Key messages

Introductory remarks

- **Thank you for the invitation** and the opportunity to exchange views with you today on how we make Europe fit for the digital age.

- I am glad we can meet in this online format since travelling is still restricted.

- One of the positive lessons of the pandemic is that digitalisation can bring people together independently of where they are physically located.

- Equally, digital technologies can facilitate safe free movement during the pandemic within the EU. This is best exemplified by the EU Digital COVID Certificate that will become available as of 1 July.

- On the other hand, digital can also increase the differences between those who can fully benefit from an enriched and secure digital space with a full range of services, and those who cannot.

- To help meet this demand and underpin the digital transformation of our economy, the Commission is supporting the timely deployment of fibre and 5G networks. I welcome the ongoing roll-out of the National Broadband Plan that aims to deliver high-speed broadband services to all premises in Ireland.

- The expansion of the digital sector, however, should not come at the expense of rising greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, data centres are of particular relevance, as they account for the biggest share of ICT emissions.

- Sustainable digital technologies are also needed to achieve our ambitious climate change targets. We believe it is important to coordinate well our policies on the twin transition.

Digital Decade & Recovery and Resilience Facility

- Europe's digital transformation should take place in line with our common values. In this light, on 9 March, the Commission adopted a Communication on a comprehensive Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade that sets out the vision for 2030.

- To ensure direction and gauge success, the Communication sets concrete targets towards 2030 in four cardinal points: (1) a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals; (2) secure and performant sustainable digital infrastructures; (3) digital transformation of businesses; (4) digitalisation of public services.

- However, targets in themselves are of course not enough and we are now developing a proposal to operationalise the Digital Compass in the form of a Policy Programme, which will also help us monitor progress. We shall soon launch a targeted consultation on the proposal.

- The resources available under the Multiannual Financial Framework and NextGenerationEU are significant, but we now need to make sure that they are well coordinated towards key areas linked to the EU's strategic autonomy and to the objectives laid in the Digital Decade.

- As you know, a minimum of 20% of the Recovery and Resilience Facility will be dedicated to support the digital transition and will help to build Europe's Digital Decade on solid foundations.

- I welcome that, on 28 May, Ireland submitted its Recovery and Resilience Plan with an objective to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery effort. The in-depth assessment of the plan is now ongoing, following which we hope to confirm that Ireland has met the digital target.

Cybersecurity

- Last month, we heard about a ransomware attack on the health system of Ireland, forcing Ireland to shut down most of the healthcare IT systems.

- Let me express our solidarity with those affected and firmly condemn this malicious act. This isan aggressive interference in an extremely sensitive and strategic area, as health services all over the world are under pressure fighting the pandemic.

- We are all concerned about the rising number of malicious cyber activities at global level. And we are committed to ensuring that all those living in Europe, citizens and businesses alike, are well protected, both online and offline, against increasing cyber threats and incidents.

- This is why, in our proposal for a revised Network and Information Systems Directive would significantly increase the coverage of the health sector meaning that many more hospitals and other health related facilities will need to take legally required cybersecurity measures and report cyber incidents.

- Today we are also proposing a new Joint Cyber Unit to improve cross-border cooperation and assistance, so that expertise from across our Union can be mobilised upon request to help in such situations.

Digital services package

- In December last year we also proposed a Digital Services Act and a Digital Markets Act to tackle challenges like hate speech, disinformation, attempts at manipulating electoral processes, sales of dangerous or counterfeit products, and unfair market access for smaller players.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- In addition, a Europe fit for the Digital Decade is also one where people and businesses benefit from AI-generated improvements. Therefore, on 21 April, we adopted the AI package that comprises of a proposal for an AI Act and the review of the Coordinated Plan on AI.

- To facilitate trust, we proposed a risk-based horizontal legislation that clearly defines the boundaries of what use cases of AI systems are allowed on the EU market and under what conditions. The aim is to provide certainty for businesses, while protecting safety and fundamental rights of citizens.

- We also aim to facilitate excellence by substantial investments in AI technologies. Our goal is to reach at least 20 billion euro of private and public investments annually in the coming decade.

Broadband Cost Reduction Directive and Connectivity Toolbox

- Allow me to end with the review of the Broadband Cost Reduction Directive. The aim of the review is to enable a sustainable, quicker and more efficient rollout of very high capacity networks, including fibre and 5G.

- While new legislation is in the pipeline, connectivity in the Member States will already now benefit from the implementation of the Connectivity Toolbox that was agreed on 25 March. It consists of a set of 39 best practices that will foster digital network deployment and facilitate access to 5G spectrum.

- I am pleased that Ireland has already submitted its Roadmap for the implementation of the Toolbox.

- I am now looking forward to hearing your comments and to answering your questions.