

Digitising European industry

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The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy adopted an own-initiative report by Reinhard BÜTIKOFER (Greens/EFA, DE) on digitising European industry, following the Commission's communication on this subject.

Developing an integrated Industrial Digitalisation Strategy for the EU: Members welcomed the Commission's communication on digitising European industry, and strongly believed that such a strategy is of critical importance in contributing to solving Europe's most pressing economic and societal challenges. Such a strategy would, notably:

- strengthening economic dynamic, social and territorial cohesion;
- fostering quality job creation and reshoring opportunities, by contributing to providing consumers with more opportunities and information;
- strengthening European cohesion through a reliable and ambitious European investment policy;
- supporting Europe's goals in climate policy by reducing emissions and energy consumption;
- strengthening economic, policy and social innovation through the principles of openness and accessibility of public and private data.

The report recommends putting in place **a competitive business environment that facilitates private investment**, a build-up of state-of-the-art European digital infrastructure, and an EU coordination structure for the digitisation of industry.

Digitisation must be accelerated particularly in those Member States, regions and sectors that are **lagging behind** and among those people who are affected by the digital divide.

Such a strategy would contribute to solving some of the most pressing challenges in the **transport and tourism sectors**. Members called on the Commission and Member States to provide uninterrupted and high-performance connectivity for main transport paths and hubs no later than **2025** and to initiate full coverage all over the EU.

Creating conditions for successful industrial digitisation (infrastructure, investment, innovation and skills): Members felt an integrated industrial digitisation must be based on strong enabling conditions ranging from a first-rate, future-proof digital infrastructure, research and development and an investment-supportive environment to an appropriate innovation-nudging legislative framework.

The report stressed the need to:

- advance public and private investment in high-speed connectivity, for example through **5G**, fibre optics, navigation and satellite communications infrastructure;
- **harmonise spectrum allocation**, aimed at increasing demand for connectivity and enhancing the predictability of the network investment environment;
- establish **leadership** in key technologies such as 5G, high-performance computing, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data analytics, the Internet of Things (IoT), and robotics.

Particular attention should be given to the specific problems encountered by **SME's**. Furthermore, the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) should be better used.

Advancing the digitisation of businesses: in this regard, the report stressed the need to:

- **safeguard sensitive European technologies and know-how:** Members highlighted the potential risks in regard to strategic state and industrial policy-driven foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly by state-owned enterprises by means of **mergers and acquisitions**; equal market access for investment should be enforced by establishing global rules;
- adopt a common European **cybersecurity** approach, particularly the need to advance cybersecurity for the internet of things;
- strengthen the role that the governing bodies referred to in the Directive on **network security** have in establishing trust in future technologies;
- establish a framework that ensures the **free flow of data** whilst protecting the ownership of data ;
- set out clear rules regarding **data management** in the framework of contractual relations between businesses ;
- establish a strong **standardisation strategy**, including interoperability in the digital domain; Members wanted to see an EU-wide coordinated approach through the European standards organisations (CEN, CENELEC and ETSI) in relation to international fora and consortia.

The social dimension (skills, education and social innovation): in view of the digital gap, Members considered that a digitization strategy for businesses should give a strong social dimension, including the right to training and the implementation of a **skills guarantee**, and lifelong learning, as well as the integration of digital skills into national education curricula. Employers should make use of the **European Social Fund** for such training. All Member States should develop comprehensive national digital skills strategies with targets.

Lastly, the report emphasised the importance of investing in the digitisation of **vocational training and the skilled crafts sector**. Digital skills also need to be combined with engineering skills and the promotion of education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.