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An ecological approach to connectivity

Greens/EFA letter to the European Commission

Brussels, 8th of October 2021

TO:

Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President "A Europe Fit for the Digital Age"
Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President "European Green Deal"
Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President "An Economy that Works for People
Thierry Breton, Commissioner "Internal Market"

Dear Vice-Presidents, Dear Commissioner,

Ahead of the publication of the Path to the Digital Decade Policy Programme, we would like to raise your attention on the importance for the digital transition to promote the green transition. It is essential that the European Commission adopt measures that will include an ecological approach to connectivity, make an efficient use of the EU budget and fully respect to the precautionary principle.

The advantages of having increased connectivity are undisputable and we support the goals of ensuring that every European household will have access to high-speed internet coverage by 2025 and gigabit connectivity by 2030. In order to do that, infrastructure upgrades and new deployments will be necessary.

The environmental footprint of the digital sector is significant[1] and the new deployments need to be consistent with the goals of the Green Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, and in boosting the impact of policies delivering environmental protection, e.g. regarding waste reduction and environmental degradation.

We therefore call on the Commission to:

1. **Ensure regulatory or financial support only for those who will provide for low or no environmental impact of the communication products, services and infrastructure's deployment. This should be reflected in** your future policies and communications. To this

regard, the Commission needs to prioritise the development of criteria for the environmental impact of the digital sector and of the manufacturing and communication infrastructure deployments connected to it. In addition, we would point out to the need to construct the procurement calls and standard-setting processes in a way that will encourage small and innovative actors.

2. **Reduce the digital gap for rural areas, providing high-speed land connections even to small communities.** In terms of geographical reach, big urban agglomerations do provide a business case for the private sector to take charge of the costs of the infrastructure, while the regions that are more sparsely populated or in economic difficulty suffer from being left behind by the market. This has severe consequences on the level of economic development, access to education and culture in these regions. We call on you to ensure that the private sector deploys communication infrastructure where the digital divide needs to be bridged, using conditionality for spectrum licencing and regulatory incentives.

3. **Adopt a checklist of environmental and biodiversity criteria for the development of future technologies.** In the light of potential changes to the Radio Equipment Directive 2014/53, taking into account the push for renewal of communication networks, we would like to point out that a recent study commissioned by the European Parliament Panel for Future of Technology and Science questioned the process of developing and supporting the 5G technology[2]. After more than 10 years of statements and actions to support these technological developments, the European Commission still does not have its own independent evaluation and impact assessment for health and biodiversity consequences of communication technologies, especially those based on radiofrequencies such as 5G. As the EU is currently starting a new development cycle for 6G, we call on the Commission to fulfil its precautionary obligations and allocate resources to assess the impact and interaction between technology and the environment. The European Commission should fund independent studies before committing public funds for market development and support. Moreover, we would suggest a strategic approach to technology, supporting multiple concurrent solutions in order to avoid picking winners and shaping the market. To that regard, EU support should equally be directed towards technologies that are not on the 5G/6G development path.

We remain at your disposal to further discuss this important issue to make both the European Green Deal and the Digital Transition a success.

Yours sincerely,

MEP Rasmus Andresen
MEP Michael Bloss
MEP David Cormand
MEP Ciaran Cuffe
MEP Rosa D'Amato
MEP Eleonora Evi
MEP Francisco Guerreiro
MEP Tilly Metz
MEP Niklas Nienaß
MEP Jutta Paulus
MEP Piernicola Pedicini
MEP Manuela Ripa
MEP Michèle Rivasi

MEP Jordi Solé
MEP Kim van Spaarentak
MEP Ernest Urtasun
MEP Sarah Wiener

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[1] https://www.greens-efa.eu/en/article/document/need-of-environmental-data-and-standards-for-the-ict-sector

[2] Health impact of 5G Study, 22-07-2021, STOA, European Parliament

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Contact person



Catherine Olier

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