

***SMART SOLUTIONS FOR  
SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES***

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Dear former President,  
Dear Minister,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and great pleasure that we, members of the Various Interests Group of the European Economic and Social Committee, are here with you, today, in Tallinn. I would like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to our Group III members Mr Joost and Mr Sõrmus and to the Estonian Presidency for their help in organising this event.

Next year, your country will celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of Estonia as an independent, democratic republic. This is, I believe, one of the greatest and most important milestones in your history. With, I'm sure, great meaning for you all. The celebration of the "Manifesto to the People of Estonia" is a perfect opportunity for you to join your efforts in building a better future together.

As early as the Middle Ages, Estonia served as a bridge between the West, the North and the East. Tallinn and other Estonian towns belonging to the Hanseatic League played a role in developing European trade and a more global economy.

Today, by prioritising digitalisation, you continue to espouse globalisation and to pursue a key role for Estonia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

60 years after the Treaty of Rome, the Union is searching for a new positive direction. The European Union continues to face major challenges such as increasing poverty, an ageing population, low-skilled workers, and the need for further innovation, sustainable development, and clean and safe energy supplies, among others.

In this "multi-speed" Europe, one of the smallest countries in the EU, Estonia, has just taken the lead of the Council: a major challenge for this state, which has been a member of the EU since 2004. The country which has been able to rebuild itself largely thanks to digital technology, to the point of being 26 years after the collapse of the USSR as a WORLD reference for digitisation and entrepreneurship. Starting at zero, you have managed to carry out your E-REVOLUTION and a complete transformation "through" and "thanks to" digital technology.

In 15 years, you have become a self-determined democracy and an active market economy, pursuing a policy of liberal openness. Your country is an example to us all! New technologies have been deeply embedded in your lifestyles.

Allow me to turn now to the topic of today's conference: SMART SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES.

Digitalisation is now a full part of our everyday lives. The digital transformation in recent years offers new means of communication and exchange and has radically changed the forms of ownership, production, distribution and consumption.

We are more interconnected and interdependent than ever before! The exponential growth of the use of information technology and the internet has changed our societies so much that we can no longer imagine life without it. The internet affects our cultures, our economies, the way we think and communicate, and the way we govern our states and handle international relations.

Today, we have the opportunity to work across different sectors to define the connectivity that will be available tomorrow. And tomorrow, citizens working in utilities, manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture and transportation will all use the networks and provide new intelligent products and services based on the connectivity of a future generation.

Most of us understand the notion of "smart" as a descriptor for the innovation and technology that helps improve our lives – we have smart phones, smart homes, smart classrooms,...we speak about smart cities, smart economy...

The long-term competitiveness and cohesion of the European Union depend on its ability to innovate and develop in a harmonious way. The performance of EU regions still varies significantly in terms of innovation, social progress and economic development. There is a need for sound projects to increase jobs and growth and improve the social and economic conditions for a more resilient and cohesive Europe. To achieve a sustainable future and emerge stronger from the global financial crisis, Europe must turn into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

For example, in healthcare the analysis of large datasets can help with the development of new drugs and treatments, and patients can benefit from more timely and effective care.

In agriculture, the smart use of big data from sensors and earth observations can increase productivity, food security and farmer incomes at the same time.

Agriculture is using technology to become faster, more efficient, more nimble and more equipped to protect our planet's resources while still growing and producing the world's very best food supply. Using drones, smart irrigation, terrain contour mapping, and self-driving and GPS-enabled tractors, farmers can produce food more sustainably. Today's SMART farms are being "teched up" when it comes to growing food, allowing them to be both: sustainable and profitable. This is the very definition of continual improvement and sustainability. This is a good thing as the earth's population is expected to grow to 9.7 billion by 2050.

To put things fully in perspective, in a recent survey by the USFRA, 56% of consumers said they expect farmers to use new technologies and innovation to protect the environment.

Dear friends,

The future of the world will be digital. At the same time, rapid change and new technologies always create vulnerabilities; our task will be to balance these risks and benefits equitably.

In Estonia, you have managed to balance security and freedom by providing a network of public and private e-services based on a secure online identity.

Your country has a high-functioning e-government infrastructure, a reliable digital identity, a system of security measures (that are obligatory for all government authorities), and a central system for monitoring, resolving and reporting cyber security incidents.

Yes, we can say it: today, we already live in a digital age. Today, we talk about e-governance and e-state. What is much more important, however, is that we are a digital society; a society where technology is thoroughly integrated into people's everyday lives.

Sustainable and digital expansion aims to preserve the balance between the economic and the societal, but also between the environmental and the cultural.

We are in a transition period. Everybody knows Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia... Today, however, SMART is the buzzword and the way of the future. We need to train and educate our children, inject innovation into all of our actions and ensure the success of this transition. It is this generation that will take charge of leading our planet.

Ladies and gentleman,

I would like to end my presentation with the words of Robert Schuman, who said: "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity."

60 years after the Treaty of Rome, will digitalisation be this new achievement? Will it allow us to give a new impulse to the construction of Europe?

Everyone must play his or her part. We can and must all be leaders in our field, working together to make sure it becomes a reality.

I would like to finish by quoting the words of Kofi Annan: "We are running out of the time to create the new society we need. The future has already arrived, and it is called PRESENT!"

Thank you for your attention. I wish you a successful meeting and fruitful discussions.