Manifesto for the Digital Future for Europe

Who we are

We are a group of associations, think tanks, start-ups, scale-ups, and successful tech businesses from across the "Digital 9" nations. These countries are Europe's digital frontrunners, who are making tech work, thanks to their thriving tech ecosystems, and healthy startup cultures. We have come together at the beginning of a new European Parliament, and upon Finland's assumption of the EU Presidency to embed a positive, ambitious and innovative digital agenda in the next EU mandate.

The Digital 9 countries are Europe's digital frontrunners; they are the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Ireland, and the UK.

We believe our own countries must do more to lead Europe in tech policy and we believe European policy must follow the lead of the most successful countries within the EU. This means doing more to support the success of the European tech ecosystem, recognising that we are entering an age where all sectors become digitised and affected by AI. There is no longer a 'digital' part of the economy – we have an increasingly digitised and automated economy and companies which have traditionally driven Europe's success must adapt.

Initiated at the request of D9 governments in 2018, members of this working group have produced two papers on the principles behind successful European policy on digital and on how we can prepare to grab the opportunities presented by the emergence of AI. We are now looking at how to put Europe on a path for greater success in the digital age, and how domestic and European policymakers must prepare for future developments in technology.

It is impossible to talk about European progress without talking about Europe's social objectives. AI can and should play an important part in helping Europe develop not just sustainable, healthy and competitive markets, but also a significant role in improving scientific and environmental progress, and combating discrimination and exclusion.

Worksome - finding problems in the way that politicians talk about AI

Worksome is a Danish platform which uses AI and machine learning to connect businesses with AI specialist consultants. It was founded in Denmark in 2017 and has grown across Europe. They have used AI to great effect, matching the needs of freelancers and potential clients.

Worksome CEO Morten Peterson believes that policymaking is too influenced by fear of AI and machine learning, treating it like a monster rather than an opportunity. This holds back AI innovation, and startups are in urgent need of political allies.

Worksome argued that regulations have to be based on real-world evidence, and good quality data, rather than fear mongering. Bias is found in the offline world, and this is simply reflected by machine learning. According to Worksome, policymakers shouldn't fear technology before it has even been rolled out in practice. Machine learning can only work with the data it is given, and it is by opening up datasets that artificial intelligence will be able to limit and prevent bias in its technology.

Our approach

While the United States and China have the edge when it comes to investment and scale, Europe has its advantages too. Europe has a highly educated population, great public services which are ripe for transformation, and strong stable democratic governments. It also boasts world-leading businesses in transport, energy, food and drink, and telecommunications. It must exploit these strengths better.

We believe Europe's strengths could be better harnessed. To succeed in the age of AI, it must promote innovation, embrace smart regulation, and strive to attract talent from abroad, and develop talent from home.

Europe can become more competitive. It's not enough to think about those companies that exist today. The goal should be to create an ecosystem for the companies and technologies of the future to develop and thrive in Europe. It is technology that fuelled the historic wealth of Europe – from the printing press to antibiotics – and it is technology that will drive its future.

Connecterra, transforming agriculture with AI

Dutch startup Connecterra shows how even Europe's most traditional industry can be revolutionised by AI. Connecterra is using AI to help farmers feed growing populations more efficiently, more sustainably, and with greater care for animal welfare.

Connecterra's intelligent technology offers dairy farmers real-time data about the health and happiness of their cows. Its platform is designed to help make the entire agricultural value chain more efficient, more humane, and more sustainable through machine learning.

The data accumulated and analysed by Connecterra's machine learning is a resource not only for individual farmers but for people trying to improve agriculture at an industrial and international level, by highlighting potential cures to disease, or preventative measures to stop infections in herds.

Our principles

These are our policy priorities:

1. **A *digitised* single market, not a digital single market.** The single market needs completing, and it needs to be fully digitised in its function and scope. Artificial intelligence must be at its heart. Digital technology will be most effective and most transformative when it is applied to the whole economy, and it is digital technologies which enable the single market to operate. Developing a digitised single market will allow the free flow of innovation and ideas around Europe, and revolutionise the economy in the 21st century, as the Single Market revolutionised the European economy at the end of the 20th.

2. **The D9 must lead by example.** Europe's digital frontrunners can show how harmonising regulations and sharing data between nations offers huge benefit to the digital industries and the wider economy. For example, the data-sharing and cooperation between Estonia and Finland, and the digital collaboration between the Benelux states can be used as a blueprint for the D9 and the EU at large. This way, we can create a 'fast lane' for the digital industries in Europe, and show how successful and practical innovation can be.

3. **The public sector must be much better used at domestic and EU level to support European SMEs and innovation.** This should include embracing open data principles in the public sector, to encourage innovation in public services, and significantly lower the barriers to entry for start-ups and scale-ups who want to compete for public contracts. The public sector accounts for nearly half of Europe's buying power, and it can provide Europe's digital ecosystems with the support they need.

4. **Skills and talent are two of Europe's greatest assets, and a key to future growth.** They must be pushed to the top of the economic reform agenda. As talent becomes more competitive the EU must focus on three things: educating the next generation for a digital era; supporting the current workforce to reskill; and ensuring Europe attracts and retains the talent its digital industries sorely need.

5. **Regulations should be smart, simple and flexible.** Europe is a world leader in regulation, and rules like GDPR have moved the global conversation on data privacy, accountability and standards in the digital industry. But regulations should always be reviewed, and an AI/innovation check should be used to consider how these regulations affect startups and SMEs, and to check whether regulations unduly hamper innovation in AI. The D9 should provide a voice for those start-ups, and show that by limiting the burdens on start-ups and scale-ups, Europe's whole digital economy will thrive as a result.

Einride, smart, sustainable transport from Sweden

Einride has developed a new form of AI-powered transport, called Autonomous Electric Transport. The company has developed self-driving trucks - known as pods - which offer businesses a smart and efficient way of transporting goods.

Sweden is one of the world's leaders in technological innovation in transport. Since in was founded in 2016, Einride has made an impact in a competitive field. Its self-driving pods are said to be 60% cheaper than conventional, driver-operated freight transport.

Einride has plans to expand to France and the United States, and it has recently signed an innovation partnership with the Swedish port of Helsingborg, to develop an innovative, intelligent, and sustainable transport and freight system for the port. Its success is testament to what can be achieved with policies which see the opportunities of AI for society.

Good tech policy is good growth policy

Artificial intelligence is in the spotlight in Europe. The new EU Commission President has a vision to regulate and invest in AI in Europe, and the EU is planning to implement far reaching ethical guidelines for how to regulate AI. The President wants to introduce new legislation within 100 days of taking office in December or later. It is important to remember that the digital industries no longer exist in isolation, and how AI is regulated will have knock-on effects throughout the mainstream economy.

We know that Europe is more than an economic project, it has a social mission too. AI can and should be central to achieving Europe's political and social goals. If we want to see increased innovation and productivity in SMEs and traditional industries, greater progress on sustainability and clean energy, making European cities happier and healthier places to live, and improving inclusion and wellbeing through skills and education, then AI adoption must be encouraged at all levels.

As more European countries set up their own AI strategies, and lay out their visions for AI investment, we want the digital frontrunners to lead Europe with an innovative, evidence-based, and ambitious approach.

1. **Encourage responsible adoption first, and regulation second.** AI is an opportunity first and foremost. It unlocks huge opportunities to transform our society and economy for the good. Europe must not rush to regulation, it should embrace what works, work to demystify and explain AI to the public, and trust its entrepreneurs and startups.

2. **Make sure regulations are simple, flexible, and based on sound principles.** AI technology is developing faster than any law can predict. Regulators should take a soft approach to AI regulation, prioritising adoption over precaution. These laws should be flexible, rather than prescriptive, and principles-based, rather than strictly precautionary. It is only through

allowing innovation and experimentation that we will build the real-world evidence to develop the most effective regulations.

3. **Europe should play to its strengths and invest in AI in core sectors.** Europe has many traditionally strong industries which can be revolutionised by AI. These include transport, finance, agriculture, health, and energy. By focusing on its core strengths and enabling AI transformation of these sectors, there is a far greater chance of Europe building pan-European, world-leading businesses. This should be underpinned by a focus on lifelong education, to help develop a technologically-minded and skilled workforce.

4. **Focus on building thriving, interlinked tech ecosystems in D9 cities and regions.** Cities are the engines of tech economy. Europe's leading cities must become magnets for talent and hubs of innovation. This can be achieved by collaborative efforts to build cutting edge mobile networks and the latest wi-fi infrastructure, develop a D9 startup visa, and bring together startups, traditional industries, universities, and governments to create a new generation of smart cities, supported by a 'tech Erasmus' initiative from D9 cities, companies, and universities.

Solita, one of Finland's AI success stories

Solita is a digital transformation company driven by data and human insight. Established in Finland in 1996, it supports businesses to use AI to improve their operations. It is a technologically-driven consultancy, which offers services and tech solutions that help us reinvent businesses and society for the better. Solita has customers in almost every sector imaginable, and shows how AI is an all-pervasive technology, which will benefit every industry.

Lauri Helenius, Senior VP of Solita, is concerned that many businesses lack a basic understanding of AI and its potential. These businesses are sceptical when they hear politicians talk about AI as if it is a magical potion and a cure to all their problems.

Solita found that many of their clients give up on AI too quickly and pull funding from deploying AI strategies before their value has been realised. They are foregoing long-term gains, partly because they do not offer the instant magic that had been promised by some of AI's cheerleaders. If AI can be demystified, it can be used to its fullest potential.

Supporting AI should be at the heart of Europe's digital future

AI is the next era-defining, pervasive technology. No part of the economy will be untouched by its developments. What is good policy for tech and AI is good policy for growth overall. While our manifesto includes ideas for the entire digital economy, much of these ideas will fail if the power of AI is not harnessed properly.

The digital frontrunner nations are uniquely placed to lead the way, and show Europe how a 'fast lane' for AI can work in practice, and how heavy-handed regulations will significantly set Europe back as we journey through the age of AI.

1. **Open up public sector datasets in the D9 countries to automate government processes.** Learn from each others' work and aim to invest in automation in the public sector, in a range of priority areas, such as transport, clean energy, education and healthcare.

2. **Introduce the free movement of data and data interoperability between D9 states.** The D9 can and should be a trial area for new innovations with data. D9 nations Estonia and Finland are leading the way with the unification of their government data, and the group should follow. This will allow AI companies to expand across Europe, and pull down electronic barriers within the Single Market.

3. **Lobby the EU to conduct an AI 'refit' of existing and future legislation.** The EU has a 'refit programme' to improve its legislation, and make it more efficient and effective, particularly for small businesses. An AI refit would amend laws like GDPR, and help put the needs of SMEs and startups at the heart of EU policy.

We must act together now

We can only succeed by working together. Our countries may be leading the way in Europe, but we are by no means perfect and too many barriers exist even between D9 countries. If our governments and policymakers are to make the case for change across Europe, they need to set an example. It's a big challenge, but an even bigger opportunity. **This group exists to help Europe seize that opportunity.**

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