

Speaking Notes

Meeting of Chairpersons of EU

Communications, Education and Transport Committees

Thank you for the invitation to join you here today, on this important week in Ireland and Europe's digital calendar.

I would particularly like to welcome Robert Madelin, Director General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG Connect) in the European Commission.

I would also like to welcome Ireland's Digital Champion, David Puttnam. David has been working closely with us on the journey to create a more connected digital society, in which citizens, communities and businesses can reap the economic and social rewards that the internet enables.

The timing of this meeting is auspicious. This week, Ireland will host the Commission's Digital Agenda Assembly. There are a myriad of digital events happening across the city all week as a consequence of the Assembly being brought to Dublin. To give you just some examples of this "Digital Week":

Later today, David Puttnam will address a conference in Dublin Castle which will explore the potential of online digital cultural content, under the slogan "Access, Use, Re-use". This is particularly timely, given that we got agreement earlier this year on the Directive on Re-use of Public Sector Information.

Tomorrow, Europe's Digital Champions, senior policy makers and thinkers from across Europe will meet to consider our digital future, reflecting what the societies, cities, Governments and schools of 2050

might look like in a truly digital society, and what policy levers do we need to be thinking of right now to address that future.

In tandem with this event tomorrow, Ireland's Digital Hub Development Agency will host a meeting of similar agencies across Europe. The Digital Hub Development Agency is a cluster of 70 small digital media enterprises employing 800 people. There are similar and highly successful cluster models across Europe and this will be the first time that they have met to share best practice and experience in developing the right environment in which digital enterprises can flourish.

On Wednesday, the Digital Agenda Assembly begins. 600 delegates are due to attend this event and day one will consist of seven themed workshops considering issues. These include digital entrepreneurship, cyber security, broadband, cloud, ICT skills and the Digital Single Market. Speakers at the workshops will include the global head of cyber security for IBM, Director of Intel Labs, Head of European Policy at Nokia Siemens, Ireland and UK representative of Google, and the President of Bell Labs. This intense day of workshops will include novel demonstrations:

- A “hackathon” for young coders will take place in the castle complex and delegates will be able to see at first-hand how easily young people take to coding and consider how this can be translated to address our widening ICT skills gap.
- Some of the larger companies, including HP and Symantec will give practical examples of cyber attacks at the cyber security workshop.
- A “Dragon’s Den” type event will take place at Ireland’s National Digital Research Centre. In this workshop, prospective entrepreneurs will pitch their ideas at a panel of experts in hope of winning funding and being chosen for a direct mentoring programme that brings their idea to the market.

- Finally we will have an exhibition of digital art from one of Ireland's leading art and design third level institutions (Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology).

In parallel with the workshops being held on Wednesday, Commissioner Kroes will launch a Digital Masterplan for Dublin City on Wednesday.

Later on Wednesday evening, Ireland's telecommunications industry will host a reception for the delegates at the Assembly and we expect that An Taoiseach will address the delegates at this reception, underlining again the importance which Ireland attaches to the digital agenda.

On Thursday, the plenary of the Assembly will be opened by the Minister, David Puttnam and Commissioner Kroes. This event will bring all of the delegates together to hear the outcomes from the workshops and to hear input from speakers who include Dana Strong, Chair of the Irish Telecommunications Industry Federation, Ralph Rivera, Head of BBC Future Media, and a number of entrepreneurs including, Jordan Casey, a 13 year old entrepreneur from Ireland.

In bringing the Assembly to Dublin, we have endeavoured to expand its reach, giving practical demonstrations of WHY the Digital Agenda is so important for Europeans, and building a series of events around the two day Assembly that celebrate and underline the transformative impact of the internet on society.

Robert has already taken us through some of the challenges of the Digital Agenda. That Agenda has 101 actions for Member States and the Commission. Last year, the Commission's report on progress indicated that we need to redouble our efforts in relation to the digital single market, public sector innovation, high speed broadband, trust and security, cloud computing, digital skills and R&D.

Europe has a lot to be proud of in its pursuit of a truly digital single market for its citizens and businesses:

- One of our most successful achievements for example was the pan-European development and deployment of 2nd generation mobile technology (GSM).
- Across Europe we are now also releasing spectrum which will be used for the first time to deliver mobile telecommunications services. With the advent of high speed 4G technology, this means faster broadband delivered over mobile platforms. With the exponential growth in mobile services and technology, this is a much needed development which will benefit considerably from a harmonised EU approach.
- I am pleased to see also that roaming rates will reduce yet again on 1st July, allowing our citizens to travel across Europe without having to worry unduly about excessive cross-border charges.

None of these developments would have happened without the support of our respective legislatures in progressing important legislative and policy instruments. The pace of development is however so fast in this sector that we need to continuously set ambitious targets and be sufficiently agile and flexible to develop and adjust measures to changing market circumstances. During Ireland's Presidency of the Council, we progressed a number of important initiatives that will contribute to Europe's Digital Agenda:

- We finalised the Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information which will make public sector information available to citizens and entrepreneurs allowing new digital products and services to emerge.
- Trust and security is a key pillar of the Digital Agenda and we concluded a new mandate for ENISA, during our Presidency while simultaneously progressing the proposed Directive on

Network Information Security and a new Cyber Security Strategy for Europe. It is hoped that we will now be in a position to present Council conclusions on the strategy to The General Affairs Council.

- Related to cyber security is the need for citizens to transact seamlessly across European borders. This is a key measure in the implementation of the first Single Market Act and we gave it a particular priority during our Presidency. We have achieved agreement on key principles for the most complex part of this dossier, which we hope will unlock some of the more challenging issues in progressing this important legislation.
- Data Protection and copyright are also key issues for a digital single market, and we have made good progress on these complex dossiers in the Justice and Home Affairs and Competitiveness Councils.
- Inclusion is a key theme of the Digital Agenda and we cannot hope to have a truly functioning digital single market, if all citizens cannot access services. The proposed webaccessibility Directive is important in this regard and during Ireland's Presidency, we have commissioned some important research by Ireland's National Disability Authority on this theme. The research will assess what Member States might need to do to ensure that citizens are not excluded from access to online Government services.

These initiatives are part of an ever evolving landscape in the digital area. In tandem with developments at EU level, Member States are forging ahead with their own initiatives.

In Ireland, we have developed a multi-faceted approach to the Digital Agenda:

In 2012, we launched a **National Broadband Plan** which aims to bring high speed broadband connectivity to all Irish citizens ahead of the 2020 EU target date. Our aim is to assist industry in accelerating its commercial investment as far as possible, while intervening directly

in areas where there is no case for commercial investment. This is particularly challenging in Ireland, where we have a very dispersed rural population. In assisting industry, we have introduced measures to ease planning and road opening barriers, and our Telecommunications Regulator, ComReg, has introduced the requisite measures to facilitate the rollout of 4G and fixed line fibre based broadband.

Next week, I intend to launch a **National Digital Strategy** which aims to stimulate engagement by non-liners, small businesses and our education sector. We are already investing in our education sector, providing 100Mbps broadband to all second level schools. The challenge now is to ensure that teachers are enabled with the skills and confidence to use the technology effectively. In the area of small businesses, we note the Digital Agenda scorecard finding that Ireland has one of the highest levels of cross-border purchases in Europe. This is a positive achievement but it also represents a threat for our small businesses as we estimate that only 23% of these businesses have an online presence. We aim to change this by introducing a dedicated voucher scheme, similar to that being proposed by the Commision, and by partnering with the internet industry in a campaign to assist small businesses take the important step into trading online. We know of course that McKinsey has estimated that traditional businesses with a meaningful online presence grow twice as fast, export twice as much and employ twice as many people. In Ireland and across Europe, it is imperative that we get this message across to our small business communities.

Allied to this objective, in the last year, we launched a **National Payments Plan** which aims to move businesses away from cash and cheques to transacting their business electronically. We have also launched an **eGovernment Strategy** and most recently we have appointed a Chief Information Officer to drive eGovernment.

We have, of course, a lot to learn from our European counterparts. Working together, sharing experiences, and driving legislation and

policy that reduces barriers across Europe must be a priority for all of us. I look forward to the debate here with you later.