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There is much more work to do to further prepare Europe for this digital transformation. A wide range of rules and changes will be required if the Digital Single Market is to become a reality. And, if we wish for the European economy to be able to truly compete globally, these changes are a must.
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- Posted by Anna Maria Darmanin, Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee

With the economic numbers around Europe getting worse and voters choosing against austerity, it is clear that there is both a very good reason and a groundswell of public support for measures that promote growth.

Where is growth likely to come from?

We often hear that somewhere is "booming". Right now Australia is such a place, but we cannot all just move to Australia in the hope of some economic good times. There is, however, an area of the economy, common to all European countries, that is booming. The internet and the amazing opportunities it brings, is booming. There are new business models springing up from nowhere creating jobs, spending, growth and tax receipts at an astonishing rate.

Clearly, some people, companies, cities and countries are more in tune to these times than others. Our challenge is to help all of Europe and all Europeans to push forward and find their place.

In part, this relates to something the European Commission calls eSkills [3]. eSkills are things that now separate people in the workforce just as literacy once did. It will soon be unlikely that anyone unable to use a computer to a reasonable level will be able to hold down the majority of jobs. Just a few years ago only office workers needed to use a computer. In a few years, even those that do not work will need computer skills to be able to access welfare benefits and state services. But, getting the workforce ready for a much more digital future is only one strand of this area.

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I am told that the UK, for example, leads the world in e-commerce. Napoleon is supposed to have described the English as "a nation of shopkeepers". He meant it in a disparaging way, but in a world of global electronic commerce, it seems to be quite a strength.

In contrast, my home country of Malta - a nation with strong ties to the UK - seems be missing this boat. A recent report by the Malta Communications Authority [4], the regulator of e-commerce in Malta, suggests that a majority of Maltese companies do not think that their products are suitable to

be sold online. This is despite Malta being one of the most well connected and digitally savvy EU nations. Can their products and services really be that different?

What is it that creates these differences? How can they be addressed? What can the EU do to help?

I was proud to open the 2012 eSkills Week [5] on behalf the Economic and Social Committee. It is a vital topic for the future of the European economy and it was right for the Committee to host such an event.

I am equally proud to have been asked to open the Digital Agenda Assembly 2012 [6]. It is another vital topic for the future of the European economy and I hope to be able to play a central role as it develops further.

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