Letter to President von der Leyen – a competitive Europe means a digital Europe

Nearly a year has passed since your Commission was formed with the aim of restoring Europe's competitiveness. Digitalisation and connectivity play a crucial role in this regard, as was signalled by Europe's main industrial leaders last year. This is why we welcome your very necessary drive for reform, but we fear that when it comes to digital policy it might be lost to resistance against change. The reality today is that Europe – which once led – now lags other major markets in many regards, from economic growth to security and the nurturing of innovation. With investment-conducive reforms, our companies are ready to further step up and are convinced we can attract even more investment.

We write together to express our serious concern that the bold reforms urgently needed to secure Europe's digital future are being placed at risk by slow and timid actions from your Commission. Your political programme, as expressed in your Mission Letters, and backed by the pertinent recommendations from Mario Draghi's year-old report – thoroughly researched and widely accepted as the right direction for Europe – deserves to be acted upon with the highest level of ambition.

The leading global economies rely on world-leading digital infrastructures. Asia and the US have combined massive capital and scale to lead the way. Meanwhile, for years Europe has chosen fragmentation and value-destructive policies. The result is connectivity leadership lost and real threats to Europe's future digital competitiveness and security.

Only 2% of Europeans connect to 5G standalone networks, compared to a quarter of Americans and more than 77% in China. Huge opportunities, both economic and social, are already being lost, notably in deriving maximum value from industrial data and exploring the true potential of AI.

With 84% of all global internet connections taking place over mobile last year, the need for 5G standalone networks must be prioritised to ensure Europe's competitiveness. Europe's industrial powerhouses, from automotive to fintech, may soon come to resemble houses of cards without the connectivity to explore, scale and exploit new services. Your Commission has the power to help reverse this trend.

This is why the Digital Networks Act (DNA) is a crucial opportunity. Europe's sovereignty, security and ability to protect its values rests on the Commission delivering against its promise of serious reform.

To deliver and maintain world-leading digital infrastructure is not cheap – mobile network operators in Europe have invested more than €500 billion over the past decade in rolling-out 5G, with work ongoing. But scale matters. Europe has more than 100 mobile operators, across 27 countries; unless the Commission takes bold action with a clearly stated intent to address the need for scale, European industries will continue to lack the strength to invest at the same pace as their competitors in the US, Asia and other markets.

For leading European companies to compete globally, an underinvested infrastructure is a structural barrier for secure, resilient, and high-quality connectivity and compute which is needed across all industries like mobility, energy, or Industry 4.0. A forward-looking and ambitious regulatory framework is therefore central to Europe's fight to become an attractive place for investment again; the Commission must act boldly to recognise the link between scale and investment, and a much-simplified regulatory framework that increases investment capacities for all industrial sectors in the context of communication and compute.

Your rallying call to the Commission was a year ago; we are ready to support you and your College so the EU enters 2026 with a clear action plan for accelerating investment in Europe's digital networks as the key facilitators of growth, security, innovation, resilience and competitiveness in Europe. It is an opportunity that simply cannot be missed. Your Commission needs to act on this now.

List of signatories:

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