



BLOGPOST



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5 tech things not to forget about

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A new, heated tech policy autumn is shaping up also this year. As government, industry and civil society leaders get back to their desks, there are at least five tech policy debates we should not forget about.

Let me be clear: I think that the European Commission got the political priorities right. Their focus is on strengthening Europe's technology sectors, while addressing the socio-economic issues arising from the transition to a digital-first world. From addressing the power of big tech corporations to fighting disinformation and leading in semiconductors, Europe's political leaders are pursuing a clear industrial and geopolitical strategy for the first time in many decades.

At the same time, while the political and media attention is rightly high on these issues, some other policy debates risk falling in the background. Here is my take on why they should not be forgotten.

Building the basics: 5G, fibre

Many times we heard that there is no digital society without strong telecom networks to underpin it. We agree with this, which is why the top level political focus should remain high and improving the investment climate for 5G and fibre networks. We need them to be rolled-out fast across the whole of Europe.

[Figures](#) have shown that the network investment needs are still significant in the Continent, with additional €300bn required to bring 5G and fibre to all Europeans. As European laws such the

Electronic Communications Code are implemented at the national level, regulatory friction on fibre incentives and spectrum auctions might overall determine a slow down in the pace of roll-out. This is why we need the European Commission to continue its efforts in accompanying Member States and National Regulators to a fast and investment-oriented implementation of such EU laws.

Thinking global: internet as one

While the US-China tech decoupling is one of the big hits in today's headlines, I believe we should look at the broader picture and ask ourselves what the future of the internet looks like. Internet governance debates – and the corresponding dialogue in international forums – was very hyped until a few years ago. Today, instead, it might not get a fraction of the attention it deserves.

We need to ensure that, both in formal settings such as the ITU and in informal ones such as the IGF, the focus is kept on an open, multistakeholder, and bottom-up [governance](#) of the internet. One that preserves the decentralised nature of today's Internet across global geographies. This can also be a major asset for addressing future use cases – including the nascent 5G ecosystem.

Going green: ICT's enabling value

Inside the tech and telecoms sector, the current focus is on achieving climate neutrality and reducing all types of environmental impact, including promoting the circular economy. This is the right focus, and further [collaboration](#) between institutions and industry is being built around this with the European Green Digital Coalition.

At the same time, however, I am worried that the debate on energy transition policies might be underestimating the potential of digital solutions in slashing the emissions of other sectors. According to [BCG](#) numbers, this potential can be as high as 15% of the current total carbon emissions. As national governments roll-out recovery plans, this should be a central focus not only of digital ministries, but also of economic development and green transition ministries.

Balancing rights: no internet blocking

The European telecoms industry has expressed full [support](#) for the Digital Services Act. The intention of tackling specific harmful content that is proliferating on platforms is a necessary step to take: the quality of the public debate in liberal democracies also depends on the ability of containing the spread of false information.

At the same time, the technological tools we choose for doing this might make a big difference between defending free speech and harming it. This is why I will tirelessly continue to advocate against blocking of content at the network level (i.e. DNS blocking). One thing is to block specific items that appear on a platform, based on an ex-ante rule about what is acceptable in a democratic society, and what is not. Another thing is to block a full website or source at the network level: the risk for freedom of speech would be disproportionate.

Reconciling objectives: ePrivacy reform

The last debate that is at times forgotten is the long-standing issue of [ePrivacy](#) reform. Which is about finally ensuring that the confidentiality of your communications is as protected through online services as it is when you use a telecom network.

Clearly, this is a crucial issue in terms of protecting the privacy of Europeans, who in large chunks communicate via messaging platforms and apps, and deserve the same protection as when they make a phone call. However, this is also a matter of digital leadership and industrial competitiveness for Europe. Realigning ePrivacy with the GDPR is an important remaining obstacle to allowing the development of an innovative European data economy. One in which European companies can innovate on the same grounds as non-European tech companies.

While the political focus today is on the right issues, it is important to firmly keep these five items on top of the priority list, as they constitute the foundation of a strong and open digital society. If they get lost in the buzz, the risk is to undermine the achievement of Europe's ambitious goals on digital leadership.