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COVER NOTE

From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine
DEPREZ, Director

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To: Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council
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European Declaration
on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade

European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission solemnly proclaim the following joint Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade

Preamble

Whereas:

- (1) The digital transformation affects every aspect of people's lives. It offers significant opportunities for a better quality of life, innovation, economic growth and sustainability, but it also presents new challenges for the fabric, security and stability of our societies and economies. With the acceleration of the digital transformation, the time has come for the European Union (EU) to spell out how its values and fundamental rights should be applied in the online world.
- (2) The Parliament has made several calls for ensuring the full compliance of the Union's approach to the digital transformation with fundamental rights such as data protection or non-discrimination, and with principles such as technological and net neutrality, and inclusiveness¹. It has also called for a strengthened protection of users' rights in the digital environment².
- (3) Building on previous initiatives such as the "Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment" and the "Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government", the Council has called, through the "Lisbon Declaration – Digital Democracy with a Purpose" for a model of digital transformation that strengthens the human dimension of the digital ecosystem with the Digital Single Market as its core. The Council also called for a model of digital transition that ensures that technology assists in the need to take climate action and protect the environment.
- (4) The EU vision for digital transformation puts people at the centre, empowers individuals and fosters innovative businesses. The Commission has recently presented a Proposal for a Decision on a "Path to the Digital Decade", which sets out the concrete digital targets based on four cardinal points (digital skills, digital infrastructures, digitalisation of businesses and of public services) that will help us achieve this vision. The Union way for the digital transformation of our societies and economy should encompass digital sovereignty, inclusion, equality, sustainability, resilience, security, trust, improving quality of life, respect of people' rights and aspirations and should contribute to a dynamic, resource-efficient and fair economy and society in the Union.
- (5) The Declaration aims to explain shared political intentions. Not only does it recall the most relevant rights in the context of the digital transformation, it should also serve as a reference point for businesses and other relevant actors when developing and deploying new technologies. The Declaration should also guide policy makers when reflecting on their vision of the digital transformation: putting people at the centre of the digital transformation; underlying solidarity and inclusion; restating the importance of freedom of choice; participation in the digital public space; safety, security and empowerment; and sustainability.

¹ 2020/2216(INI)

² 2020/2018(INL); 2020/2019(INL); 2020/2022(INI); 2020/2012(INL); 2020/2014(INL); 2020/2015(INI); 2020/2017(INI)

- (6) The democratic oversight of the digital society and economy should be further strengthened, in full respect of the rule of law principles, effective justice and law enforcement. This Declaration does not affect lawful limits on the exercise of legal rights, in order to reconcile them with the exercise of other rights, or necessary and proportionate restrictions in the public interest. The Union should promote the Declaration in its relations with other international organisations and third countries with the ambition that the principles serve as an inspiration for international partners to guide a digital transformation which puts people and their human rights at the centre throughout the world.
- (7) This Declaration notably builds on primary EU law, in particular in the Treaty on European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the case-law of the Court of Justice of the EU, as well as in secondary law. It also builds on and complements the European Pillar of Social Rights. It has a declaratory nature and does not as such affect the content of legal rules or their application.
- (8) The promotion and implementation of the digital principles is a shared political commitment and responsibility of the Union and its Member States within their respective competences and in full compliance with Union law. The Commission has proposed that the annual report on the “State of the Digital Decade”, to be submitted to the Parliament and Council, would cover the monitoring of the digital principles.

Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade

We aim to promote a European way for the digital transition, putting people at the centre. It shall be based on European values and benefiting all individuals and businesses.

We therefore declare:

Chapter I: Putting people at the centre of the digital transformation

People are at the centre of the digital transformation in the European Union. Technology should serve and benefit all Europeans and empower them to pursue their aspirations, in full security and respect of their fundamental rights.

We commit to:

- strengthening the democratic framework for a digital transformation that benefits everyone and improves the lives of all Europeans;
- taking necessary measures to ensure that the values of the Union and the rights of individuals as recognised by Union law are respected online as well as offline;
- fostering responsible and diligent action by all digital actors, public and private, for a safe and secure digital environment;
- actively promoting this vision of the digital transformation, also in our international relations.

Chapter II: Solidarity and inclusion

Everyone should have access to technology that aims at uniting, and not dividing, people. The digital transformation should contribute to a fair society and economy in the Union.

We commit to:

- making sure that technological solutions respect people’s rights, enable their exercise and promote inclusion.
- a digital transformation that leaves nobody behind. It should notably include elderly people, persons with disabilities, or marginalised, vulnerable or disenfranchised people and those who act on their behalf.
- developing adequate frameworks so that all market actors benefiting from the digital transformation assume their social responsibilities and make a fair and proportionate contribution to the costs of public goods, services and infrastructures, for the benefit of all Europeans.

Connectivity

Everyone, everywhere in the EU, should have access to affordable and high-speed digital connectivity.

We commit to:

- ensuring access to excellent connectivity for everyone, wherever they live and whatever their income
- protecting a neutral and open Internet where content, services, and applications are not unjustifiably blocked or degraded.

Digital education and skills

Everyone has the right to education, training and lifelong learning and should be able to acquire all basic and advanced digital skills.

We commit to:

- promoting and supporting efforts to equip all education and training institutions with digital connectivity, infrastructure and tools,
- supporting efforts that allow learners and teachers to acquire and share all necessary digital skills and competences to take an active part in the economy, society, and in democratic processes.
- giving everyone the possibility to adjust to changes brought by the digitalisation of work through up-skilling and re-skilling.

Working conditions

Everyone has the right to fair, just, healthy and safe working conditions and appropriate protection in the digital environment as in the physical work place, regardless of their employment status, modality or duration.

We commit to:

- ensuring that everyone shall be able to disconnect and benefit from safeguards for work-life balance in a digital environment.

Digital public services online

Everyone should have access to all key public services online across the Union. Nobody is to be asked to provide data more often than necessary when accessing and using digital public services.

We commit to:

- ensuring that all Europeans are offered an accessible, secure and trusted digital identity that gives access to a broad range of online services,
- ensuring wide accessibility and re-use of government information.
- facilitating and supporting seamless, secure and interoperable access across the Union to digital health and care services, including health records, designed to meet people’s needs.

Chapter III: Freedom of choice

Interactions with algorithms and artificial intelligence systems

Everyone should be empowered to benefit from the advantages of artificial intelligence by making their own, informed choices in the digital environment, while being protected against risks and harm to one’s health, safety and fundamental rights.

We commit to:

- ensuring transparency about the use of algorithms and artificial intelligence, and that people are empowered and informed when interacting with them.
- ensuring that algorithmic systems are based on suitable datasets to avoid unlawful discrimination and enable human supervision of outcomes affecting people.
- ensuring that technologies, such as algorithms and artificial intelligence are not used to pre-determine people’s choices, for example regarding health, education, employment, and their private life.
- providing for safeguards to ensure that artificial intelligence and digital systems are safe and used in full respect of people’s fundamental rights.

A fair online environment

Everyone should be able to effectively choose which online services to use, based on objective, transparent and reliable information.

Everyone should have the possibility to compete fairly and innovate in the digital environment.

We commit to:

- ensuring a safe, secure and fair online environment where fundamental rights are protected, and responsibilities of platforms, especially large players and gatekeepers, are well defined.

Chapter IV: Participation in the digital public space

Everyone should have access to a trustworthy, diverse and multilingual online environment. Access to diverse content contributes to a pluralistic public debate and should allow everyone to participate in democracy.

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression in the online environment, without fear of being censored or intimidated.

Everyone should have the means to know who owns or controls the media services they are using.

Very large online platforms should support free democratic debate online, given the role of their services in shaping public opinion and discourse. They should mitigate the risks stemming from the functioning and use of their services, including for disinformation campaigns and protect freedom of expression.

We commit to:

- supporting the development and best use of digital technologies to stimulate citizen engagement and democratic participation.
- continuing safeguarding fundamental rights online, notably the freedom of expression and information.
- taking measures to tackle all forms of illegal content in proportion to the harm they can cause, and in full respect of the right to freedom of expression and information, and without establishing any general monitoring obligations.
- creating an online environment where people are protected against disinformation and other forms of harmful content.

Chapter V: Safety, security and empowerment

A protected, safe and secure online environment

Everyone should have access to digital technologies, products and services that are safe, secure, and privacy-protective by design.

We commit to:

- protecting the interests of people, businesses and public institutions against cybercrime, including data breaches and cyberattacks. This includes protecting digital identity from identity theft or manipulation.
- countering and holding accountable those that seek to undermine security online and the integrity of the Europeans' online environment or that promote violence and hatred through digital means.

Privacy and individual control over data

Everyone has the right to the protection of their personal data online. That right includes the control on how the data are used and with whom they are shared.

Everyone has the right to the confidentiality of their communications and the information on their electronic devices, and no one shall be subjected to unlawful online surveillance or interception measures.

Everyone should be able to determine their digital legacy, and decide what happens with the publicly available information that concerns them, after their death.

We commit to:

- ensuring the possibility to easily move personal data between different digital services.

Children and young people should be protected and empowered online

Children and young people should be empowered to make safe and informed choices and express their creativity in the online environment.

Age-appropriate materials should improve children's experiences, well-being and participation in the digital environment.

Children have the right to be protected from all crimes, committed via or facilitated through digital technologies.

We commit to:

- promoting a positive, age-appropriate and safe digital environment for children and young people.
- providing opportunities to all children to acquire the necessary skills and competences to navigate the online environment actively, safely and make informed choices when online.
- protecting all children against harmful and illegal content, exploitation, manipulation and abuse online, and preventing the digital space from being used to commit or facilitate crimes.

Chapter VI: Sustainability

To avoid significant harm to the environment, and to promote a circular economy, digital products and services should be designed, produced, used, disposed of and recycled in a way that minimises their negative environmental and social impact.

Everyone should have access to accurate, easy-to-understand information on the environmental impact and energy consumption of digital products and services, allowing them to make responsible choices.

We commit to:

- supporting the development and use of sustainable digital technologies that have minimal environmental and social impact.
- developing and deploying digital solutions with positive impact on the environment and climate.