation of young digital natives that is finding entry into the labour market difficult – is an opportunity that cannot be missed. That's why we encourage the next European Commission president to continue – and build on – the **Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs**.

3. A competitive, dynamic economy operating at the leading edge of digital technologies is the only way forward – but it cannot sit on top of an outdated, under-invested digital infrastructure. Modest estimates put the price tag at up to €200 billion to meet the 2020 digital broadband targets. This investment in the very foundation of future growth and job creation can no longer be postponed. It needs to be a top priority for the incoming leadership of the European Commission, working in tandem with the member states and key stakeholders to produce a convincing time table with real deliverables and deadlines.
4. Tech entrepreneurship will be crucial in powering the economic recovery and create the jobs that Europe so urgently needs. According to the OECD, the vast majority of new jobs are created by companies five years old or younger. The app economy workforce alone is set to go from 1.8 million in 2013 to 4.8 million by 2018, more than tripling its revenues from €17.5 billion to €63 billion in the same time span. The potential is huge – and it calls on policy makers to recognise the importance of founders and start-ups in modern, dynamic economies. That is why we call on you to pledge your support to the **Startup Manifesto** and incorporate its recommendations in your political programme.

As individuals operating at the leading edge of innovation and technology, we are eager to learn more about your digital strategies and encourage you to start developing them at an early stage. We invite you to share your vision for a connected, wired and dynamic Europe as soon as possible, allowing voters to make an informed choice at the European elections on 22-25 May 2014.

Signed by:

Gilles Babinet, Digital Champion of France
Paul-Andre Baran, Digital Champion of Romania
István Erényi, Digital Champion of Hungary
Ondřej Felix, Digital Champion of the Czech Republic
Jan Gulliksen, Digital Champion of Sweden
Stelios Himonas, Digital Champion of Cyprus
Gesche Joost, Digital Champion of Germany
Kęstutis Juškevičius, Digital Champion of Lithuania
Linda Liukas, Digital Champion of Finland
Włodzimierz Marciński, Digital Champion of Poland
António Murta, Digital Champion of Portugal
Tineke Netelenbos, Digital Champion of the Netherlands
Björn Ottersten, Digital Champion of Luxembourg
Darko Parić, Digital Champion of Croatia
Gergana Passy, Digital Champion of Bulgaria
Peter Pellegrini, Digital Champion of the Slovak Republic
Aleš Špetič, Digital Champion of Slovenia
Godfrey Vella, Digital Champion of Malta
Reinis Zitmanis, Digital Champion of Latvia