



Mariya Gabriel

Commissaire à
l'économie et à la société numériques

Brussels, 26 April 2018

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Dear Minister Le Maire,

We are collectively making good progress to complete the Digital Single Market and laying the foundation for a successful European digital future spurred by innovative technology, new business models and entrants, stronger competition and lower barriers.

However, we will not succeed in our ambitions unless we bridge the persistent digital gender gap. The underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship, economic leadership and the digital economy is a missed opportunity for Europe and is costing us dearly. The evidence of the digital gender gap is overwhelming.

Only 17% of the 8 million digital technology experts in the EU are women in the labour market where there is a severe shortage of skilled ICT professionals. 40% of enterprises recruiting ICT specialists report difficulties in getting qualified people. In cybersecurity alone we expect a shortage of up to 1.8 million people globally by 2022 of which over 350,000 people in Europe.

That paradox results in a loss of value for Europe on all fronts: economic, societal and human capital. The latest study on Women in the Digital Age that the Commission published on 8 March 2018 shows that more women in digital jobs could create an annual €16 billion GDP boost in the EU and improve the start-up environment, as female owned start-ups are more likely to be successful.

The reasons for the limited participation of women and girls in the digital economy are lack of skills and their lower interest in STEM studies and ICT professions, but also skewed perceptions, stereotypes and lack of role models for them to draw inspiration from. Often, women lack confidence to embark in STEM fields and professions.

Today, at the occasion of the “Girls in ICT International Day”, it is perfect timing to commit for concrete actions to redress this situation. As the Commissioner in charge of the Digital portfolio, I want to work with you to change this. Drawing on my own responsibilities and portfolio, I have put forward a strategy addressing the three

major causes of the problem and reinforced it with actions insofar as the Commission's mandate permits. I want to (1) combat stereotypes and promote role models in the digital economy; (2) invest in and promote digital skills and education for women; and (3) facilitate women's participation in digital entrepreneurship and innovation.

However, the Commission can only do so much. In order to make a real difference, we need engagement and action at all levels and by all actors. That is why, in partnership with the Bulgarian Presidency, the upcoming Austrian presidency and MEPs representing the European Parliament we call on you to join forces at the European and national levels in tackling the roots of the problem across the EU in every Member State.

Looking at some figures available (Eurostat), the current picture shows that France is slightly above the average in basic digital skills. 57% of women has at least basic digital skills (55% in the EU). The same applies to ICT specialists: 18% of ICT specialists are women in France (17% in the EU).

We need robust and systematic measurement to know whether we are succeeding or failing in our efforts. I have asked my services to define appropriate indicators to monitor progress on the effective participation of women in the digital economy at both European and national level which I would like to publish through an annual scoreboard. This scoreboard will be published later this year and I have asked my services to work with Member States' officials to report on actions taken by Member States in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) and national country reports which will be presented in 2019.

Across Europe, there are lots of good initiatives proving that the current situation can be changed for the better. I have asked the Digital Champions to collect the most successful examples such as *IT for SHE*, a Polish programme which aims to increase the participation of women in the high tech industry by helping talented female students from IT faculties to enter the labour market. Such good practices will already be discussed on 25-26 June in Sofia at the Digital Assembly.

In this context, I have also asked the forthcoming Austrian Presidency, to co-organize an informal breakfast on 4 December 2018, the day of the TTE Council to discuss the indicators which would feed into the annual scoreboard, the possibility to set annual targets, as well as to identify good practice examples and role models addressing the strands of the strategy above. I will also propose that the Digital Single Market Strategic Group which, since 2016, has looked at the effectiveness of *DSM actions* and their implementation in Member States, prepares the discussions at the Digital Assembly in Sofia on 25-26 June.

Please note that we are also organising a one day conference on 19 June 2018 in Brussels "More women in digital: a strategy for growth and equality" where these issues can be discussed. This event will bring together policy-makers, young girls and boys, women entrepreneurs and investors and stakeholders interested in the benefits of gender-quality in the digital sector.

I invite you to send us any best practices, role models or existing objectives in your country by 10 June 2018 in view of the first discussions at the June events in Brussels and in Sofia. Should you have any questions concerning the event, you are invited to

contact DG CONNECT – unit D2 (Policy Implementation & Planning) at connect-d2@ec.europa.eu.

I am, together with the Members of the European Parliament co-signing this letter, looking forward to your active participation so we can shape an all-inclusive digital future for Europe.

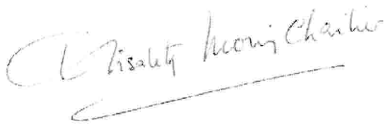
Yours sincerely,



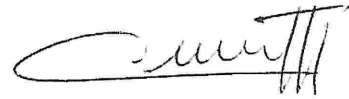
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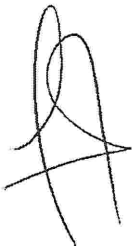
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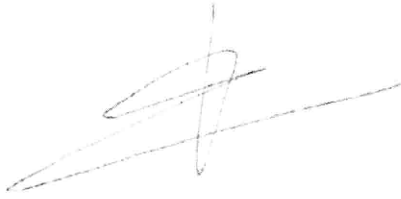
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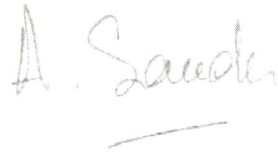
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