

DG GROW
High Level Conference on "The Digital Transformation of
European Industry and Enterprises"

The Egg, Brussels
Brussels, 16 February 2016

"Digital transformation is a must and speed is of the essence"

Concluding remarks by Director General Lowri Evans

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the interventions of Vice-President Katainen, Commissioners Bieńkowska, Oettinger and Moedas, and many more important speakers, what is left for me to say?

One clear message: digital transformation is no longer an option – it is a must.

And it is our joint responsibility to make sure that Europe's businesses fully embrace digital technologies and the business opportunities they offer.

We have also heard today that the real added value of digital technologies is their convergence with other technologies and in particular industrial ones.

A convergence that will generate new businesses, new business models, and stimulate our international competitiveness.

So, what are the main takeaways of today's discussions?

Today, you have been debating the role of digital technologies and their business models in shaping our future.

You have discussed how they can facilitate the transition to a greener society and a way of life that is resource efficient and sustainable.

The 4th industrial revolution indeed goes hand-in-hand with responsible use of scarce resources and a true Circular Economy. As Vice-President Katainen said – digitalisation and the circular economy are best friends.

The EU is a leader in 'green and clean tech'.

The global market for these technologies is growing by 5% a year.

This offers huge new business opportunities inside and outside Europe.

You have today also shared experiences of the gains digital transformation can bring to your businesses.

Who would have thought a few years ago that the connected, self-driving car would emerge from the world of science fiction and become a reality?

Who would have thought of personalised medicine and healthcare as a way to provide better and more efficient treatments? That data analysis may be as significant as new drug breakthroughs for our future health ?

And you have identified the challenges this transformation brings, including how to manage the vast amount of data collected by digital platforms.

The conference declaration

A word on the Conference Declaration.

The Declaration will add impetus to our work in the Commission now to help European businesses seize the opportunities that are there.

Let me highlight, in particular, four aspects of the Declaration:

First, it is right to stress that speed is of the essence when it comes to digital transformation.

There is a clear role for large companies: to drive the modernisation process in their own value chains, and to engage in creative collaboration with innovative SMEs and start-ups.

And all small and medium sized companies have to engage. We have to help with that. Everyone needs to be on board.

Second, the Declaration highlights the need to boost investments.

In particular, big cross-border investments. Tools are there to facilitate also riskier investments notably the new EFSI tool.

Digital platforms and data driven business models are key for the future.

Business needs to invest in platforms and in their scaling-up if we want Europe to succeed in building a true data economy.

And management, use and access to big data will be crucial issues in this context.

Third, the Declaration stresses the impact of digital transformation on the way we work and the need for reskilling.

This means that we must adapt our education and training programmes.

And Commissioner Moedas mentioned combining disciplines. And people coming out of schools and universities – whatever their course - need to fully master digital technologies to meet the demands of industry. We need much more collaboration between schools and universities with businesses to get the match right.

We must also accelerate the upskilling of the current workforce. We have unfilled vacancies now because of skills gaps. This is absurd.

To help this process, Commissioner Thyssen is preparing a New Skills Agenda that the Commission will unveil in May, and all Commission services are contributing to that.

Fourth, it is clear that we will not run this transition from Brussels.

We need to help pioneering cities and regions to team up, to learn from the best strategies and share this knowledge with all those who may be lagging behind.

For this we need to bring together efforts from all across Europe.

And involving local and regional governments, business leaders, academia and research centres, and above all, businesses.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I said at the beginning, digital transformation is no longer an option – it is a must.

This conference has been a very useful step in our common reflection on how to make it happen.

We will take away your messages.

Let us continue our work.

Europe is in the digital race ! We have to run faster.

Thank you.