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## Forging Ahead: A Unified Vision of Central Eastern European Digital Industries for the Digital Future

As the Three Seas Summit convenes and the European Parliament elections approach, as Members of the CEE Digital Coalition we want to articulate a forward-looking vision for the incoming European Commission and European Parliament. A vision that underscores our unwavering dedication to driving digital transformation across the European Union, focusing on ensuring that the CEE region leads in innovation, competitiveness, economic vitality, and resilience due to:

- Promoting Cross-Sectoral Digital Integration and Openness;
- Strengthening Cybersecurity and Trust;
- Boosting Investment in Digital Skills and Education;
- Fostering Innovation and Digital Services;
- Promoting a Conducive Regulatory Environment;
- Ensuring Sustainability;
- Promoting Competitiveness and Global Partnerships.

The digital transition in Europe presents a critical opportunity to redefine global living standards and confront major challenges through collective action. The CEE's remarkable economic evolution, highlighted by significant GDP growth, exemplifies the transformative power of digital initiatives.

Recognizing the challenges that lie ahead, it is imperative to boost productivity with digital technologies and master artificial intelligence to sustain our competitive advantage. As leaders of the digital industry in Central Eastern Europe, gathering around the initiative of the CEE Digital Coalition, we are committed to building a competitive and innovative digital economy in Europe and a prosperous, safe, modern society in our region. Guided by these principles, we present the following core priorities for digital advancement for the new European administration:

### **Promoting Cross-Sectoral Digital Integration and Openness**

For the European Union to fully embrace the digital future, it is imperative to foster the widespread adoption of advanced technologies like AI and cloud computing across various sectors. By championing a 'cloud-first' policy, the EU can spearhead the breaking down of data silos, unlocking vast economic potential, and facilitating a seamless digital transformation of the Single Market. It is particularly critical in the public sector and highly regulated industries (e.g. health and finance), where cloud computing will become a cornerstone for modernizing operations of such industries. Furthermore, ensuring interoperability and fostering open digital ecosystems are crucial for stimulating competition and innovation across sectors. The EU's commitment to setting global standards for interoperability among devices and services will be instrumental in overcoming current barriers to B2B collaboration and competition. By combating lock-in practices, the EU can ensure a more open and interoperable cloud market, enhancing consumer choice and ensuring fair software licensing practices. Together, these strategies will drive the digital economy forward, promoting a more connected, competitive, and innovative European Union.

### **Strengthening Cybersecurity and Trust**

At the core of our journey towards a digitized future lies the imperative to improve our cybersecurity, ensuring the integrity of our digital infrastructure for both businesses and citizens. This foundational commitment serves not only as a shield against cyber threats but also as a key driver of trust in our digital progression. To reach these objectives, it is essential that the European Union deepens its collaborative efforts with liberal democracies, fostering robust partnerships for cyber resilience with both private and public entities in countries that share our values. By enhancing and leveraging existing frameworks for international security collaboration, such as NATO, we advocate for a strategic approach where EU cybersecurity initiatives are designed to integrate and benefit from leading global security practices and services. Such a concerted effort will ensure a secure and resilient digital ecosystem.

### **Boosting Investment in Digital Skills and Education**

To foster an inclusive digital future, policymakers and stakeholders have to concentrate on enhancing digital skills and literacy across the entire society. Integrating digital competencies from an early educational stage and promoting continuous learning will ensure the workforce is prepared for the future in the digital economy. To achieve that it is necessary to establish robust partnerships between the public sector, civil sector, and the digital industry to ensure educational programs are closely aligned with market needs. By prioritizing investment in digital education, the aim is to create an equitable digital landscape where everyone can reap the benefits of digital transformation.

### **Fostering Innovation and Digital Services**

CEE is one of the regions that are open to innovation and the expansion of digital services. By cultivating a supportive environment for research and development in cutting-edge technologies like AI, blockchain, and quantum computing, CEE is laying the groundwork for both economic vitality and societal progress. To amplify this momentum and align with the ambition of a fully integrated Digital Single Market by 2030, it is essential for the EU to set clear targets for increasing the digital economy's contribution to the European GDP. This involves bolstering R&D spending in technology, a move that would accelerate technological innovation and its widespread adoption, driving the EU towards achieving its Digital Decade 2030 goals. Moreover, enhancing the accessibility of EU and national funding for digital transformation projects is crucial. Simplifying the procedures for obtaining public funding and reporting achievements can ease the financial burdens on companies and organizations. This approach not only facilitates their participation in the digital transformation but also positions them to effectively compete on a global scale, countering the state-subsidized economic models from other parts of the world.

### **Promoting a Conducive Regulatory Environment**

Streamlining the regulatory landscape is crucial for unleashing digital innovation, with the goal of establishing a Digital Single Market by 2030 that eliminates unnecessary barriers and promotes the free flow of data, goods, and services. This vision emphasizes the importance of formulating regulations that do not unduly increase compliance costs for businesses including SMEs, thereby enabling them to innovate and compete effectively. To further this aim, it is essential to implement policies that facilitate the European startup ecosystem's access to venture capital and tech talent, which is crucial for transforming innovative ideas into market-ready solutions. Moreover, the current complexity of the EU's regulatory framework and the associated compliance costs can hinder businesses' digitalization efforts. Identifying and resolving conflicting regulations and removing redundant barriers will help SMEs innovate and digitalize. Such measures are key to creating a dynamic, competitive, and innovation-friendly Digital Single Market, ensuring Europe's place at the forefront of the global digital economy.

### **Ensuring Sustainability**

In aligning our digital initiatives with the EU's green objectives, it is crucial that our digital transition actively enhances environmental sustainability and climate action efforts. The use of AI offers a transformative potential in this realm, enabling the development of solutions that can significantly mitigate climate change impact, optimize energy consumption, and reduce emissions across diverse sectors. AI's analytical prowess can forecast environmental trends, optimize renewable energy distribution, and enhance efficiency in manufacturing and urban planning, contributing to more sustainable solutions. Moreover, digital technologies can streamline waste management, improve agricultural practices, and facilitate the conservation of natural resources, reinforcing the EU's commitment to sustainability. This strategic integration of digitalization within sustainability efforts exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to harmonizing technological advancement with environmental preservation, ensuring a greener future for all.

## **Promoting Competitiveness and Global Partnerships**

The significance of competitiveness and international collaborations cannot be overstated, particularly for the CEE region, a dynamic hub of innovation and technological advancement within the European Union. Strengthening our transatlantic relationships and forging robust partnerships with key global players are critical for mutual prosperity and security. Central to this endeavor is a strategic investment in digital infrastructure, which not only sharpens our competitive edge but also solidifies Europe's influential role in the digital global economy. By capitalizing on the CEE's innovative potential and advocating for a more interconnected and technologically advanced Europe, we aim to drive forward a competitive strategy that places the EU at the forefront of the digital age, ensuring our economic resilience and leadership on the world stage.

As members of the CEE Digital Coalition, we stand at the forefront of Europe's journey towards a sustainable and digitally advanced future. Our collective vision and proposed priorities aim to guide the new European Commission and Parliament towards policies that foster a thriving digital economy. We call upon these institutions to collaborate closely with industry leaders, leveraging our insights and expertise, to enact legislation that supports cross-sectoral integration, bolsters cybersecurity, enhances digital education, promotes innovation, and ensures a sustainable and inclusive digital transition. Together, let's embrace this pivotal moment to secure a prosperous, secure, and digitally empowered European Union for generations to come. Our key message is clear: through collaboration, innovation, and targeted action, we can transform the digital landscape of Europe, ensuring it remains competitive and resilient in the global digital economy.

**AAVIT** - Association for Applied Research in IT (Czechia)

**American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria** (Bulgaria)

**ANIS** - Employers' Association of the Software and Services Industry (Romania)

**APDETIC** - Association of Producers and Dealers of ICT (Romania)

**Digital Poland Association** (Poland)

**DNA** - Digital National Alliance (Bulgaria)

**HUP** - Croatian Employers' Association (Croatia)

**INFOBALT** (Lithuania)

**ICT Association of Slovenia** (Slovenia)

**ITL** - Estonian Association of Information Technology and Telecommunications (Estonia)

**IT Ukraine Association** (Ukraine)

**IVSZ** - IT Association of Hungary (Hungary)

**LIKTA** - Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association (Latvia)

**SAPIE** - Slovak Alliance for Innovation Economy (Slovakia)