



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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C(2021) 7259 final*

Dear Presidents,

The Commission would like to thank the Vlaams Parlement, which, as expressed in Declaration 51 to the Treaties, is a component of the Belgian national parliamentary system, for its Opinion on initiating a political dialogue with the Commission about the Flemish perspective on the European digitalisation agenda, and the Sénat for transmitting this Opinion.

The Opinion refers to the European digital strategy in general and to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade” {COM(2021) 118 final} in particular. With the Communication, the Commission responded to the European Council’s call from October 2020 to present a digital decade vision with ambitious goals for the European Union. As a follow-up to the Communication, the Commission is currently preparing a proposal for a Digital Decade Policy Programme to operationalise this vision. The Programme would be a governance tool to coordinate efforts between the EU, Member States and the private sector to boost European digital capacities and capabilities with the aim to empowering people and businesses to seize a human centred, inclusive, sustainable and prosperous digital future.

The Commission is pleased that the Vlaams Parlement shares the view that cooperative action at the EU level is required to accelerate the European digital transformation. It welcomes the Vlaams Parlement’s broad support for the EU’s digital ambition and 2030 targets, and takes note of the actions proposed to achieve them. The Digital Decade Policy Programme would set up an annual process to discuss and implement such actions together with Member States and the Commission. The priorities identified by the Vlaams Parlement are consistent with the Commission’s understanding of a successful digital transformation. Microchips are a key underpinning technology for secure and sustainable digitalization. To facilitate their design and production in Europe, the Commission launched the Alliance on Processors and Semiconductor technologies in

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July 2021 to bring together key actors in the field.¹ Moreover, the Digital Decade Policy Programme would introduce a framework for Multi-Country Projects to coordinate investment in electronics design, among other areas. The initial set of Multi-Country Projects listed in the Digital Compass Communication also includes a project in European Common Data Infrastructure and Services to facilitate the interoperability and sharing of data across national and sectoral borders.

The Commission fully supports Flanders' ambition to become a frontrunner in new manufacturing technologies and concepts. The Digital Decade Policy Programme would further support this ambition by accelerating progress in network deployment and cloud and edge penetration. The Digital Decade targets aim for universal Gigabit connectivity, 5G coverage of all populated areas, and deployment of 100,000 climate neutral highly secure edge nodes by 2030. The manufacturing sector in particular requires secure edge and cloud services due to the need to process highly sensitive data in strict compliance with sectoral legislation.

Like the Vlaams Parlement, the Commission deems it crucial to create an environment that facilitates the adoption of digital technologies and business models by small and medium-sized enterprises. In this context, it would like to point to the European Digital Innovation Hubs as an existing instrument to assist small and medium-sized enterprises in accessing finance, building internal capacities and skills, and complying with digital policies and regulations.

The Commission also appreciates and acknowledges the Vlaams Parlement's feedback on the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the Regulation on Artificial Intelligence, which are currently under negotiation in the European Parliament and the Council. The Commission underlines the role of these proposals to help deliver the objectives and targets outlined in the Digital Compass Communication. In particular, they would help to pave the European way for the digital decade by setting the rules framing the responsible use of digital technologies and fair digital trade.

The Commission takes due note of the Vlaams Parlement's concerns regarding disruptions in the number and nature of available jobs because of the digital transformation. To redress such disruptions, the Digital Decade Policy Programme would aim to foster both basic and advanced digital skills among European citizens and employees. The initial list of Multi-Country Projects envisions a large-scale multi-stakeholder partnership for digital skills to build a bridge between demand and supply, foster greater private and public investment, and increase the quantity and quality of specialised education and training offers. This could also include training offers to improve data processing and interpretation skills.

The Commission has taken this Opinion and other contributions received during the targeted consultation into account while preparing the proposal for the Digital Decade Policy Programme presented on 15 September 2021.

¹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/alliance-processors-and-semiconductor-technologies>

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised in this Opinion and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

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Vice-President*

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Member of the Commission*