

B9+ Statement, for D9+ Ministerial Meeting, December 4, 2023

This Statement presents the B9+¹ vision and recommendations to D9+ and EU policy makers on the next steps for a digitalised Europe that enables national Governments, enterprise, innovators, and individuals to rise to the challenges of the 21st Century, creating further prosperity and resilience across both the D9+ States and Europe in the period 2024-2029.

Our vision for a Digital Europe, 2024-2029:

An open, inclusive, green, competitive, resilient and integrated Digital Europe that enables conditions and capacities in Member States, a strong and effective internal market, Business, Innovators and Individuals to develop and harness trusted digital tools and data, connect, innovate and trade to meet the challenges of the 21st century, enhancing our competitiveness, prosperity and resilience.

Key Messages to the D9+ Ministerial meeting, December 4, 2023:

- 1. Promote an open and ambitious EU digital trade agenda.** Work with likeminded partners at multilateral, bilateral and local levels. Deepen existing trading relationships and establish new ones. Ensure governance and regulation works with, not against further beneficial digital trade and facilitates data flows.
- 2. Strengthen the capacities and conditions that enable a successful Digital Europe.** Boost skills, digital infrastructure and connectivity, cybersecurity and resilience, research and innovation, public and private sector adoption of digital technologies² and the twinned green transition. To reach Europe's ambitious 2030 digital objectives, it is essential to bolster investment in critical technology domains, support R&D, skills development, and promote the integration of these technologies into European businesses.
- 3. Strengthen digital competitiveness, innovation and resilience.** Allow new digital rules to take effect. Support the European Commission, Member States and organisations in the implementation, harmonisation and adaptation to new regulations. Safeguard a level playing field in the development and implementation of new rules. To strengthen European competitiveness, deliver a proposed 'competitiveness and internal market check' on any proposed new digital regulation and one that takes stock of the cumulative interplay and impact of recent digital regulation too. Support regulatory innovation³. Encourage compulsory and accessible regulatory sandboxes across all digital regulation. Share and act on lessons from the regulatory sandboxes.
- 4. Deepen the Single Market,** particularly in services. Introduce a new Single Market Strategy with a clear ambition to empowering SME growth through beneficial digital adoption. Deliver a meaningful framework and programme to remove the bottlenecks in the Internal Market impacting the roll out of digital products and services and the potential of SMEs to scale, grow and export. Support digital-first, openness, interoperability, productivity, prosperity and resilience. Support SMEs by implementing one-stop-shops on digitalised public services for business at member state and EU level⁴.
- 5. Be the authoritative and collaborative platform and voice for an outward-looking, secure, competitive, innovative, and pro-enterprise EU.** Work together on a shared strategy to shape an EU agenda built on these principles. Develop and deepen enhanced structures and engagement within the D9+ and with the B9+ on sharing experience in policies and learnings to enhance and safeguard our collective digital transition⁵. The D9+ initiative is important. We welcome the valuable engagement and contributions that the D9+ forum has made to date⁶ and stand ready to support the D9+ further.

¹ The B9+ Group is composed of the business confederations of 12 digitally advanced (D9+) Member States: CEOE (Spain), VBO-FEB (Belgium), SPCR (Czechia), DI (Denmark), EE (Estonia), EK (Finland), IBEC (Ireland), FEDIL (Luxembourg), VNO-NCW (Netherlands), LEWIATAN (Poland), CIP (Portugal) and Swedish Enterprise (Sweden).

²Including Cloud, Big Data, AI, quantum computing, 5G/6G and immersive technologies.

³ For example, the [Spanish AI regulatory sandbox](#) initiative and [ICO regulatory sandbox for personal data](#).

⁴ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/single-digital-gateway_en

⁵ [DESI 2023 dashboard for the Digital Decade](#)

⁶ D9-B9+ discussions from 2021 to date.

Expanded B9+ priorities for D9+ and EU policy makers on the conditions and capacities necessary to enable our vision for a Digital Europe in the period, 2024-2029

1. **Promote an open and ambitious EU digital trade agenda.** Digital trade continues to grow, in 2020 it represented 25% of global trade⁷. Work with likeminded partners⁸. Deepen existing trading relationships and establish new ones⁹. **Include digital in trading agreements, also and not least with developing countries** and devote particular focus to increasing trade in digital services:
 - a. Multilaterally, enable and safeguard trusted international data flows and adequate protections for privacy, intellectual property rights, source codes, algorithms, and trade secrets; commit to conclude the WTO Joint Initiative on eCommerce with a high-standard agreement; and prioritise the extension of the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions at the WTO Ministerial in 2024, and confirm, for greater certainty, that this Moratorium covers the electronic transmissions and the content being transmitted.
 - b. Bilaterally, pursue ambitious EU digital trade agreements and chapters in trade agreements. Engage business and leverage the EU-US Trade and Technology Council. Cooperation and leadership on digital innovation and regulation are key areas where benefits could materialise for several sectors.
 - c. Locally, ensure EU regulation and governance works with, not against digital trade. Ensure UCC reform enables the use of the latest technology for customs simplification and trade facilitation. Enable responsible data use to leverage further benefits in healthcare, education and mobility. Avoid unjustified sovereignty or protectionist requirements, particularly with likeminded partners.

2. **Strengthen the capacities and conditions that enable a successful Digital Europe.** Partner with business. Maximise and monitor collaboration in the achievement of EU and Member States' digital targets to 2030, including digital infrastructure and connectivity, skills, cybersecurity and resilience, innovation, public and private sector adoption of digital technologies¹⁰ and the twinned green transition. Focus on initiatives that attract investment.
 - a. Set ambitious digital targets and funding across all relevant EU programmes to ensure Europe benefits from AI and other emerging technologies¹¹. Maximise funding in areas where the green and digital transition have synergies or are twinned¹².
 - b. Digital Solutions and infrastructure can empower and reinforce the green transition. Roll out targeted digital transformation strategies. Apply a holistic/integrated approach: Explore the whole value chain, including infrastructure and end user demand, to identify areas that drive carbon emissions. Investigate and apply mechanisms that provide transparency in this exploration and enable the attraction of funding.
 - c. Prioritise awareness, skills, and education for citizens and businesses.

⁷ OECD (2023) Key issues in Digital Trade

⁸ We restate previous B9+ statements supporting the need to leverage the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) and enhance EU-Latin American digital trade.

⁹Spanish EU Presidency (Resilient EU 2030).

¹⁰Including Cloud, Big Data, AI, quantum computing, 5G/6G and immersive technologies.

¹¹For example, go beyond the 20% provided for digital initiatives in the Recovery and Resilience Fund.

¹² [B9+ Statement to D9+ Ministerial, October 2021](#) called on policymakers to support coherence in green and digital policy, trajectories and enablers and a need to enable both agendas to work in tandem.

- d. Governments should work with business to develop strategies to tackle digital skills shortages, to ensure that technological developments are not stalled due to a lack of talent and to expand education and training pathways to in-demand jobs. This is crucial to ensure no one is left behind in the digital transition.
 - e. This should include supporting diversity in training providers, a strong focus on Vocational Education and Training, more agile pathways to new skills such as micro-credentials, and scale-up of successful private-sector skilling initiatives.
 - f. Promote digital literacy and improve the digital skills of European Union citizens to ensure that no one is left behind.
 - g. Explore a new programme to attract mobile talent with digital skills.
 - h. Develop connectivity in a technology-neutral and market-driven way. Ensure the value of the EU Recovery and Resilience funds to digital spending, particularly connectivity, are maximised. Facilitate further investment in infrastructure to achieve high-speed connectivity as an essential enabler for digital transformation and inclusion. Spectrum licensing should be leveraged to encourage sufficient spectrum and avoid high prices or restrictions to allow further investment in mobile networks. Ensure regulation enables and does not hamper, electronic communications. Any potential policy interventions affecting relationships in the online ecosystem¹³, shared digital decade ambitions and competitiveness must be carefully considered, and based on clear evidence-based risks¹⁴. Continue to safeguard net neutrality and the advantages of an open internet must be protected.
3. **Strengthen digital competitiveness, innovation and resilience.** Ensure new regulation works with not against beneficial digital innovation and ensure the rulebook applies equitably to all parties. Prioritise an EU strategy on long-term competitiveness and harness the benefits of further digital and data innovation.
- a. Allow new digital rules to take effect. Support the European Commission, Member States and organisations in the implementation, harmonisation and adaptation to new regulations¹⁵.
 - i. Deliver a proposed ‘competitiveness and internal market check’ on any proposed new digital regulation and one that takes stock of the cumulative interplay and impact of recent digital regulation too. Companies are confronted with a lot of new legislation. There needs to be insight into this regulatory interplay to help business planning, innovation and investment.
 - ii. Develop an inter-institutional initiative that simplifies and aligns governance structures to allow for: greater collaboration between regulators, greater collaboration between DGs; and for swift, integrated and informed guidance on compliance. Support long-term competitiveness.
 - iii. Promote meaningful engagement with business to ensure that regulation is aligned with the technological capabilities and competitive needs.
 - b. New legislative proposals should be evidence-based, risk-based, proportionate and introduced only where regulatory gaps are proven. Regulation is more future proofed when rules are predictable, technology-neutral, and principle-based. Support regulatory innovation. Encourage compulsory and accessible regulatory sandboxes in all existing and future digital regulation to permit testing and accelerate

¹³ Telecom operators, platforms, and digitalised businesses using their services.

¹⁴ [Results of the exploratory consultation on the future of the electronic communications sector and its infrastructure](#)

¹⁵ For example, [‘A dataset on EU legislation for the digital world’](#), (Zenner, Marcus and Sekut, July 2023)

innovation to the largest extent possible. Sandboxes should be accessible to any business that wants to participate, including smaller companies. Share and act on lessons gained from regulatory sandboxes.

- c. Considering the growth of cyber threats, invest in cooperation with like-minded public and private partners to improve EU's cyber security and resilience. Work towards harmonised policy approaches and standards with likeminded partners to advance a global and open cyberspace. Ensure Europe's policies and initiatives consider and support cybersecurity and resilience. Ensure a truly unified cyber governance framework and trusted cooperation between the public and private sectors. Ensure an equitable sharing of knowledge of vulnerabilities between both sides. Encourage further investment in innovative, home-grown technologies and skills to foster vendor diversity and boost European competitiveness, security, and resilience (such as Open RAN).
4. **Deepen the Single Market.** Support productivity, prosperity, and resilience. Reinvigorate and harmonize the Single Market, while preserving its achievements. Introduce a new Single Market Strategy with a clear ambition to empowering SME growth through beneficial digital adoption. Design and deliver a meaningful framework and programme to support digital-first, openness, interoperability and deepen the Single Market, particularly in services. Support SMEs by implementing one-stop-shops on digitalised public services for business at member state and EU level.
- a. Focus on removing the bottlenecks and regulatory barriers in the Internal Market impacting the roll out of digital products and services. Enable businesses to scale into pan-European operations to become global players. Address the fragmented implementation and interpretation of digital rules to allow scale and agility. Enhance certainty for business and customers.
 - b. Capitalise on developments in the field of European digital identity of citizens and companies (SSI) to simplify all transactions and movements throughout the EU.
 - c. Improve the interoperability of important business processes like e-invoicing. Explore how national e-invoicing standards can be made interoperable with European frameworks¹⁶ to facilitate further cross-border e-invoicing in Europe.
 - d. Retain the achievement of the digital decade targets as a key political priority for the EU and Member States. Install a process and mechanisms to secure focus, to safeguard coherence and drive this shared strategic agenda.
 - e. Continue to leverage digital tools and data in the evolution of the financial sector. Support a robust, competitive and sovereign European payment's market.



¹⁶ For example, [OpenPeppol](#).