

**Speaking Points**

Dear Minister Petrescu,

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

I am very pleased to participate in today's investment roundtable. I have learned from my colleagues about the excellent work you have done together since the Startup Summit in Cluj. As such, I am convinced that today's launch of the Digital Innovation and Scale-Up Initiative (DISC) for Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe—is a significant step in closing the investment gap for digital innovations in the region.

It's great to have around the table representatives from the Government of Romania, which is currently holding the EU presidency, as well as colleagues from future presidencies—Croatia, Finland, Germany and those from key international finance institutions: the EIB Group (including EIB and EIF), the EBRD and the World Bank Group (including World Bank and IFC). We are here because we all share a common goal—to promote digital innovations and entrepreneurship in the region, contributing to the strengthening and competitiveness of the European digital economy. Having you all gathered around the table, is in and of itself a significant milestone, and I thank-you for your support in moving this important agenda forward.

We all know that innovation can come from all corners of the world, and that the region holds huge, but often underutilized potential for digital innovations. In fact, the success by UiPath, Prezi, Taxify and Avast are a few examples that demonstrate that innovation, creativity and grit can emerge and overcome the great odds, of challenging and less developed digital ecosystems in the region. Make no mistake, successful startups are not a monopoly product from established tech hubs such as Paris, Berlin or Stockholm.

At the same time, there are important barriers that are currently holding back digital entrepreneurs from reaching their full potential. First, there is a substantial investment gap for the scale-up of highly innovative deep tech companies and startups. Often, these companies are considered too risky for investors, however they hold the highest growth potential and thus require more targeted financing tools and attention. As such, beyond financing, there is also a

need for technical assistance programs, which increase synergies and knowledge transfer, while strengthening the institutional capacity of public agencies to design, develop and implement digital innovation programs. Finally, we need to boost investment and enhance the enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, with a focus on cross border digital infrastructure and digital skills projects.

The objectives of today's meeting are clear. We want to make progress on the DISC investment initiative, and at the same time, we want to seek your recommendations on the best way to move forward. I also want us to agree on a concrete implementation path, leveraging our shared efforts to making DISC a driving catalyst for innovation and growth in the digital economy across Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, with positive spillover effects across the region and the globe. Particularly, given that 46% of startups incubated in this part of the world, raised financing outside of Europe and have moved their base following the foreign investment, often leaving for the US and China. By working together, we can leverage our funding and thus achieve a greater impact. We can together harness our regional talent, stop the brain drain of our best, brightest and often younger entrepreneurs, by providing greater access to capital, improving knowledge transfers and solidifying regional innovation ecosystems.

In closing, I want to extend my thanks to all of you, for contributing to shaping the DISC initiative because through it we are investing in the future of Europe.