

Welcome to this first parallel session. We will dive deep into the question "What will be the internet's drivers over the next decade?". Why have we decided to organise this session on the future internet? What's wrong with the internet? Why is there a mounting interest on the topics? Because societal issues with the Internet are real and growing, such as lack of trust, lock-in effects and lack of choice, as well as a lack of respect for European values such as openness, privacy, security, diversity, inclusiveness and a level playing field for all.

These issues with today's internet were not so evident 10 years ago but now they are firmly established today. For instance in the EU-28, users concerned by private companies monitoring and commercialising personal information has increased from 68% (2014) to 77% (2016). However at the same time the internet plays an ever-growing role in society and the economy. Projecting forward to 2030, I can see two extreme scenarios:

We continue using an internet largely provided and increasingly influenced by others according to their rules and their values. We have little perspective on issues that will become a problem or even have a say in how they are resolved. Europe will remain a consumer of an internet driven by big tech companies.

Or, action is taken to redirect the logic of the internet towards serving people and society. Such a human-centric internet is very different from what our competitors have in mind. It aims to increase trust in the internet. It ensures higher participation and it allows the internet to become a tool for societal integration and innovation.

Many options between them are conceivable, but the second scenario is what European citizens favour and should hence be our target.

The mounting concerns of Europeans about internet technologies and the crucial socio-economic role that the internet is expected to play in the future, appear to be contradictory trends. This growing divergence is a strong motivation for action and does merit our attention. The cardinal question now is how to build a more comprehensive strategy for the internet, a strategy which aims beyond our ongoing support for technological research and regulation. Seizing the opportunity could turn Europe into a more influential actor and provider of internet technologies, services and applications and not only remain a consumer.

With introducing this human centricity we mean an internet which delivers more to people in their various roles as citizen, as SME owner, as student or unemployed, and the many other roles in society. This human-centric approach is in contrast to today's app-, device- and company-centric internet and aims to return control back to the users. This will not lead to the frequently cited risk of fragmenting the internet, rather to building the technological and policy framework which favour services that respect certain rules and guidelines. Not acting deprives ourselves of the opportunity to develop internet technologies serving the citizen – an internet of 2030 as we like it.

Last autumn, the European Commission has put in motion an initiative it calls "Next Generation Internet". In a first step we want to pump-primes research and innovation actions which will focus on the real internet innovators, meaning the young researchers and hi-tech startups and SMEs. An action very agile, dynamic and catering for the unpredictable in its approach.

It will also be the means of practically expressing our priorities on internet governance policy, from the high-level principles of multi-stakeholder participation to practical issues such as the .eu top-level domain serving as a premium brand that stands for security and integrity on the internet.

I acknowledge the organic growth of the internet and suggest maintaining this principle. But this organic growth is not the outcome of a random process. Some do currently influence the development, and Europe should be there as well. Furthermore, there are no signs that the future internet will naturally prioritise European values such as openness, privacy, security, diversity, inclusiveness and a level playing field for all.

Europe has all assets in place to act as driver towards a human-centric future internet but will have little influence unless we have a technological, political and intellectual leadership. Choosing to take action now will create value for society, citizens, innovators and startups – more generally the young generation.

In summary, I believe we can best influence the future evolution of the internet by a combination of

- Research and innovation investments,
- specific policy actions, and,
- by raising a broad European conversation on what internet we want for our future.

In particular the last point on raising a European conversation is important. We are committed to a continuous open and frank dialogue with all stakeholders. For example: Yesterday Guido Romeo reported on work of the high-level Next Generation Internet Summit which took place at the European Parliament in early June. Next Generation Internet was also in the spot-light at the Digital Assembly some 10 days ago. And this morning we had the third meeting with the Future Internet Forum which brings together representatives of the Member states and associated countries to anchor a European initiative in the fertile national context. These are just few examples boarding the debate and bringing new stakeholders to the table.

What we propose is a modest first step.

Clearly we are not the owners of a grand master plan for how exactly to achieve the ambition of a human-centric internet in 2030. From the past we know that the evolution of the internet is unpredictable. We want to follow an agile policy making approach in which on a continuous basis we discuss, define and adjust upcoming actions.

In acting, Europe shows it has an interest in the Internet and its future evolution and is willing to address the question: 'How do we want to live in the Internet age?'

In closing, I call upon all of you to reflect on the issues I raised. Take them home and make them part of conversations you lead as much as we commit to keep a European conversation open.