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“Parliamentary leadership in promoting peace and development in the age of innovation and technological change”

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**AUSTRIA**

**- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -**

Madam President, Mr. Secretary General,  
Fellow Parliamentarians,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

The world of science and the world of politics usually and unfortunately do not have very many points of contact. Therefore, I am very pleased that this Assembly gives us the opportunity to discuss exactly how we can better connect these two worlds for the benefit of all. As you may know, Austria currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union; let me therefore speak to you today as a fellow parliamentarian about the experience in my home country but also as a representative of the current EU Presidency.

**Which actions at EU level are taken under the Austrian  
presidency**

At the EU level, we realised that we will be best prepared for the future by joining forces and by coordinating our efforts. The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union has chosen the topic of

**“securing prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation”** as one of its three **priorities**. This comprises the following points: avoiding overregulation, installing intelligent policies for digital transformation, completing the Digital Single Market, renewing industrial policy, capturing the potential of artificial intelligence, modernizing public administration, combating harmful tax competition and tax evasion, and bringing forward models of taxation of the digital economy.

Let me give you some examples:

**Horizon Europe**, which will follow the current Horizon 2020 Programme in 2021, is proposed as the most ambitious research and innovation funding programme ever. It will continue well-established funding instruments but will also provide new impetus, be it with respect to the European Innovation Council or developments towards stronger mission orientation of research and innovation.

Building on the Digital Single Market strategy, the main objective of the **Digital Europe Programme** is to shape Europe’s digital transformation for the benefit of citizens and businesses.

These key capacities concern high-performance computing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and advanced digital skills as well as ensuring their wide use and accessibility across the economy and society by businesses and the public sector alike.

### **Vulnerable groups we have to pay attention for when speaking of digitalisation**

When speaking about all these ground-breaking future technologies that will bring changes to society, the nature of employment, etc., we have to make sure that no one is left behind. Let me therefore touch upon the issue of the **gender gap in digitalisation**.

Women are under-represented at all levels in the digital sector in Europe.

Only 17% of the 8 million digital technology experts in the EU are women. Although the digital sector is rapidly growing, creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs every year, the share of women in this sector is decreasing. To counteract this development, girls need to be encouraged early in their life to study subjects in the field of ICT. I am very pleased that the Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel, has outlined actions to increase the participation of women in digital, concentrating on the following three main areas:

- challenging stereotypes;
- promoting digital skills and education;
- advocating for more women entrepreneurs

Also in Austria we have set up several **initiatives** aimed at arousing young people's and girl's interest in ICT and STEM subjects.

Austria is a best-practice example when it comes to its **dual vocational and education training system** with its core principle: "Learning in practice for practice".

Within this system, 13 new apprenticeships, some with a focus on digitalization, have been implemented to counteract the current shortage of suitable and qualified staff.

### **Indicators and benchmarks as basis for reasonable regulation**

What can we as parliamentarians do and how do we make sure to find the most appropriate regulatory measures? One important aspect, in my opinion, is to have useful and reliable indicators and benchmarks enabling us to take sound decisions as well as to monitor their progress. I believe that on a European level we already have very useful instruments in place, such as the **digital scoreboard** that measures the performance of Europe and the member states in a wide range of areas,

from connectivity and digital skills to the digitalization of businesses and public services. The **Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)** summarizes relevant indicators on Europe's digital performance and tracks the evolution of EU member states in digital competitiveness. And, to name one last example, which will focus on the gender issue and will be presented by the end of this year, the **scoreboard for Women in Digital**, including different indicators such as internet usage, basic digital skills of women, STEM graduates, proportion of ICT specialists, and gender pay gap.

### **What needs to be done: build trust and protect citizens**

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have seen the first accidents with fatal consequences involving self-driving cars; in the financial sector, we have witnessed two stock market crashes caused by trading algorithms; the usage of devices such as fitness trackers or car insurance GPS tracking brings about concerns regarding the protection of personal data. In other words, many citizens are concerned about the effects digitalisation may have on the economy and their personal lives. Therefore, I believe that the core prerequisite for an appropriate regulatory framework for innovation and technological change, and the guiding principle for our work in this regard, is to build trust, namely trust in new technologies and their utilisation.

At the Austrian Parliament we have started a project last year called "foresight and technology assessment in the Austrian Parliament" in cooperation with two research institutes, aiming at consulting parliamentarians in technology assessment and foresight.

I therefore believe the future challenge for us legislators will involve

finding a sound balance between paving the way for innovative science that brings about technological change for the benefit of us all and providing for the protection of each individual, vulnerable groups, and society as a whole in order to build trust in our future.

Thank you for your attention.