

Joint statement by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioners Jourová and Gabriel one year after the assassination of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia

Today marks one year since the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia. Today, we honour the hard work and relentlessness of Daphne, of Jan Kuciak and many other journalists who sacrifice everything they have – sometimes even their lives – to seek the truth. It is also an occasion, for Europe, to pause for a moment and think about what we hold dear: our right to speak freely.

The Commission stands firm on the protection of free speech and free media. Democracy cannot survive if journalists are no longer able to report freely, if they are subject to censorship, if they are prevented from reporting criticism of the powers that be and especially if they are intimidated, harassed, threatened and sometimes even killed just for doing their job. There is a job democracy relies and depends upon.

In this vein we must also consider whistleblowers, often sources of investigative journalism, who need protection as well. They rely on us to provide for their safety, we cannot let them down.

We don't want these murders to have a chilling effect on free media. Citizens should be able to form their own opinions based on unhampered investigation and independent reporting.

That is why the persons responsible for these assassinations must be brought to justice. We want the full truth. We need to send a clear signal to all journalists: it is safe to work in Europe. If journalists are silenced, so is democracy. This will not happen in Europe. Not on our watch.

Baltic Sea: Council decides on how

much can be fished in 2019

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On 15 October 2018 the Council agreed on next year's **total allowable catches (TACs)** and member states' quotas **for the ten commercially most important fish stocks in the Baltic Sea**.

The Council decided to increase fishing opportunities for **plaice (+43%)**, **sprat (+3%)**, **Western cod (+70%)**, and **herring in the Gulf of Riga (+7%)**. The Council also rolled-over the TACs for **main basin salmon**, and decided to decrease the future amounts to be fished for **Central herring (-26%)**, **Bothnian herring (-7%)**, **Western herring (-48%)**, **Eastern cod (-15%)**, and **salmon in the Gulf of Finland (-3%)**.

Thanks to this agreement, 7 out of 8 stocks for which complete scientific advice was available will be fished in line with the principle of maximum sustainable yield (MSY), covering 98% of fish landings in volume.

The 2020 deadline we set ourselves for achieving the sustainability of our fisheries resources is getting closer. Today's decision is another important step towards meeting this goal, whilst at the same time respecting the socioeconomic viability of our coastal communities.

Elisabeth Köstinger, Austrian federal minister for sustainability and tourism and president of the Council

The agreement in detail

Based on a Commission proposal, the agreed quantities take into account the commitment to meeting the objectives of the **Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)**, including the **achievement of MSY**, as well as **scientific advice** provided in particular by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The provisions of the **multiannual management plan for the Baltic sea** have also been closely followed.

In addition to setting TACs and national quotas on some species, the Council confirmed the extension to 2019 of some **management measures currently in place** to improve the state of the stock **Baltic cod** (bag limitations in **recreational fisheries for the Western cod** and closure period from 1 to 31

July, with derogations for small coastal fisheries for the Eastern cod).

In the context of discussions on fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea, the Council also:

- introduced an inter-area flexibility for **salmon** from subdivisions 22-31 (main basin) to 32 (Gull of Finland) for those member states requesting it, together with measures to address misreporting of catches
- fixed the EU quota for **Norway pout** for the next fishing season running from 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2019 to 50 000 tonnes, thereby guaranteeing continuity in the fisheries of this short lived species
- agreed on an in-year amendment to the TAC for **anchovy** and the modification of the TAC period that will now last until 30 June 2019

Preparatory work conducive to finding swift agreement was carried out at regional level through **BALTFISH**, a body providing a platform for discussion on important fisheries issues in the Baltic Sea, currently under Swedish chairmanship.

Council agreement on 2018 catch limits in the Baltic Sea

2019 TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES (TACS) IN THE BALTIC SEA

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Legend: Latin name – English name/ Nom français/ Deutsche name
Clupea harengus – herring/ hareng/ Hering
Gadus morhua – cod/ morue/ Dorsch
Pleuronectes platessa – plaice/ plie/ Scholle
Salmo salar – Atlantic salmon/ saumon atlantique/ Lachs
Sprattus sprattus – sprat/ sprat/ Sprotte

Next steps

This item will be adopted by the Council by written procedure to ensure that the fishing season for Norway pout and anchovy is not interrupted.

Background

Today's discussions were based on a Commission proposal with article 43(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) as a legal basis. Under such article, it is for the Council to adopt measures on the fixing and allocation of fishing opportunities within the framework of the common fisheries policy. The European Parliament's participation and the Economic and Social Committee's opinion are therefore not required for the adoption of this regulation.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)

[Fisheries](#)

European Battery Alliance Q&A

[IP/18/6114](#)

Why does the EU need to produce batteries instead of importing them?

The battery will represent a high proportion of the value added in the car of the future. Since the car industry is a major player in the European economy, our aim is to retain as much of the value creation in Europe as possible. If battery production is primarily sourced from third countries, European manufacturers will be vulnerable to disturbances in the supply chain. At the same time, Europe will have less influence over standards setting to minimise the environmental impact of battery manufacture.

Currently, the EU has no capability to mass produce battery cells. Europe relies on battery cells from foreign, mainly Asian suppliers. The lack of European cell manufacturing base puts the EU at a competitive disadvantage – it jeopardises the position of EU's industry because of security of supply chain issues and increases costs due to transportation, time delays, weaker quality control or limitation on the design.

Europe has what it takes to become a world leader in sustainable battery technology. The EU is already a leader in many sectors of the battery value chain and has great potential in recycling and the circular economy. We are acting fast to establish a full and innovative, competitive and sustainable battery value chain, with large-scale battery cells production at its core.

It is important to act now and fast. With the shift towards e-mobility, battery demand is expected to surge. Batteries can be a major source of jobs, economic growth and investment for the EU. Some 4-5 million jobs may be created as a result of the EU taking the lead in this sector.

How can the EU compete with its Asian competitors who currently have the lead and can deliver a cheaper product?

The technology of batteries evolves rapidly. In any high-tech field, today's leaders cannot rest on their laurels. Investment in R&D underpinned by a strong scientific base and commitment by all stakeholders can take Europe into the lead.

The EU has invested a lot of money to support research and innovation in batteries. Now it is time to capitalise on these investments and create the partnerships and factories to produce the batteries Europe needs. The next field for competition will be the Li-ion solid state.

What EU-based consortia are emerging and where does the money come from?

- **Northvolt** has started the construction of a demonstration line in Sweden

in Vasteras, with a €52.5 million loan from the European Investment Bank. The production is to start in the second half of 2019. Moreover, Northvolt has also obtained a permit to construct a larger scale facility in Skellefteå in Sweden. The company is also teaming up with **the BMW Group** and **Umicore** in a consortium covering a complete and sustainable value chain for battery cells for electrified vehicles in Europe. It is being financed from their own resources.

- The battery maker **SAFT** announced in February 2018 a consortium with **Solvay, Umicore, Siemens** and **Manz** to develop and industrialize next generations of battery cells with solid state technology and some preliminary development on advanced lithium-ion.
- Companies and research institutions in Germany are working with great ambition to establish a battery cell production in Germany in due time.
- **Siemens** is working with the entire cell manufacturing value chain on manufacturing challenges and solutions, and has recently engaged in piloting the first fully automated and digitized production lines in Europe.
- **Umicore** announced in June 2018 a major investment in Poland – Nysa – for the production of cathode materials. The plant will build upon the state-of-the-art technologies and is due to start deliveries in late 2020. Furthermore, a new Process Competence Centre will be built in Belgium to develop and scale up high-efficiency production technologies.
- **BASF** is a strong player in the battery materials market. The company expects the market for lithium-ion batteries to grow rapidly and plans to add production capabilities in Europe.
- **Solvay** is working on developing state-of-the-art electrolytes and electrode binders and separators that are needed for highly efficient batteries. The company is considering building a plant in Europe.

What role the state aid will play and is the public funding in general justified?

Leaving aside any other uses of batteries in the future, the car industry needs batteries to stay globally competitive and a globally competitive car industry is very important for the EU economy. However, the creation of an EU-based battery industry is a long term strategic goal. One which we cannot expect car manufacturers to support on their own. Given the promise a long term rewards for the EU, public investment in developing the battery industry is a no-brainer.

Where projects require State Aid, different rules may apply. For example, collaborative Research, Development and Innovation (R&D&I) projects may receive high levels of support (up to 70% of the costs of applied research for large enterprises and even higher for SMEs). Moreover, production investments in disadvantaged areas of the EU can be eligible for support under Regional aid rules.

As part of the 2018 Action Plan on batteries, Important Projects of Common

European Interest (IPCEI) may be set up. Such a project can benefit from high levels of aid (up to 100% of the funding gap). They must involve several Member States, generate positive spill-overs across the EU and be extremely ambitious in terms of research and innovation.

How will the EU ensure that the battery sector does not cause environmental disasters because of its raw material intensity?

Future batteries will play a key role in enabling a green and secure energy supply for Europe. Their development can create jobs and support growth in key industries. But the pursuit of commercially competitive, high-performance batteries needs to go hand-in-hand with the quest to lower their environmental impact.

Considering the entire lifecycle of batteries, the environmental gains of using batteries offsets the environmental impact triggered by their production. Recycling plays an essential role to ensure this. Recovering materials at the end of the life of batteries reduces the impact of mining and manufacturing: CO2 emissions are lowered, less hazardous substances are used and the local impact of mining activities is reduced. This is why the EU has a policy aimed to ensure the recycling of spent batteries, the Batteries Directive. However, the full potential of recycling still needs to be untapped.

Other opportunities to tackle a range of environmental issues exist, such as using non-toxic materials; increasing energy density; extending battery lifespan or improving charging efficiency. Changes in design and production could bring about substantial environmental benefits: more efficient use of raw materials, reduced impacts of pollutants on human health and nature, plus fewer GHG emissions and lower energy consumption associated with the manufacture and use of batteries.

When it comes to the extraction of the minerals and the treatment of metals used in batteries, these processes usually take place outside of the EU, and in some cases in countries unable or unwilling to implement adequate health, labour and environmental protection conditions. The EU should not offshore the environmental impact of the production of the batteries used in Europe. Environmental, health and social conditions within the EU are amongst the highest in the world, but nothing prevents the development of fully compliant extractive activities here as it is already the case for some metals.

How is the development of infrastructure keeping up with an ongoing shift to e-mobility?

Having the right infrastructure is key for e-mobility to take off. People won't buy electric cars if they can't recharge them, but why invest in infrastructure if people aren't buying e-vehicles? To break this vicious circle, investment is needed.

We now have almost 135.000 public rechargers in place across the EU. However, it is estimated that by 2020, 440.000 publicly accessible recharging points would be needed – a significant increase compared to today. Reaching this

objective would require significant investments, especially in urban areas. Besides expanding the network, it will also need to be improved. Most importantly, the network needs to be interoperable cross-borders.

The roll-out of alternative fuels infrastructure is supported by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the EU's financial mechanism to support the development and modernisation of infrastructure. In total, CEF has so far supported 641 projects with a total amount of €22.3 billion. Additionally, €450 million is made available to finance alternative fuel infrastructure through the InnovFin Energy Demo Projects (EDP) and CEF Debt Instrument. They are managed by the European Investment Bank.

Is the EU only investing in batteries as key technology for mobility and decarbonisation?

In the context of decarbonisation, the EU also supports research and innovation in Fuel Cells and Hydrogen technologies both for energy and mobility applications. Within the Horizon 2020 framework programme the EU invests €665 million in the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking – a public-private partnership with the hydrogen industry.

Moreover, within the European Green Vehicles Initiative, energy efficiency of vehicles and alternative powertrain projects are funded, such as natural gas.

Within more basic experimental research programmes, a large portfolio of research topics is funded to explore the potential of future technologies to decarbonise transport.

EU Battery Alliance: Major progress in establishing battery manufacturing in Europe in only one year

One year on from the [launch](#) of the European Battery Alliance (EBA), the Commission Action Plan is in place, the first pilot production facilities are being built and further projects are announced to establish the EU as the lead player in the strategic area of battery innovation and manufacturing.

Batteries will be as essential to the automotive industry of the 21st century as the combustion engine was in the 20th century. If the EU is to maintain its leadership in the automotive sector, but also in clean energy systems, it has to have independent capacity to develop and produce batteries. Today Vice-President **Šefčovič** is hosting a high-level meeting with Member States and CEOs to present main achievements and to discuss next decisive steps.

Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš **Šefčovič** said: *"I am proud to see the*

traction created by the European Battery Alliance. As we mark its first year anniversary, we can show how the various pieces of puzzle are coming together thanks to our collaborative work with the European Investment Bank, several governments and the industry. We are now building a whole competitive value chain in Europe, with sustainable battery manufacturing at its core. And we are doing this at light speed."

Commissioner for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Elżbieta **Bieńkowska** said: *"This alliance is at the heart of our industrial policy. A strong battery industry is a perfect fit for our ambition to promote clean mobility. E-cars are the standard example, but we're also already thinking about how the battery alliance could be useful for trucks, sea shipping and ferries. If Europe wants to lead and compete with other big industrial players around the world, we need to hurry up."*

For Europe, battery production is a strategic imperative for clean energy transition and the modernisation and competitiveness of its industry, including the automotive sector. This will, at the same time, be providing a boost to jobs and growth, stimulate research and innovation and prepare the European industry to support climate commitments set by the EU to tackle climate change also in the context of the Paris Agreement. Moreover, the Commission's "New Industrial Policy Strategy" goal is to make the EU the world leader in innovation, digitisation and decarbonisation.

The Strategic [Action Plan for Batteries](#) covered all the activities which can help Member States, regions and European industry establish competitive, innovative and sustainable battery manufacturing projects in the EU. These include measures on the access to [raw materials](#), research and innovation, skills, the regulatory framework that will ensure that the batteries placed on the market are not only competitive, high quality and safe but also sustainable and recyclable. The Action Plan was built on discussions with key industrial stakeholders, interested Member States and the European Investment Bank.

On the side of **the industry**, there has already been substantial progress in many areas.

On the EU ecosystem:

In less than a year, the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) InnoEnergy** has managed to mobilise and steer a network of around **260 innovation and industrial actors**, coming from all segments of the batteries value chain. These key actors have committed to investing into actions and projects that they have collectively identified as top priorities, ranging from cells manufacturing, second-life batteries, ecolabel, carbon footprint reduction in manufacturing, a clearing house for batteries recycling, vehicle-to-grid, and enhanced cooperation between universities and companies to set up relevant education and training programmes.

On manufacturing projects:

Battery materials

- Umicore announced in June 2018 a major investment in Poland – Nysa – for the production of cathode materials. The plant will build upon the state-of-the-art technologies and is due to start deliveries in late 2020. Furthermore, a new Process Competence Centre will be built in Belgium to develop and scale up high-efficiency production technologies.
- BASF is a strong player in the battery materials market. The company expects the market for lithium-ion batteries to grow rapidly and plans to add production capabilities in Europe.
- Solvay is working on developing state-of-the-art electrolytes and electrode binders and separators that are needed for highly efficient batteries. The company is considering building a plant in Europe.

Battery cells

- Work has already begun to build a demonstration line in a project led by [Northvolt](#) of Sweden (with a EUR 52.5 million loan from the European Investment Bank).
The production is to start in the second part of 2019. Northvolt has also obtained the permit to construct a larger scale facility in Skellefteå in Sweden. The objective is to scale up production up to 32 GWh in 2023.
- The BMW Group, Northvolt and Umicore have formed a joint technology consortium in order to work closely together on the continued development of a complete and sustainable value chain for battery cells for electrified vehicles in Europe.
- The battery maker company SAFT has announced in February 2018 a consortium with Solvay, Umicore, Manz and others to develop and manufacture battery cells – starting with advanced Li-ion technology followed by Li-ion solid state.
- Siemens is working with the entire cell manufacturing value chain on manufacturing challenges and solutions, and has recently engaged in piloting the first fully automated and digitized production lines in Europe.
- Companies and research institutions in Germany are working with great ambition to establish a battery cell production in Germany in due time.
- Other EU operators are also building facilities to produce battery cells, notably for energy storage applications (FAAM in Italy and MES in the Czech Republic).

This list of announced manufacturing projects and investments is by no means exhaustive.

The Commission has **started with the rapid implementation of the Strategic Action Plan for Batteries**. Key actions are now underway:

1. **The regulatory framework** – the work on a new Eco-design Regulation is rapidly developing, to set the performance and sustainability criteria that batteries will have to comply to be placed on the EU market. The preparatory study is under preparation and a first stakeholder public consultation meeting will be organised on 20 December in Brussels. In the context of battery Ecodesign, the Commission's Joint Research Centre has also [published today](#) the results of a survey of battery-related standards. The Commission Report on the Evaluation of the EU Batteries

Directive should also be published before the end of the year. It will address i.a. the collection of waste batteries, the recycling levels achieved within the EU or the labelling system. The results of the study in support of the Evaluation will be made [available](#) by the end of October.

2. **Raw Materials** – a High Level Conference on Raw Materials in Brussels on 14th November will present recommendations based on a dialogue launched by the Commission with the Member States on battery-related raw materials in view of developing attractive framework conditions for exploration, extraction and recycling of battery raw materials in Europe. The Commission is calling industry to also build raw materials refining capacity in the EU.
3. **Interregional Partnership on Batteries** – at a workshop on 8th October an Interregional Partnership on batteries has been set up. Slovenia has proposed to take the lead together with 7 regions in total on advanced materials. This partnership will benefit from support from special teams established within the Commission and can also benefit from external advisory services to accelerate towards scale-up and commercialisation activities. Another partnership led by Lombardy on de-and-remanufacturing of batteries is already well advanced in establishing a network of pilot demonstration plants for recycling. Based on their respective special strengths, more regions are currently expressing interest in joining these partnerships. Support is provided from the European Regional Development Fund ([ERDF](#)).
4. **Research** – on 24 January 2019 a call will open with a total budget of EUR 114 million from the EU Research and Innovation Programme Horizon 2020 for battery related topics, also supporting European Battery Alliance objectives. In 2020, additional topics for battery-related projects with a total budget of EUR 70 million will be published. For the next MFF the Commission has also the intention to propose a "Partnership" on batteries under Horizon Europe. In parallel, a new European Technology and Innovation Platform is being set up. The objective is to advance on battery research priorities, define long-term visions, elaborate a strategic research agenda and road-maps. The leadership of this Platform will be taken by the industrial stakeholders, research community and Member States.
5. **Skills** – In the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, the next call for proposals for the Sector Skills Alliances implementing the [Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills](#) will be published in the end of October 2018. This new call will cover six sectors including 'batteries for electro-mobility'. The selected Blueprint Alliances will identify skills gaps and future skills needs in the sector, develop a sectoral skills strategy, work on European occupational 'core' profiles and labour-market relevant European vocational 'core' curricula, and draft an action plan for implementation at national or regional level.

Background

The European Battery Alliance was launched by Vice President Šefčovič with Member States and industry in October 2017. This cooperative platform now gathers the European Commission, interested EU countries, the European

Investment Bank and over 260 industrial and innovation stakeholders. The objective is to create a competitive, innovative and sustainable value chain in Europe with sustainable battery cells at its core. To prevent technological dependence on our competitors and capitalise on the jobs, growth and investment potential of batteries, Europe has to move fast in the global race. According to available forecasts, the battery market could be worth of €250 billion a year from 2025 onwards. To cover the EU demand alone, it requires a conservative estimate of at least 20 'gigafactories' (large-scale battery cell production facilities) established in Europe. The scale and speed of the necessary investment require a combined effort to address this industrial challenge.

The main outcome of the European Battery Alliance so far has been the Strategic Action Plan for Batteries adopted in May 2018 and the industrial investments announced in the area of battery materials and battery cells. The Action Plan – part of the third '[Europe on the Move](#)' package, completing the Juncker's Commission's ambitious agenda for the modernisation of mobility – comprises of a set of robust measures in the area of critical raw materials, EU research and innovation or regulatory requirements to support the competitiveness of our companies.

For More Information

[MEMO/18/6113](#)

[European Battery Alliance website](#)

[Europe on the Move website](#)

Opening remarks by Commissioner Gabriel at the FT-ETNO Summit 2018: Strengthening Europe's Digital Leadership

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to be with you today and to participate for the second time in this unique moment of the telecommunication year in Brussels.

I would like to thank ETNO for having again organised this event and for the timely and relevant choice of the theme: the issue of digital leadership has never been so central for our common future in Europe.

As you all know, the digital shift comes with a massive redistribution of

cards, changing the established order on both the economical and societal points of views, with new winners and new losers, among people, companies and countries.

Europe is no exception and we are clearly under pressure to deliver collectively in order to keep the pace of digital change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Leadership starts with a lucid look at where we are.

The reality is that EU's digital leadership is not fully achieved: on the global digital map, we are still not at the place, which we are aiming at. Of course, Europe has a strong position in many industrial sectors, such as photonic or robotics and its performance in connectivity is globally satisfactory. But we are still underinvesting in new technologies and are lacking European digital world-class online players. In this end, leadership will not come by chance. It will depend on today's decisions and today's action.

Adopting a helicopter view, we are facing three major challenges

First challenge, the **creation of a level-playing field and of the conditions for fair competition** enabling each actor, small or big to compete. The Rockefeller or Standard Oil from the old times have been replaced by powerful online companies, which are sometimes using their market power to undermine competition. The rise of online platforms and the use of data will remain a serious challenge for public policies during the decade to come.

Second challenge, **the need to adapt to digital times** and in particular to **renew our social contract**. We are all witnessing the rise of criticism amongst people affected by globalisation, fearing for their future and for the future of their children. Be aware, this is not just a social issue: no business will flourish without a social consensus between all actors, on how to share benefits and insure risks. It should be a priority for all of us.

Third challenge, the need to **invest massively in human capital, research and development**. Being at the periphery of the global digital economy is not an option for the EU. But today, the centre of gravity of the digitizing world stands on the other side of the Atlantic, and now increasingly in China. Knee-jerk reactions will not be enough to meet this challenge: as we all know, US's leadership is deep rooted in political decisions taken since the 60's to stay at the technological frontier, if necessary with huge investments such as DARPA or programmes such as Apollo.

Global leadership on digital: the Digital Single Market

The good news is that we have started to answer these challenges in the EU since 2015, with the establishment of our digital single market.

In the last four years, we have put forward more than 60 initiatives aiming at protecting European citizens, with a focus on competitiveness, innovation and fundamental values. This is certainly the most comprehensive and

ambitious attempt to drive a continent to the digital age.

The Digital Single Market is already a reality with portability of content, end of roaming surcharges, end of unjustified geo-blocking, and protection of personal data. In doing this, the EU has become a world leader for digital regulation and an example for our partners who are sharing our values.

The digitalisation of our industry is also an essential focus of the DSM. We are building on our numerous industrial assets, our know-how and our worldwide reputation of quality and innovation. Among recent success, the decision to invest collectively in high performance computing based on European technology is a real breakthrough which will irrigate the whole European economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building a gigabit society

Let me come to a dimension of the Digital Single Market, which, I know, is close to our hearts: connectivity.

To serve both citizens and business, top-notch infrastructures are essential and are at the centre of the DSM: no service, no digitalisation of our society will be possible without high-speed, secure and intelligent connectivity.

You know in detail the numerous actions that we are taking within the Digital Single Market to foster the development of high-speed networks through private and public investment.

But these infrastructures do not only need to be fast, they also need to be **safe and intelligent**.

Cybersecurity is the *sine qua non* condition for trust online and for the development of online business. Our digitalisation will depend on transforming our ability to protect the EU against cyber threats. With the cybersecurity package, we are precisely enabling our ecosystems to be more resilient with better certification and a more efficient ENISA.

Intelligence will also be embedded in future infrastructures and the EU needs clearly to intensify its efforts on artificial intelligence, a domain where we are still lagging behind as compared with China and the US. For this to happen, we need to have a much intense collective discussion about AI. The first version of the ethics guidelines of the high-level expert group that we created earlier this year will be published for an online public consultation by the end of the year. I call on all of you to participate! It is very important that the experts hear from industry, about your expectations and needs when it comes to AI.

The importance of the new telecom Code

The telecom Code agreed last June is of course central in our attempt to equip the EU with the best communication infrastructures.

Let's take the time to pause on it.

First of all, it is one year, since I took the floor at the 2017 edition of the FT ETNO summit, when negotiations for a new Code were entering their final stage and I remember the passionate discussions we had by then. Fully satisfied or not, we can recognise that the new code is in line with our initial endeavour: to ensure both a pro-competitive and pro-investment environment.

During all this time of preparation and negotiation, we have been listening very carefully to what all of you said and your valuable input has been essential to find a bold and balanced outcome.

One of the key messages we received from you and other market actors, including financial institutions, was to increase predictability in order to foster investment.

My hope is that we have delivered investment certainty and smart regulation. On spectrum, the code ensures 20 years of investment predictability with a clear timetable for availability of pioneer bands by the end of 2020, under the same conditions all over Europe. Certainty is also set in stone for the development of small cells, an absolute necessity to pave the way for 5G and WIFI development. Finally, we have adopted procedures capable of exercising peer pressure, to avoid wrong decisions, which can cost millions.

We also have also delivered provisions for lighter regulation for those who co-invest in very-high capacity networks in the form of clear conditions, with a safeguard role for the Commission and BEREC. The Code gives a clear signal to operators of different sizes to seek meaningful co-operations and ramp-up investment. In addition, where business models emerge that do not present the usual risks for competition, regulation takes a step back: this is the case for wholesale-only operators, which have already started to show their commitment and potential in boosting fibre network deployment.

Finally, Europe can take pride in the fact that citizens are at the centre of its policies. The objectives within the Union are clear, they are high-speed connectivity, affordability, and security for end-users, allow me insist and say ALL end-users, in line with universal rights precepts.

The Code will also greatly benefit to our citizens including those inhabiting rural areas who will benefit from better connectivity. Citizens will have access to affordable communications services, including universally available internet access, for services such as e-government, online banking or video calls. Consumers will also be able to make international calls to other EU countries for 19 cents a minute maximum. I know what your concerns were on this file. However, as for roaming, the capping of international calls can be a success benefiting every actor on the long term.

Next step to ensure that the Code will be a success

Now, after 5 years of policy reflection and negotiation, it is time to act!

The reality is that the final success of the code is still not written: it

will depend on the commitment of all actors: Member states, regulators, operators and the Commission.

On our side, we will deliver the necessary implementing and delegated acts such as the single mobile voice termination rate. I take responsibility for the fact that our work will be done in a transparent manner, valuing your input.

Our cooperation to make the code a success will imply a multitude of players, from Member States, Regulation authorities, to European organisations. Member states' will have a central role with the transposition of the directive, the appointment of competent authorities and the delivery of effective peer reviews. National Regulation authorities will play a key role with the analysing of their national markets and the selection of the most appropriate regulatory tools from the toolset that the Code provides. BEREC will ensure consistency at European level, notably through guidelines on a number of important provisions of the Code, including the provisions on co-investments and on symmetric regulation.

Finally, nothing will be possible without your commitment. We expect operators to explore co-investments schemes as early as possible; there is no need to wait for the rules to become applicable. This is now the time to design, to negotiate, to prepare.

In 2020 the ball must be already rolling.

This broad and intense cooperation will be critical to forge concrete change within the EU and also to develop EU's soft-power outside of the EU.

In this respect, the current collective work to support the digitalisation of Western Balkan is both a sandbox and an example on how we can move forward with common goals and pragmatic solutions.

As you know, the European Commission presented in February its Strategy for the Western Balkans. One of the important elements of this strategy focuses on digital: the Digital Agenda for the region, which we launched last June in Sofia.

I have chosen to be pragmatic and flexible, when it comes to the subjects of intensified cooperation. The reduction of roaming tariffs ranks high in this regional agenda. Our role is simple; we share the inspiration and act as catalyser, up to partners in the region to agree on how to further reduce these tariffs. I take pride in the fact that there is already a regional roaming agreement between four partners, all the more as the debate continues on how to extend benefits to all citizens in the region.

A balanced and ambitious approach

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now that it is time to conclude I would like to come back to the issue of leadership.

Today, even more than yesterday, leadership is an endless frontier: it requires constant efforts for those who want to stay in the race. Established positions are far less protected than in the past and those who have read the book "the End of power" of Moises Naim" know that in the XXIth century, any power is more fragile than ever.

This is why we have no time and no parcel of energy to loose: we must now look forward! The technological revolution will not wait for us and the global competition is fierce for achieving digital leadership.

As the representatives of major organisations for a strategic sector, you bear a special responsibility, and I count on you to use all your energy and creativity to help us delivering on our DSM agenda, which is both bold and pragmatic.

Beyond the implementation of the code, I am also thinking on the e-privacy directive. We need to finalise it. It can provide a win-win success with a high level of protection for consumers while allowing businesses to innovate with more opportunities to use data and provide additional services.

I regret not being able to stay to hear your discussion and I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful exchanges. Let build this digital leadership together!