

## 1. Opening Session – Digital Decade: is the EU on the right path?

During the opening session of the conference with Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Petra de Sutter, a interview took place to evaluate the European Union's (EU) direction in the Digital Decade. The current global geopolitical landscape and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the importance of strategic autonomy. While the EU possesses substantial potential, the panel emphasized the necessity of deliberating on the breadth of this autonomy and its implementation.

The protection of strategic assets emerged as a key concern, leading to the establishment of the EU Chips Act and the Critical Materials Act. The Belgian Presidency outlined its approach, which involves engaging operators to demonstrate the security of their products. The presidency is particularly focused on enacting the gigabit infrastructure act and adopting Council conclusions on technological priorities. The objective is to foster a sustainable and resilient digital ecosystem that prioritizes environmental considerations while remaining centered around human needs. This vision encompasses open strategic autonomy, inclusive participation (including women in digital and small and medium-sized enterprises), and the enhancement and transformation of indicators to better measure progress.

Regarding the *Gigabit Infrastructure Act*, the Deputy Prime Minister stressed the need for increased investments and a stronger strategic orientation. The ultimate aim of this act is to ensure that every EU household has access to high-speed internet (giga-speed) by 2030. This will lead to improved connectivity and the establishment of new regulations that promote cost-effectiveness, speed, and efficiency in network infrastructure.

In conclusion, the discussion highlighted the interdependence of the green and digital agendas, emphasizing the importance of aligning sustainability and innovation. Ongoing updates and advancements in innovation were identified as crucial for success in the Digital Decade.

## 2. How to implement the new EU platform laws?

The forthcoming implementation of the new EU platform laws has sparked considerable interest and raised important questions. In this panel discussion, we delved into the strategies and challenges associated with successfully implementing these regulations.

As part of the process, the Commission will make decisions in early September, identifying the companies deemed to be gatekeepers. This step aims to ensure their compliance with the obligations outlined in the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and promote fairness. Should companies fail to comply, legal recourse will be pursued.

It is crucial to emphasize that the implementation of the DMA cannot be viewed merely as a bilateral discussion between the European Commission and a select group of companies. Given the inherent asymmetry, the Commission must actively collaborate with industry players to enhance its understanding of the impact and explore potential solutions. The role of gatekeepers should not replace antitrust enforcement but rather work in conjunction with it.

It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach in implementing the DMA. Drawing from experiences in other sectors, regulators should take the lead, fostering dialogue, incentivizing collaboration, and ultimately reaching a shared understanding.

The DMA acts as a catalyst for change, introducing an element of resilience within the legal framework. It is essential to avoid solely evaluating its success based on market share, as this approach may yield unfavorable outcomes. Instead, the DMA is designed to create opportunities while maintaining a structured process that does not aim to diminish the market share of companies.

One of the significant challenges for businesses lies in effectively translating the legal text into practical implementation. The objective here is to achieve fairness, and the more evidence we can gather—such as through testing and understanding user reactions—the stronger our position becomes. Transparency plays a vital role in building trust, and a comprehensive compliance report is of utmost importance in this process.

Considering the inherent knowledge asymmetry among companies, it is essential to acknowledge the speed at which gatekeepers can adapt their technologies to comply with the DMA. This factor adds an additional layer of complexity to the implementation process.

This panel discussion has shed a light on the strategies and challenges surrounding the implementation of the new EU platform laws. By fostering collaboration, transparency, and a structured approach, we can work towards achieving the intended fairness and promoting a thriving digital ecosystem.

### **3. The role new technologies can play in supporting SMEs' growth**

In a recently conducted interview discussion on "The Role of New Technologies in Supporting SMEs' Growth," the participants explored strategies to empower small businesses through the effective adoption of technology. Recognizing the time constraints faced by SMEs, the discussion highlighted the significance of identifying tools that can assist them in their endeavors.

During the interview with Jim Rudall, Head of EMEA for Intuit Mailchimp, emphasis was placed on the potential of Intuit Mailchimp's technologies as a catalyst for enhanced productivity and effectiveness. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in Mailchimp's functionalities enables SMEs to unleash their creative potential. By leveraging AI-powered tools and harnessing large-scale data, SMEs can optimize their marketing efforts. The interview stressed the importance of dedicating time to comprehend and address the barriers hindering progress by utilizing appropriate tools.

Representatives from Intuit Mailchimp shared their commitment to harnessing the power of AI to drive efficiency and foster creativity in the realm of digital marketing. With a strong governance model in place, they ensure responsible and value-driven utilization of AI, benefiting small businesses. Notably, Mailchimp provides recommendations and suggestions for messages and target audiences, streamlining marketing activities for SMEs.

Furthermore, the interview shed light on the broader market trends, identifying AI and machine learning as areas with significant potential for improvement in the SME sector. Striking the right balance between competing priorities was emphasized as crucial in fostering innovation. The participants stressed the importance of understanding the risks associated with regulations and opportunities, underscoring the need for increased collaboration between regulators and SMEs.

In conclusion, the interview emphasized the necessity of substantial investments in supporting and nurturing the growth of SMEs. By embracing new technologies, fostering collaboration, and establishing a favorable regulatory landscape, the participants believe that SMEs can be empowered and propelled towards success.

#### 4. How to build a Single Data Market?

The focus was on the prioritization of data and data economy by the European Commission. The strategic approach to achieving this goal was presented through two pillars: the legislative pillar, encompassing the data governance act and the data act, and the funding pillar, directed towards governance structures and technical infrastructures. The ultimate objective of these initiatives is to enhance data utilization, promote competition, and stimulate the data economy while ensuring the protection of trade secrets through the implementation of appropriate safeguards.

During the discussion, industry experts raised concerns about the lack of incentives and participation from companies in data sharing endeavors. Several areas were identified as focal points for progress, including increasing user awareness regarding data exploitation, fostering the development of complementary services for data comparison and utilization, and facilitating direct business-to-business data sharing. As the journey towards a single data market necessitates the implementation of new regulatory tools, it was emphasized that building user trust and understanding consumer preferences through advocacy efforts are crucial. However, the complexity arising from the interaction of multiple laws underscores the need for regulators to provide clear guidelines on addressing trade-offs between different instruments.

The participants emphasized the importance of striking a balanced approach in crafting rules that not only cater to the interests of various stakeholders but also ensure that an increase in data demand does not disrupt the supply of data. Additionally, data sharing was identified as a vital aspect for the industry's growth. Concerns were raised regarding existing disincentives within the European Union that hinder data sharing, while noting the distinctions between the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Act in terms of data sharing requirements.

Regarding data concentration, it was clarified that regulatory responsibility lies within the scope of the DMA (Digital Markets Act), as data exhibits unique economic characteristics that foster a self-perpetuating cycle of data generation. To foster market openness and encourage the entry of new players, the exploration of new markets was deemed necessary.

Machine-generated data was acknowledged for its significant value and potential applications. Participants emphasized the importance of data protection and intellectual property (IP) protection as integral elements that facilitate improved data sharing practices. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the Data Act serves as a catalyst for competition, emphasizing the importance of sharing data in its raw form.

In conclusion, the discussion emphasized the imperative nature of building a Single Data Market by employing comprehensive strategies, promoting collaboration, addressing regulatory challenges, and ensuring the responsible and secure utilization of data to benefit all stakeholders involved.

#### 5. How to build global digital partnerships?

The participants addressed the challenges and strategies associated with establishing the European Union (EU) as a leader in the tech industry during the new geopolitical era, marked by increased competition from China and the United States. The importance of fostering trust and ensuring citizen security in the digital space was emphasized as a foundational step. To safeguard EU values in this digital era, the Data Protection regulation and the AI Act were identified as crucial instruments.

The regulatory framework in the EU, particularly the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), was acknowledged as a key driver for empowering tech transformation and building trust in industrial tech

applications. The Trade and Tech Council emerged as a significant platform for leveraging the strengths of the EU and the US to establish a rules-based order in the digital realm. Prioritizing specific topics for cooperation was highlighted as essential in meetings and gatherings between the two regions, with a particular emphasis on potential collaboration in the areas of artificial intelligence (AI) and data flows, which present significant opportunities for partnership.

The discussion delved into the challenges posed by generative AI, noting that its innovation pace and regulatory pace are unfolding simultaneously. The unpredictable nature of products and services generated by generative AI presents regulatory challenges for both creators and consumers. Addressing this issue requires a focus on information transparency and defining the boundaries and applications of this technology for regulators and consumers alike.

Regarding the semiconductor supply chain, the Chips Act was cited as an example of the importance of cooperation with other democratic nations to effectively manage the challenges in this area. Partnerships were emphasized to rely on trust and transparency, while cautioning against engagement with countries that do not uphold these values, such as China.

In conclusion, the discussion highlighted the necessity of establishing global digital partnerships to navigate the evolving tech landscape. Building trust, ensuring regulatory frameworks align with technological advancements, prioritizing specific cooperation areas, and engaging in partnerships grounded in shared values were identified as essential steps in forging successful global digital collaborations.

## **6. AI and risk-based regulation: challenges and opportunities**

In a past discussion focused on building trust and regulation in AI, participants explored various aspects related to the development and deployment of artificial intelligence technologies. The European Commission's objective of concluding the trilogue on the AI Act by the year-end was highlighted, along with the Commission's commitment to funding activities supporting AI research, testing, and experimentation. The aim was to ensure that startups have the necessary capacity and capabilities to thrive in the EU, emphasizing the importance of establishing trust in AI.

The significance of the AI Act was underscored, particularly in developing rules that address the use of AI in contexts where risks to fundamental rights and safety may arise. The discussion revolved around the need to focus regulations on high-risk situations, while also examining whether generative AI should be considered high-risk, a topic to be discussed in the trilogue.

Participants emphasized the requirement for increased budgetary allocations, including mechanisms for the EU to become a stronger investor at the national level. Additionally, the importance of building new infrastructures to facilitate the participation of startups in AI programs and experimentation was stressed.

Engaging in dialogue with the EU was recognized as crucial, as contributions from companies worldwide could be solicited. The United Nations' work on AI, particularly in areas such as human rights, law enforcement, and the establishment of an AI Charter, was mentioned.

Balancing innovation and risk mitigation emerged as a key challenge. While AI can unlock human potential and offer opportunities, concerns regarding job displacement and data protection need to be addressed. Maintaining public trust in AI was deemed essential to avoid potential backlash, emphasizing the importance of effective communication between users and companies.

The discussion also touched upon the unequal distribution of AI investment across countries, which hinders equitable growth. Managing risk was acknowledged as a means to enable innovation.

Several pillars were identified for the use of AI, including democratizing access, investing in skills to foster inclusion, promoting sustainable AI through cloud technologies with reduced carbon footprints, and developing risk-based and technically feasible regulations. Addressing legitimate concerns and ensuring practical use continuity were considered critical.

The AI Act aimed to make the EU competitive in AI research and innovation. Allocation of responsibility within the regulatory framework was a concern for startups, highlighting the importance of transparency and fostering healthy competition. International cooperation in AI models and a consistent definition of risk were deemed essential to enable global innovation.

The discussion emphasized the need to focus not only on what AI can do but also on what it should do. Transparency, accountability, security, fairness, and inclusiveness were identified as crucial considerations. Striking a balance and ensuring human control over AI systems were key principles.

Regarding healthy competition, participants acknowledged the significance of establishing common ethical standards among companies. The EU was recognized as having a pivotal role in setting the right standards, encompassing security, accountability, and alignment among stakeholders.

## **7. Waste not, want not: towards a circular tech industry**

This discussion focused on sustainable consumption in Europe, participants highlighted the unsustainability of current consumption patterns in the region, particularly regarding the significant environmental impact of information and communication technology (ICT) products. They acknowledged a discrepancy between consumers' intentions and their actual actions.

To address this issue, participants emphasized the need to incentivize consumers to make sustainable choices. They stressed the importance of setting ambitious product requirements that go beyond price considerations and prioritize the performance and environmental impact of products.

Environmental impact assessment was deemed essential, extending beyond carbon footprint to encompass factors such as resource usage and energy consumption. The participants emphasized the need to reduce the overall volume of devices and promote ecodesign principles.

The role of companies in responding to these challenges was discussed, with an emphasis on increasing user access to repair services and encouraging the purchase of second-hand products. By enhancing repairability and promoting the circular economy, companies can contribute to more sustainable consumption practices.

Overall, the discussion revolved around the importance of aligning consumer behavior, ambitious product requirements, environmental impact assessment, and corporate actions to foster sustainable consumption practices in Europe.

## **8. How to fund connectivity infrastructure?**

Centered on connectivity and digital infrastructure, participants highlighted the need for digitalizing permit granting processes to streamline and expedite procedures. They emphasized that the current regulatory framework for connectivity is outdated and called for investments in infrastructure to incentivize development.

Recognizing that connectivity and computing infrastructure form the foundation for digital transformation, participants set ambitious objectives for creating an investment-friendly environment and reducing the deployment costs of connectivity infrastructure.

To drive customer engagement and foster connections, participants stressed the importance of delivering high-quality content and services that resonate with users. They emphasized placing customers at the core of discussions and promoting a symbiotic relationship between content producers and internet service providers, where mutual benefits are derived.

Amazon's Project Kuiper was highlighted as an example of substantial investment in connectivity expansion. With a commitment of over 10 billion USD, Project Kuiper aims to establish a low-Earth-orbit satellite network to provide fast, reliable, and affordable broadband to unserved and underserved communities globally, including in Europe.

Regarding the utilization of artificial intelligence tools, participants emphasized the importance of providing sufficient information to enable accurate and framed responses from these tools.

Addressing the investment gap was recognized as crucial in light of evolving technological changes, such as the demands posed by connectivity advancements and cybersecurity challenges. Participants underscored the need for investments to keep pace with these developments.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the significance of enhancing connectivity, promoting digital infrastructure investments, and fostering customer-centric approaches to deliver compelling content and services.

## **9. Closing Session – An accomplished digital revolution in Europe?**

The creation of the Cybersecurity Solidarity Act was highlighted as a significant step towards addressing cybersecurity on a global scale. The discussion emphasized the importance of building resilience to ensure consumer security and the need for robust cyber defense capabilities to effectively combat cybersecurity attacks.

During the interview, it was expressed that Member States (MS) are eager to take additional measures in the realm of cybersecurity, recognizing its distinct geopolitical significance. As part of these efforts, plans were announced to establish a Cybersecurity Skills Academy. The academy aims to introduce individuals to the evolving cybersecurity landscape within the European Union (EU). Unlike a traditional university degree, the academy will offer a diploma that serves as a tangible demonstration of an individual's proficiency in the required cybersecurity skills. This initiative is deemed crucial due to the shortage of professionals in the cybersecurity sector. Moreover, the academy will prioritize inclusion and create opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds.

In summary, the interview highlighted the implementation of the Cybersecurity Solidarity Act as a means to address global cybersecurity challenges. It emphasized the importance of resilience, consumer security, and effective cyber defense measures. The establishment of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy was also discussed as a pivotal step to introduce individuals to the cybersecurity ecosystem within the EU, bridging the skills gap, fostering inclusion, and generating opportunities for aspiring cybersecurity professionals.