Making the Digital Single Market a reality

Andrus Ansip writes that the European Commission's Strategy for the DSM lays down a marker for Europe's digital future, creating a free, fair and open digital environment that is accessible to everyone

The European Commission launched its Strategy for building a Digital Single Market (DSM) on 6 May. It lays down a marker for Europe's digital future, creating a free, fair and open digital environment that is accessible to everyone.

Europe's people and companies do not enjoy the same freedoms online as they do in the existing single market - the physical one. Our plan will change all that, and give Europeans the oppotunity to unlock the huge potential of the digital economy.

Our strategy has a clear timetable, with sixteen ambitious initiatives based around three inter-linked policy pillars:

- better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services across Europe;

- high-quality infrastructure that works smoothly across Europe. We also need to create the right and fair conditions in the underlying environment;

- preparing for the future, to maximise the growth potential of the digital economy.

I will highlight a few initiatives under each pillar. An urgent first task is to secure and guarantee free movement of goods and services in a unified digital space, and to improve online access generally. The DSM aims to boost cross-border e-commerce by encouraging SMEs to sell across borders.

One of our first initiatives will be to bring rules for online purchases more into line across the European Union. People could save €11.7 billion per year if they could choose from a full range of EU goods and services when they shop online.

European Commission

Roadmap for completing the

Digital Single Market /// Initiatives

2015

2016

I. Better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services across Europe

Legislative proposals for simple and effective cross-border **contract rules** for consumers and businesses

GEO BLOCKED

A wide ranging review to prepare legislative proposals to tackle unjustified **geo-blocking**

Review of the **Regulation on Consumer Protection Cooperation**

Measures in the area of **parcel delivery**

Competition sector inquiry into **e-commerce**, relating to the online trade of goods and the online provision of services

Legislative proposals for a reform of the **copyright** regime

Review of the **Satellite and Cable Directive**

Legislative proposals to reduce the administrative burden on businesses arising from different **VAT** regimes

II. Creating the right conditions for digital networks and services to flourish

Comprehensive analysis of the role of **platforms** in the market including **illegal content** on the Internet

Legislative proposals to reform the current **telecoms rules**

Review of the **e-Privacy Directive**

Review of the **Audiovisual Media Services Directive**

Establishment of a **Cybersecurity contractual Public-Private Partnership**

III. Maximising the growth potential of the Digital Economy

Adoption of a **Priority ICT Standards Plan** and extending the **European Interoperability Framework** for public services

Initiatives on data ownership, **free flow of data** (e.g. between cloud providers) and on a **European Cloud**

New **e-Government Action Plan** including an initiative on the 'Once-Only' principle and an initiative on mandatory interconnection of business registers

Digital Single Market

The DSM is also about modernising today's copyright system. We want to improve people's access to cultural content online, while opening new opportunities for creators and the content industry. This will also promote cultural diversity. We will present legislative proposals before the end of 2015 to reduce the differences between national copyright regimes and allow for wider online access to works across the EU.

Then, under its second pillar, the strategy will look to improve conditions for digital networks and services to underpin the DSM. The Commission will propose an ambitious reform of EU telecoms rules. This will include more effective spectrum coordination. It will also tackle regulatory differences around EU national markets and create better incentives for investment in high-speed broadband.

The Commission will also conduct a comprehensive analysis of the role of online platforms. It will focus on transparency, liability and equal conditions for competition.

Lastly, we will build a solid foundation for long-term growth. Europe needs to take full advantage of the digital economy, where data is becoming all-important and where people have the skills needed to fill new jobs. They must also have trust and confidence when they go online.

This is a huge undertaking. We have just 18 months to prepare and take all the key decisions. They will not solve all our problems in one go, and certainly not overnight

Common standards and interoperability are essential to make the best of fast-growing sectors such as cloud computing and the Internet of Things. We also need them in the context of promoting e-government services around Europe and a more inclusive e-society.

Together, these initiatives form a realistic roadmap for us to work together over the next four and a half years. They will prepare Europe for a bright digital future. They will help people and companies to get the best from the online world.

I want Europeans to have better protection when buying online. Lower cost for deliveries, more choice and better access to content, goods and services from other EU countries. With the DSM Strategy, the European Commission looks at opportunities that our citizens could enjoy – to help us create a vibrant creative digital economy and society in Europe.

For businesses, the Commission will focus on bringing opportunities for them to create new innovative products for a single market of 500 million people, not 28 splintered national markets. European companies and industries must be at the forefront of the digital revolution – using the DSM to scale up, not to move out. We need equal conditions for all to compete openly and fairly in this digital market. Every company – large or small – plays by the same rules. No discrimination. No favouritism.

I do not have enough space now to go into the details of each initiative that we are planning. However, one thing I do want to say is that they must be taken together, as a coordinated and balanced package.

Europe's single market is not working as well as it should. Without the digital element playing its full part, all of us are missing out on a wealth of opportunity. The DSM is about allowing the freedoms of Europe's single market to enter the digital age. But we are not there yet.

We do not feel the full benefits - either economic or social. We need change. And that change is digital. Not only to create more jobs and economic growth, but also to improve the lives of people and to make life easier for our companies.

The vast majority of member states have asked for the DSM to happen. Our Strategy reflects their contributions, and also those of the European Parliament's main political groups. I hope all EU institutions will agree on a clear timeline for taking this project forward.

This is a huge undertaking. We have just 18 months to prepare and take all the key decisions. They will not solve all our problems in one go, and certainly not overnight. This is going to be long and difficult. Nobody should be under any illusions about that.

None of what we plan will be easy– modernising copyright laws, reviewing telecoms rules, tackling geo-blocking, or assessing the role of platforms. There will be vested interests fighting us all the way. Neither is any of it a 'done deal'. But it is necessary for Europe's digital future. We have to make it happen. It is essential that the DSM can become a reality, where all Europeans will gain.

The real work starts now. ■

Andrus Ansip is Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of the Digital Single Market