

European Regional Bureau Newsletter



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Internet Access

EU: Ministers adopt conclusions on post-2020 digital policy

- On 7 June, the EU's Council of Ministers adopted [conclusions](#) on the future of a highly digitalised Europe beyond 2020: "Boosting digital and economic competitiveness across the Union and digital cohesion".
- The conclusions act as a political message to the next leadership of the European Commission on the main priorities it should address to enable a strong, competitive, innovative, and highly digitised Europe.
- On the topic of access, the document acknowledges the need of further promoting the development of ultra-fast digital infrastructure, including 5G, through the establishment of test beds across the continent.
- The conclusions also outline the importance of full coverage and wide use of fast broadband, underlining that the best way to achieve those is via "combined and coordinated investments at EU level".
- Other highlights include the importance of supporting R&I policies into key enabling technologies while developing Artificial Intelligence grounded in clear ethical principles.

EU: Launch of the Digital Innovation and Scale-up initiative

- On the side-lines of the 2019 Digital Assembly, a group of institutions including the European Commission, European Investment Bank and the World Bank Group launched the [Digital Innovation and Scale-up initiative](#) (DISC) with the aim of boosting investment in start-ups in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (CESEE).
- Through tailored financing tools, the DISC aims at creating a regional investment facility targeting digital innovation and the scale-up of start-ups that face higher financing risk at early stages.

- The DISC's main objective is to fill in the gap of European investment, as studies show that 46% of start-ups incubated in the CESEE area receive funding from outside the EU.

EU: Court rules Gmail is not a telecoms service

- The European Court of Justice (ECJ) [ruled](#) on June 13th that Gmail, Google's email service, does not constitute a telecoms service after a German court raised the question to the ECJ.
- The ruling contradicts the German telecoms regulator, which had stated in 2012 that Google's e-mail service was a telecoms service and thus fell under the scope of Germany's stringent telecoms rules.
- The ECJ explains that "an Internet electronic messaging service that does not include Internet access, such as Gmail, is not an 'electronic communications service'".
- This ruling contrasts with the court's [decision](#) last week's on Skype that stated that their calling service did constitute a telecoms service.

Russia: National authority to soon block a list of VPNs

- Roscomnadzor, the Russian telecoms authority, [asked](#) in March ten of the most important VPN providers – including ExpressVPN, NordVPN, IPVanish – to block websites from the country's blacklist.
- Following the companies' non-compliance, Roscomnadzor's Alexander Zharov stated that "the [Russian] law says unequivocally if the company refuses to comply with the law – it should be blocked".
- Implications of the statements would mean that the VPN providers would be placed in the country's blacklist.

Global: Mexico and the EU to closely cooperate on connectivity

- On the occasion of the second EU-Mexico digital economy [dialogue](#), Mexico and the EU agreed to deepen their digital cooperation in the fields of eCommerce, telecoms regulation, technological standardisation and the digitisation of industry.
- Among the recent projects discussed was "[BELLA](#)", the new transatlantic submarine fibre-optic cable, as both sides highlighted the need to seize the opportunities enabled by this improved connectivity.

Trust

Global: G20 main tech takeaways

- The ministers of G20 countries meeting in Japan, released this week their [Ministerial Statement](#) on Trade and Digital Economy, highlighting cross-border data flows as a major priority and important work area for discussions at international level.

- The document includes conclusions on “human-centred AI”, “regulatory innovation”, “security in the digital economy” and acknowledges the challenges presented by the free flow of data, calling on countries to work together in order to address those related to privacy, data protection, intellectual property rights and security.

Global: Facebook’s new cryptocurrency to be unveiled next week

- According to [reports](#) in the Wall Street Journal, Facebook intends to release its white paper on its new digital currency next week. The official launch of the actual currency is not expected before next year.
- Little is known so far about the newly created product, but companies such as Uber, Paypal, Visa and Mastercard have signed up as part of a consortium to help administer the currency.
- The currency is expected to be a “stablecoin”, meaning it will be pegged to the value of a fiat currency. It is believed that users will be able use the coin both inside and outside Facebook.

EU: European Commission releases the 2019 Digital Economy and Society Index

- The European Commission [released](#) its 2019 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), which monitors the EU’s overall digital performance and tracks the progress of EU countries with regards to their competitiveness level.
- The study finds, unsurprisingly, that countries with established ambitious targets in relation to the EU Digital Single Market achieve better performance results. The report warns that if the EU wishes to be a global competitor, digital transformation must be accelerated.
- The country-by-country assessment of the Index found that Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands are at the head of digitisation. While Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, Italy and Poland have the lowest scores.
- Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus Ansip [stated](#): “The successful implementation of the Digital Single Market can significantly contribute to further improving country results. It is urgent to implement new rules to boost connectivity, data economy and digital public services as well as help Member States to equip citizens with digital skills”.

EU: Publicly funded data is a key enabler towards digital innovation

- EU Ministers [adopted](#) last week new rules on open data and the reuse of public-sector information.
- Alexandru Petrescu, Romania’s Minister for Communications and the Information Society, stated that “these rules...will bolster the EU’s digital industry, especially smaller companies and start-ups, which would not otherwise have access to all the data they need to innovate and expand.”
- The text will be soon be published in the Official Journal of the EU and enter into force 20 days thereafter.

EU: One year of GDPR – the Commission points to Greece, Portugal and Slovenia for lagging behind

- Commissioner for Justice and Consumers Vera Jourová gave a [keynote speech](#) during yesterday's event "The Data Protection Regulation one year on: Taking stock in the EU and beyond".
- She reminded how Greece, Portugal and Slovenia are still lagging behind on the GDPR regulation and identified national data protection authorities as the key for GDPR success.
- The Commissioner also acknowledged that other countries such as Brazil, Chile or Kenya are adopting similar rules, which in her view demonstrated that more countries are now "recognising the importance of protecting privacy, for individuals, and for society as a whole".

EU: Vice-President Ansip cautions against re-opening the eCommerce Directive

- In a [speech](#) given earlier this week, Andrus Ansip, the European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, stated that "after each scandal, some want to prohibit, regulate, accusing the Internet of being responsible for everything going wrong. We have to be very careful".
- Although the Vice President recognised that legislation approved 10 years ago might not be up to speed with current technological developments, he also warned against re-opening the 2000 e-Commerce Directive, which governs the current legal regime for many online platforms, with the intention of introducing more stringent requirements on platform liability.
- Ansip questioned the objectives around re-opening the directive, adding that: "We have solved already many issues in other legislative acts over the past years. The principle of limited liability has to stay. If not, tech giants will adapt, but smaller platforms – we have 7,000 of them in Europe – will suffer."

EU: European Parliament sets up its new priorities

- In the context of the first weeks of work of the newly elected European Parliament, political group leaders have been holding meetings to plan the political priorities of the next mandate.
- According to some media reports this week, environment and industrial policy (with a focus on trade and defending European commercial interests on the global stage) are at the top of the list, however, issues such as digitisation, Artificial Intelligence, and consumer policy are also expected to be of high relevance in the coming five years.