

COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, RESEARCH AND ENERGY  
COMMITTEE ON THE INTERNAL MARKET AND CONSUMER  
PROTECTION

INVITED COMMITTEES:  
COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SECURITY AND DEFENCE  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION

**CONFIRMATION HEARING OF**

**HENNA VIRKKUNEN**

EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE  
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

(Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy)

TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2024

BRUSSELS



1-0002-0000

**IN THE CHAIR:****BORYS BUDKA***Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy***ANNA CAVAZZINI***Chair of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection*

1-0003-0000

*(The hearing opened at 18:30)*

1-0004-0000

**Borys Budka**, *Chair of the ITRE Committee*. – Good evening. First of all, I'd like to welcome the Executive Vice-President-designate for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy to this joint hearing organised by the ITRE and IMCO committees. I'd like also to welcome the members of both committees jointly responsible for this hearing, the members from the four invited committees and everyone present in the room today, not forgetting those watching us live on the web stream.

This is a joint hearing, therefore I wish to particularly welcome Anna Cavazzini, Chair of the IMCO Committee, with whom I will co-chair this hearing.

1-0005-0000

**Anna Cavazzini**, *Chair of the IMCO Committee*. – Also from my side good evening and welcome to this hearing. Before we start, we have some procedural remarks – I think you know them by then, but I will still repeat them because it's important. So in line with the guidelines – Annex VII of the Rules of Procedure – for the approval of the Commission, Parliament evaluates the Commissioners-designate on the basis of their general competence, European commitment and personal independence. And we also assess the knowledge of their prospective portfolio and their communication skills.

So the Committee on Legal Affairs has raised no objection to the holding of this hearing, and before the hearing, Ms Virkkunen had replied in writing to a questionnaire. The written answers have been distributed to Members in all languages, and we acknowledge Ms Virkkunen's readiness to cooperate with the European Parliament. This is particularly important in the context of the revision of the Framework Agreement between Parliament and the Commission, in particular regarding your engagement to be regularly present in committees and plenaries, to follow up on Parliament's legislative initiatives, and to timely share information with Parliament as co-legislator and arm of the budgetary authority. We count on the full implementation of these commitments and emphasise the Commission's role as an honest broker, ensuring equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council.

We equally count on your full cooperation to inform our committees in advance of all upcoming proposals, with detailed justifications for those requiring urgent action. This will ensure transparency and allow Parliament to properly exercise its prerogatives.

Today's hearing will be structured as follows: we first have an introduction, an opening statement by Ms Virkkunen for about 15 minutes; and then we have four rounds of questions and answers. The first round is with a ping pong, a follow-up question. All the other rounds are simply questions.

Colleagues, we ask you again to stick to the time, to be fair, because everyone else has basically the same amount of speaking time, so don't go over it. This makes our life much easier.

1-0006-0000

**Borys Budka**, *Chair of the ITRE Committee*. – I'd like to note that interpretation is provided in all 23 languages. All speakers can therefore use their own language. Speakers are to be reminded that what they say will need to be interpreted, and that they should therefore not speak too quickly.

The confirmation hearing is streamed live on the Parliament's internet site, and it will be also possible to access a video recording of the hearing on the same site within a few hours after the hearing.

In order to ensure the smooth running of the hearing, all the Chairs will be very strict with speaking time and will not allow speakers to exceed their allocated time. So the stars will appear before 10 seconds of the end of the time, and afterwards we will use this hammer just to remind that time is money.

I now give the floor to Ms Virkkunen for her opening statement.

1-0007-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Chair Cavazzini, honourable Chair Budka, honourable Members of the European Parliament, it's a privilege to be here today in front of you as the Executive Vice-President-designate for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy.

For the past 10 years, I have had the honour to represent European citizens in this House. Now I'm humbled, if given the opportunity, to shape with you – Members of the European Parliament – policies that are fundamental to our future.

Euroopan perusarvoja, taloutta ja turvallisuutta haastetaan ennennäkemättömällä tavalla. Tähän meidän on vastattava yhdessä. Jos annatte minulle tukenne, lupaan työskennellä joka päivä eurooppalaisten puolesta yhdessä parlamentin ja jäsenmaiden kanssa.

We are facing a now-or-never moment in Europe. In her address to this House last July, President von der Leyen stated that Europe faces a choice: either we will be shaped by events and the world around us, or we can come together and build Europe's future ourselves.

Vi måste se till att Europa kan klara sig i alla situationer. Det innebär att vi måste öka vår egen kapacitet inom alla kritiska sektorer och arbeta närmare likasinnade länder.

Europe has an enormous potential and its own strengths. When we act together, we are strong.

I come from a small Member State with a harsh climate, long distances and over one thousand kilometres of common external border with a hostile neighbour. So I know how important security is, what preparedness means in practice, and how democracy makes us united and strong. If confirmed, I will carry with determination the portfolio entrusted to me – Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy.

I have had the honour to work with you in this House as a Member of Parliament, and I'm very happy to see many familiar faces from ITRE and other committees here today. In my work in the committees I have focused especially on innovation and digitalisation with you.

Prior to my election to the European Parliament 10 years ago, I had the privilege to serve in the Finnish Government in several ministerial positions, from education and science to public administration and transport. I believe this background and experience will be very helpful if confirmed as the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission.

Honourable Members, in the field of technology, we have a lot of work ahead of us. Europe is all too dependent on third countries when it comes to digital. Eighty per cent of our technology comes from outside the EU, but we also have our strengths which we can and have to boost. I propose here a twofold approach: first, we have to take all the actions to boost innovation and investments in frontier technologies; second, we need to ensure a level playing field, security and a safe online space for our citizens. Everybody who wishes to do business in Europe has to follow European rules.

The key technologies that will shape our future – such as AI, quantum, cloud, semiconductors and space technologies – are at the centre of my mission. Our research is very strong in all these fields. Supporting European groundbreaking technologies and fundamental research is my priority. They are also cornerstones of Europe's competitiveness, as Professor Draghi's report also highlighted.

Our tech sovereignty depends on a strong microchips industry. In some areas, we are the best in the world; in others, we lag dangerously behind. The ambitious Chips Act has helped us to mobilise more than EUR 80 billion of public and private investments. We need to do more to reach our 20 % target of global production. I will consider additional actions to the Chips Act.

Quantum is the technology of the future where Europe has many reasons for optimism. For a coordinated EU approach, I will present a quantum strategy that includes a quantum chips plan.

In AI we have the world's first legislation, also thanks to the European Parliament. The AI Act will soon apply everywhere in the EU, protecting our citizens. I will ensure it is swiftly implemented as an enabler for innovation, in a transparent and predictable way.

I want Europe to become an AI continent – the best place in the world for developing trustworthy and advanced AI – by implementing the following actions: in my first 100 days, I will boost the AI computing power of our supercomputers with the 'AI Factories' initiative. It will offer access to computing power to our startups, researchers and industry.

Secondly, I will leverage with the Member States, industry, civil society and other Commissioners our leadership in sectors such as automotive, pharma, robotics and aeronautics. I will present an 'Apply AI' strategy to boost new industrial uses of AI and also to improve public services, for example healthcare. At the same time, I will make sure that everyone can benefit from the possibilities of AI. Also, the AI adoption path must be sustainable for our workforce. AI can support each worker and increase productivity and thus support greater prosperity for all of us.

Thirdly, we will develop an AI ecosystem in research and science. Here I will work together with the Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation to set up the AI Research Council.

Honourable Members, to boost innovation, we need the highest standards of connectivity. Here we are lagging behind. Europe must make a leap in smart and secure connectivity, especially in 6G. I plan to propose the Digital Networks Act to boost secure high-speed broadband for everybody.

Technology and digitalisation play an important role in our green transition and in achieving our climate goals. To improve cloud services and to upscale our high-performance computing capacity

in an energy-efficient way, I will propose the EU Cloud and AI Development Act. The Act will allow even the smallest businesses to access advanced AI services.

As an AI continent, Europe needs more data-sharing and better access to high-quality data, in line with our data protection rules. I will address this via a dedicated Data Union strategy, as also suggested by the Letta report.

Europe has much untapped potential in space. If confirmed, I will propose, in cooperation with the Commissioner for Defence and Space, an EU space industrial strategy.

All these initiatives can only succeed if we invest in Europe's most valuable asset: its people. I intend to put a particular emphasis on the skills we need, most obviously those in the twin transition. The EU is far away from its target of 20 million ICT experts, and we will never get there if we do not attract the best talents, also girls and women.

Honourable Members, with the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act, we have set standards to protect the fundamental rights of citizens when using online services, as well as ensuring fair competition in the online world. Having been the Parliament's ITRE rapporteur on DSA, I am very committed to applying both the DSA and the DMA fully. We should use the oversight and enforcement powers swiftly and rigorously, working closely with the Executive Vice-President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition as regards the DMA. I will make sure that we dedicate enough competent staff for this work. My first priorities will be ensuring fair competition and a level playing field in the area of e-commerce.

We need to be mindful of how social media affects the lives of citizens, particularly children. I will call firmly on all market players to take their responsibilities and to make sure that the online world for minors is safe and helpful, instead of harming them. I will give full support to the EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media led by the Commissioner for Health, and to the action plan on cyberbullying led by the Commissioner for Youth.

To be able to protect our core values and democracy, I will defend in every possible way the rule of law, in particular the freedom of information and speech. I look forward to preparing the Democracy Shield, together with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law, in order to protect our democracies against electoral interference, disinformation and manipulation by malign foreign actors.

Reputable and independent media is the key, as is media literacy of our citizens. As a former journalist, this is very important also to me personally. The European Media Freedom Act puts in place vital provisions to defend media pluralism in the EU, and I will give full support to the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law to ensure its proper enforcement.

One of Europe's greatest assets is our rich culture. Together with the Commissioner for Culture, I will work to protect our cultural diversity and to ensure that creators are being rewarded for their works, also in the age of AI.

The European Union is often criticised for creating too much bureaucracy for the citizens and businesses. I take this feedback very seriously. Reducing the administrative burden and simplifying processes is high on my agenda. If confirmed, I will strive to reduce reporting obligations. During this mandate, many of the digital rules are up for review, and I would like to reflect together with you and with the stakeholders where there is space for cutting red tape. Beyond regulatory simplification, there is also much room for improvement by using technology for

burden-reduction, building on the EU wallet. The business wallet should be a single point of entry for every request that reaches a company from the side of governments in Europe, and it should be secure and user-friendly.

Honourable Members, given the geopolitical situation, with recent hybrid attacks, including on our critical infrastructure, it's clear that Europe needs to be more secure and resilient. High standards of cybersecurity must be met, especially in critical sectors. In this regard, we need urgent actions on healthcare. If confirmed, in cooperation with the Commissioner for Health, I will propose in the first 100 days an action plan on the cybersecurity of hospitals and healthcare providers.

It's important that the technologies we develop ourselves, such as AI or quantum, cannot be used against us. That is why we should, together with our allies, tackle the technology leakage to countries of concern. We must secure our communication, cloud and connected devices. We must make sure that the supply of critical telecom equipment is in the hands of trusted vendors. I will also make concrete proposals on how to improve the resilience of our submarine cable infrastructure.

Honourable Members, migration will remain one of the top political issues and I will work closely with the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration. Implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum is a priority to me. It's important to create safe and legal pathways for people and to ensure their integration into European societies. At the same time, we need to fight smuggling networks and prevent irregular migration, thereby also preventing further loss of life. And we need stronger and more effective return procedures for people without the legal right to stay in the EU.

For Schengen to work well, the EU external borders must be protected. We need Frontex to support Member States, and for this more resources are needed. Protecting our borders requires a European solution; one that also holds strong against hybrid attacks, without compromising on our values.

At the same time, we must be strong on internal security. In the first months of our mandate, we will prepare a new internal security strategy to strengthen our preparedness and respond to increasingly complex threats.

Honourable Members, the best investment right away to European security is investing in the security of Ukraine. For our Union to be stronger, we have to build a true EU Defence Union with a competitive defence industry. Europe needs to invest more, invest better and invest together. I will contribute willingly to the Defence White Paper to be prepared by the High Representative / Vice-President together with the Commissioner for Defence. We will identify the decisions needed to deliver to our Member States the full spectrum of defence capabilities and European defence projects of common interest based on joint European investments and industrial capabilities.

Finally, working with my colleagues, I will contribute to enhancing the EU's preparedness, following up on the advice of President Niinistö's report. The EU should become an ever-greater contributor to the security of the European continent in partnership with, and in support of, NATO.

In all these areas, I will not work in isolation, but in close cooperation with the responsible Members of the College. I will work closely with the European Parliament, the Member States and stakeholders to make sure that our policies serve all Europeans. If confirmed, I will prioritise participating in plenary debates, committee meetings and trilogues.

Honourable Members, if confirmed, in all my actions, I will work together with you towards a more prosperous Europe in the intersection between democracy, technology and security. Let's build a stronger, more resilient and more democratic Europe.

1-0012-0000

**Eva Maydell (PPE).** – Commissioner-designate, welcome to this hearing. First of all, thank you for what was a very clear but also already a very concrete opening. We much appreciate that.

I believe if we were to talk tech sovereignty, we should also zoom out and see where Europe finds itself in the world. I would like to quote the Australian Strategic Policy Institute tracks. It tracks who leads in the 44 top emerging technology and what it has found out is that in 37 out of 44 cases, the country that leads is China, followed by the US. But there is still some hope for optimism because Europe is still in the game, particularly in some areas.

I'm also Vice-Chair of the US Delegation and whenever I visit, I'm struck by the level of private sector involvement in deep tech and how the private sector works with government. Basically, there's way more trust by government in the market. Very often in Europe, it feels the other way around where we try to recreate that from the offices of Berlaymont, very often by copying American success, whether it's in cloud or satellite constellations or even AI.

So my question to you is, how can you redress this challenge so that the EU institutions trust the free market and work with private sector innovators to scale the next European deep tech innovation, rather than innovating the American will?

1-0013-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Ms Maydell, for your very important question. That was really in the core of my portfolio when it comes to tech sovereignty and competitiveness of European innovation and industry.

I think the starting point for this is very much that we should make sure always that our legal framework is encouraging investments and innovations in Europe. So we should make sure that we don't have extra regulatory framework, red tape, not extra bureaucracy and administration for our businesses.

At the same time, we have to boost investments. So it means often that the permitting processes in the Member States that they should be faster than what they are now. As we clearly know, President von der Leyen was stating that this Commission will be an investment Commission. So we will seek all the solutions how to boost investments in this field and how to also create a framework that encourages innovation.

I think it's important also to pay attention to the skills of the people because this is one of our main challenges in Europe. We have an ageing population in Europe and we have to take care that everybody is having good basic skills, but also that people have possibilities to reskill and upscale their skills, that we have excellent education in Europe and also that we can attract talented people from all over the world.

Where we can be very proud in Europe is that we have top research in Europe and I think we have to take good care of that because fundamental research is very much a basis for all our innovations.

But then to an area where we have to now look very carefully at all the solutions, it's really how to have better access to capital, how to have better access to venture capital, private capital for our SMEs and for our startups. There we are lagging behind and we have the Draghi report where we can base on.



1-0014-0000

**Eva Maydell (PPE).** – With the Commissioner-designate, we know each other for quite a while, as she still calls me by my maiden name, so my family will be very happy about that. So thanks for reminding how I started in the Parliament.

You mentioned the quantum chips strategy, that's something concrete that you're going to propose. Can you elaborate on that? Because we believe that quantum could be still one of those areas where it could be a game changer for Europe.

1-0015-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Certainly, quantum is, like you said, an area where we can be very positive and optimistic in Europe because there, again, we have the situation that we have super-talented researchers, we have top-quality research in this field of quantum, but still, again, the same obstacle that we are often facing: that our market is too fragmented here. We can also see that many Member States have their own quantum strategies.

We have top researchers in this field and now we should have a more comprehensive common approach also in this field. That's why I'm also planning to come up with this quantum plan. Maybe it could be also followed by a quantum act to make sure that we can pool our research and resources, and also all our efforts, so we are not too fragmented, because also big investments are needed in this sector. So we have to pull the researchers together, all the science, but then also to build industry around this.

1-0016-0000

**Laura Ballarín Cereza (S&D).** – Ms Virkkunen, we are assessing you today on another Super Tuesday, one week after the second victory of Donald Trump in the United States. Some American online platforms, like Facebook, Instagram or X, are already under formal proceedings by the European Commission for the possibility of breaching the Digital Services Act.

We are suffering a global pandemic of mental health, especially the minors, due to the harmful and excessive use of social media – depression, alimentary disorders, cyber bullying or violent behaviour. But we know that owners of these big tech companies are aware of the effects of their addictive designs, the misuse of algorithms, and lack of effective age-control tools in order to protect users.

So my question is: do you commit to confront, not only call, the future American administration and the big companies by taking new legislative measures like the Digital Fairness Act? But, moreover, to require platforms to develop all possible tools to preserve the well-being of our minors, but not only minors, to protect adults from harmful content and women from online gender violence? And how?

1-0017-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Honourable Member, thank you very much for this very important question, and I think this will be one of the highest priorities now for the Parliament also: to make sure that we have a safe online environment for our minors. It will be a priority for me when I'm enforcing our DSA.

I see that online platforms and social media have many very positive impacts on our life and also on our kids. They can keep contact with their friends and their families. But then there's also this other side you were referring to.

First of all, the time that the kids are spending with the screen and also the content, what they see there. And these both can be very harmful. It says clearly in our DSA regulation that online platforms have to take care of the safety, security and privacy on high level when it comes to the minors. And we know that all of them are not taking this responsibility like they should. And like you said, investigations and proceedings are also already going on from the Commission's side.

At the same time, I think it's important that we are continuing the dialogue also with the online platforms. And also I'm proposing guidelines for this purpose during the spring for the online platforms: how to take care of the safe online environment for kids, and it will be based on the Better Internet for Kids strategy also.

But I think we have to be also very strict here when we look at the responsibility of the online platforms, because they should make sure that they don't have that kind of addictive algorithms that make people spend more and more time on online platforms, because this is posing a systematic risk. And it's addressed in our legislation that they should assess their systematic risks and also content if they are aware, if online platforms are aware that the minors are using their services, then the services should be fit for the minors' age.

So I think we have to be now very concrete and strict here.

1-0018-0000

**Laura Ballarín Cereza (S&D).** – Thank you for your answer. As a follow-up question, I would like to stress that our single market is inundated with dangerous and cheap products from third countries.

Online commerce is cheap and comfortable, but puts the safety of our citizens at risk and provokes unfair competition with local businesses in Europe. We have digital service and data protection laws, but we need to go further.

So, do you commit to take additional measures, and which ones, to ensure that online marketplaces will take responsibility to stop the entrance of unsafe products from third countries and also trying to make Europe this island of protection of consumers, that now we are more alone than one week before in this sense?

1-0019-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Honourable Member, I think you are really touching the most burning topics. Now when we speak about DSA and enforcing DSA, really the protection of minors and then also e-commerce parts, that we have to make sure that we have a level playing field and fair competition also for our SMEs and businesses in Europe and we can take care of the safety of our citizens.

Also here online platforms which are online shops, they have to also assess their systematic risks and if they are aware that they are selling illegal products, they are supposed to take them down.

We know that there's also investigations and proceedings going on from the Commission's side now when it comes to Temu and AliExpress – currently very famous online shopping platforms.

There's also, of course, benefits for consumers when it comes to online shopping, because there are much more consumer choices, it's easy. Ten million packages arrive in Europe every day, but we have to make sure that they are not selling illegal products, that we have also fair competition for our SMEs in Europe. So everybody has to respect the European rules here.

1-0020-0000

**Klara Dostalova (Pfe).** – Dear Madam Commissioner-designate, on behalf of Patriots for Europe, I would like to touch on two sets of questions.

First, the Digital Services Act and the European Democracy Shield. Freedom of speech is a cornerstone of European democracy. Within your portfolio is the implementation of the DSA. With regard to the implementation of the DSA and in the setting up of the European Democracy Shield, I would like to ask you, how do you intend to handle the risk to freedom of speech?

Following recent admissions of censorship by digital companies such as Meta, I would like to ask whether you are ready to publish all Commission requests to very large platforms to censor specific messages or specific accounts on a public register, together with the related grounds?

1-0021-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, honourable Member, for this very important question, also because freedom of speech is one of our fundamental rights in Europe and we want to make sure that we are protecting this important right for all our citizens.

But, of course, then there has to be also balance when the online platforms are taking actions, because in the DSA we wanted to be very clear that they have to take actions if there are illegal products or content online, they have to take this down, but when it comes to the content that is not illegal, then they have to find the right balance. Sometimes it's possible that also content that is not illegal is posing a systematic risk.

We know also that freedom of speech doesn't mean that we can freely post everything when it comes to hate speech or violating someone's privacy, for example. But we wanted also to make sure that, at the same time, when online platforms are taking care of that, that they are not spreading illegal content, that also they are respecting our freedom of speech and also the users of online platforms. They have the right also to get noticed if some of their content is, for example, taken down, so there has to be a statement of reasons for the user also of that and there has to be a dispute mechanism also for the user.

So, at the same time, we wanted to protect the freedom of speech and make sure that the online platforms are respecting our democratic values here. But, at the same time, they have to also make sure that they are not spreading illegal content. And it's important that the balance is found there.

1-0022-0000

**Klara Dostalova (Pfe).** – My second set of questions concerns e-commerce.

How will you ensure that goods that do not comply with EU law are dealt with, particularly where the main players, which are big platforms, are based in third countries?

How do you want to guarantee that the European producers are not disadvantaged compared to third country producers, as is the case now?

Please describe all steps that the Commission will undertake in order to enforce compliance with the DSA.

1-0023-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Member, DSA states very clearly that these online shops have to know their business customers and if they have the information that illegal products are sold on the platform, they have to take them down.

Now, it's important that we are fully enforcing DSA and using all the tools we have there to make sure that those platforms are taking their responsibilities here. But we need bigger efforts here because also we have to look at the customs part, at how the customs can share the information in a better way, and also at market surveillance authorities, that they have been also taking the actions what needed.

Like I said earlier, 10 million packages are coming to European markets every day. It's a huge amount, so we have to take actions in many fields. This will be certainly one of the first topics the Commission has to focus on now, because it's very unfair for our companies, for our SMEs who are fulfilling all the legislation in Europe, and this is a matter of safety for our citizens also.

1-0024-0000

**Piotr Müller (ECR)**. – Szanowna Pani Komisarz! Unia Europejska jest w gospodarczym kryzysie i coraz częściej staje się niestety użytkownikiem, a nie producentem nowych technologii. Nie jest już też konkurencyjna na rynku globalnym i mam wrażenie, że takie akty jak DSA, AI Act, DMA i inne akty, które przygotowaliśmy w ostatnich latach, nie poprawią tej konkurencyjności.

Dlatego mam trzy pytania do Pani. Czy może Pani przede wszystkim zapewnić, że jako komisarz zatrzyma Pani nadaktywność regulacyjną ze strony Komisji Europejskiej w obszarze cyfrowym? Bo raczej widzę tu nadaktywność w tym obszarze.

Czy zamierza Pani utrzymać tzw. prymat zasady ostrożnościowej, jeżeli chodzi o wyznaczenie podejścia do regulowania nowych kwestii w tym obszarze?

I czy zgadza się Pani z takim stwierdzeniem, że ostatnie lata jednak udowodniły, że część regulacji miało negatywny wpływ na naszą konkurencyjność gospodarczą i konkurencyjność w szczególności w kontekście Chin czy Stanów Zjednoczonych? Zresztą wspomina też o tym Mario Draghi w swoim raporcie. Jakie Pani priorytety ma tutaj w tym zakresie?

I ostatnie: czy Pani widzi w Stanach Zjednoczonych konkurenta czy raczej partnera do wspólnych działań gospodarczych?

1-0025-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – The USA is the most important trade partner for the EU and also the most important strategic partner when it comes to security, and we are cooperating very closely, of course, with the USA.

But we have a different tradition with legislation, especially when it comes to the digital part. Yes, we are often facing this criticism that we are overregulating our markets and I think we have to be serious with this and take this feedback very seriously and look to see where is the place where we can cut red tape, administration bureaucracy, from the industry, SMEs. I see it as a very important priority for the next Commission.

As you know, the President of the Commission, von der Leyen, has stated that all the Commissioners have to look at their own sector, how to reduce especially reporting obligations.

We are supposed to cut them by 20 % and more than 30 % for our SMEs. So I'm taking this very seriously.

But also now when we are in the implementing phase in many of our digital regulations, I'm looking especially at how we can simplify the processes, how we can look if there are some overlapping regulations and how we can make sure that these are not setting burdens for our SMEs.

I think that regulation is often needed for the innovations, because it's also important from the business perspective, that they have legal certainty when they are investing into some new ideas, that they know that there's a legal path. And then we have to have a long-term approach because these investments, they can be very, very big also.

So I think it's needed, but we shouldn't be too bureaucratic here. And it's a very high priority for me and also for the Commission to make sure that our regulatory framework is innovation-friendly.

1-0026-0000

**Piotr Müller (ECR).** – Mam pytanie uzupełniające, bo tutaj mówiliśmy też przed chwilą o wolności słowa. W związku z tym w tym kontekście pojawiają się wątpliwości obywateli dotyczące właśnie cenzury prewencyjnej, w szczególności na platformach społecznościowych. Mam pytanie: co Pani robi, aby te kwestie związane z działalnością Komisji Europejskiej w tym zakresie były bardziej transparentne?

Wiemy też o zarzutach, które były kierowane do Komisji Europejskiej, chociażby w kontekście Platformy X. Czy Pani by mogła na przykład zadeklarować, że wszelkie rozmowy, wszelkie ustalenia, które były czynione w ostatnich miesiącach pomiędzy Komisją Europejską i Platformą X, na przykład zostaną ujawnione w ramach tej zasady transparentności? Bo obywatele, żeby rozumieć, w jaki sposób Komisja Europejska podejmuje działania w tym obszarze, potrzebują po prostu jawności tych działań.

1-0027-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Honourable Member, like I already said earlier, everybody who is operating and doing business in Europe has to respect our rules. So the same rules for everybody who is in the scope. Currently, I know that the Commission is investigating in several proceedings towards these online platforms which are not respecting our rules and regulations.

Of course, the DSA came into the force just one year ago. So there is also all the time dialogue going on with these online platforms about how to comply with EU regulations. But I think this is very fair also, our regulatory framework for online platforms, because it makes sure that everybody is having the same rules, they are respecting our democracy, our rules, our legislation in Europe, and it's the same for everybody in the world – for the European ones and for those who are outside of Europe. And that is my approach, also, onwards.

1-0028-0000

**Svenja Hahn (Renew).** – Thank you very much, Commissioner-designate, for laying out the new proposals for the new legislation that you're planning to work on. I think there are quite some important topics. And thank you also for committing in general to the goal of cutting down red tape and bureaucracy.

But, unfortunately, so far you stayed very vague about what you want to do, having in mind that the reduction of bureaucracy and a more simplification are actually very crucial for enhancing

competitiveness and innovation in Europe. You said you wanted to cut red tape after a dialogue with the EP and stakeholders, so I was wondering if you could give us a bit more clarity, particularly, how will you measure the designated cuts of 25% to 35% of bureaucracy? What is even the basis for that assessment? Which rules are you planning to cut down, or do you only want to act after hearing from stakeholders, or do you have your own ideas? And will you commit to the 'one-in, two-out' principle?

And regarding the efficient roll-out of legislation – looking at the AI Act, you mentioned that – how will you ensure that the implementation balances out the weakness of the legal tax and makes it easier for companies to comply?

1-0029-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This will be one of my main priorities during my term, if confirmed: to cut red tape and bureaucracy and extra administration and make Europe an easier place for businesses and our SMEs.

So I will start with the reporting obligations: if confirmed, in the first day in the office, I will ask my services to list all the reporting obligations that we have in our digital legislation for our industries and SMEs. And then when we have a concrete list, we can see how we can cut these obligations.

Also, of course, digitalisation, automation, AI can be used in many ways to make things easier. But I think it's not enough, we also have to cut the administrative burden as well. And that's why now when we are implementing many of our pieces of digital legislation, I will look all the time at how we could simplify the processes. Is there something that is overlapping where we could make it easier for businesses to comply with these rules?

And also we have some new ideas: I was mentioning this business wallet we could make. It would be a very practical tool for our businesses if they had one contact point always. If the public administration governance is asking for some reports from them, some information, it could be always transmitted by this structure, and it would be very easy to access also.

So I'm planning to take very concrete measures here, and I'm also planning to come to the Parliament, if confirmed, after one year with the fitness check in the digital area, so that you can see really what is the situation with this cutting of bureaucracy and what efforts we could do.

And, like I mentioned earlier, during this term, many of the regulations are coming up for revision, and I think it's also a good time to see whether we are having a too detailed regulation, whether there is something where we can be more general in the future?

1-0030-0000

**Svenja Hahn (Renew)**. – Thank you very much, that was a very helpful answer. Maybe you could clarify if you commit to the 'one in, two out' principle?

Talking about implementation, you very much clearly care about the DSA. We're hearing now from the US that the designated Vice-President sees NATO as a bargaining chip to shield X-owner Musk from EU regulation. How are you ensuring a consequent enforcement of the DSA in a time of blackmailing from democratic partners?

How are you going to uphold the dialogue with our transatlantic partners, which is very crucial now, particularly with the EU-US Trade and Technology Council, that we're actually going to see tangible results?

1-0031-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – The USA is our most important trade partner and also partner in security as we know, and I'm very willing to continue good cooperation with the USA.

Also in the digital area and area of technologies, we have had very good cooperation during the last years and we have many things in common, for example, in the field of cybersecurity. So, I see this very positively that we will work closely together also in the future.

But at the same time, of course, our rules apply to everybody who is operating in Europe, who is doing business in Europe, and I think this is very fair also: same rules for everybody.

For the USA companies, it's true that Europe is, for many of them, a very big market, one of the biggest markets. So of course, the companies are protecting their business interests and it's very normal, I see it also. But we will continue a good dialogue with them and sometimes, as we know, the Commission has to open formal procedures if dialogues don't help.

1-0032-0000

**Alexandra Geese (Verts/ALE)**. – Executive Vice-President-designate, I very much welcome your strong commitment to European legislation, to the DSA, the DMA and the AI Act. But we do know that the victory of Donald Trump in the US is closely linked to the support of Elon Musk and other tech tycoons who will have a strong influence on the US administration and who want to avoid any kind of legislation. They're saying it. And my colleague Svenja Hahn just mentioned the example of the future Vice President of the US.

So that means if we want sovereignty, we need to have tech sovereignty as well, and that means a reliable European digital infrastructure that goes beyond AI and quantum. Hence my questions:

Can you commit to the fact that building a sustainable European digital infrastructure, based on open standards, will be the main goal of your mandate and that it will inform the work of the whole European Commission?

Will you come up with a comprehensive strategy for the European tech sovereignty, based on a scientific study that clearly defines the priorities in the first six months of your mandate?

And will you introduce performance measurements for public money to ensure that all the different initiatives taken really deliver the desired results?

1-0033-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I'm fully committed to developing our tech sovereignty and our security, and reducing our dependencies and boosting the competitiveness of Europe and welfare of our citizens.

We are very dependent when it comes to technology and digitalisation – 80 % comes from outside of Europe. So we have to really build up our own capacity in all the critical fields and in all frontier technologies and, at the same time, we need also like-minded partners from all over the world.

It's clear in Europe, we are deciding on our own rules and everybody who is operating and doing business here has to respect these rules. We are making sure of that.

I think it was a very interesting idea that you had about open source and open standards also, how we are going to continue with this. And we can say that this has really been a European success story, and they have been in the heart of our policies of connectivity, electronic identity data and AI also. So we will continue this approach. I think it's important now, especially when we are trying to share data more and more, it's really needed. In data spaces and also in the cloud services, this is an important basis because it has been successful, our services in Europe, that we have been very, very strong when it comes to open source and open standards.

Now we can see that the market is taking up here because of the open source projects, where European Start-Ups are doing, for example, now projects on generative AI and in microelectronics. So this has been successful approach and I'm very willing to continue in this office with this field on open source and open standards.

1-0034-0000

**Alexandra Geese (Verts/ALE).** – I think the commitment to open standard opens possibilities for a lot of SMEs as well.

Digital technologies require a very physical infrastructure, in particular data centres, but currently the bulk of cloud infrastructure is run by non-European companies, which are subject to non-European jurisdictions.

Therefore, our data cannot be considered safe, even if the data centres are located in Europe. In spite of this concern in fact, the market share of European cloud providers is rapidly declining and not rising.

So will you make sure that the European Cloud and AI Development Act provides a framework in which European cloud providers can actually thrive?

1-0035-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for this question and this is really the main purpose of this cloud initiative because like you said, we are lagging behind when it comes to cloud, we are very dependent.

Europe has only a third of the data centres that the USA has and our capacity gap is widening here. So that is why I'm going to propose an EU Cloud and AI Development Act, if confirmed. This should bring this much needed independent computing capacity for our small businesses and also in different economical sectors, both for training AI models, but also for interference and fine-tuning.

It will contain also measures to stimulate innovation and boost investment in the cloud for AI capacity, cut red tape and also, what is important to me, we will set very ambitious, sustainable targets in this Act.

1-0036-0000

**Jussi Saramo (The Left).** – Draghin raportti hälytti meidät siihen tosiasiaan, että me olemme häviämässä Yhdysvaltain ja Kiinan puristuksessa, jos mitään ei tehdä.

Kiina on yhden puolueen hallitsema suunnitelmatalous, jonka työntekijät ovat olemassa valtiokapitalismia varten. Yhdysvallat taas on rikkaimpien hallitsema suunnitelmatalous, jossa sielläkin tavallisten ihmisten arvo on aika kaukana siitä, mitä meillä Euroopassa. Kumpikaan näistä maista ei myöskään halua ottaa vastuuta ilmastonmuutoksesta tai lajikadosta.



No EU on vaalinut muun maailman hylkäämää utopiaa globaalisti vapaista markkinoista. Nähdään, että muut alueet enemmän suojaavat omaa talouttaan tai ovat ainakin tähän asti näin tehneet. Pakon edessä nyt meilläkin mietitään, että miten nämä niin sanotut Euroopan mestarit pärjäisivät tässä kovassa kilpailussa näitä jättejä vastaan. Mutta kuitenkin yksityisiin monopoleihin ja kartelleihin perustuva yhteiskunta on huonoin mahdollinen.

Ja kysynkin, miten me voimme saavuttaa teknologisen itsenäisyyden Kiinasta ja Yhdysvalloista, joiden suuryritykset eivät osallistu yhteiskuntien rahoittamiseen veroilla, eivät alistu kotimarkkinakilpailulle, vaan päinvastoin saavat valtavia valtiontukia tällä hetkellä? Miten me konkreettisesti saamme tasapuoliset mahdollisuudet menestyä?

1-0037-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Komission jäsen ehdokas*. – Kiitos tästä kysymyksestä, arvoisa jäsen. Meidän ei onneksi tarvitse aloittaa ihan tyhjästä tekemään näitä ehdotuksia. Tänä vuonna sekä Lettan että Draghin raportti on erittäin hyvällä tavalla alleviivannut sen muutoksen merkitystä, joka meidän on tehtävä. Se, että meidän pitää vahvistaa sisämarkkinoita, se on meidän yksi vahva keino lisätä kauppaa, toimeentuloa, hyvinvointia Euroopassa. Meillä on edelleen liikaa esteitä jäsenmaiden välillä. Tässä on paljon esteitä purettavana.

Toisaalta meidän pitää investoida edelleenkin vahvasti tutkimukseen ja tuotekehitykseen, ja lisäksi meidän pitää löytää enemmän tapoja saada näitä innovaatioita markkinoille.

Minä en itse ole kovinkaan paljon sellaisen mallin kannattaja, missä poliitikot valitsevat ne teknologiat, joihin investoidaan, mutta nyt selvästi on identifioitu kriittisillä sektoreilla tietyt alueet, missä Euroopan on pakko vahvistaa omaa kapasiteettia, missä ollaan liian riippuvaisia tällä hetkellä muusta maailmasta.

Yksi näistä on kehittyneet puolijohteet eli mikrosirut. Ja tässähän on tehty merkityksellinen Chips Act, jolla on saatu jo hyviä tuloksia vuoden aikana aikaan, mutta lisää tarvitaan. Meidän tavoitteemme on, että Eurooppa pystyisi jatkossa tuottamaan 20 prosenttia puolijohteista itse. Nyt ei päästä edes kymmeneen prosenttiin, joten tarvitaan lisää toimia. Ja tässä me olemme erittäin riippuvaisia muusta maailmasta ja se haittaa ja uhkaa koko meidän digitaalista kehitystämme samoin kuin vihreää siirtymää.

Toinen alue, mikä on identifioitu, mikä on meille kriittisen tärkeä, on tekoäly ja siihen myös investoidaan tällä hetkellä paljon, koska se tulee muuttamaan paljon taloutta ja yhteiskuntia ja lisäämään niiden tuottavuutta. Kuten Draghi raportissaan mainitsi, yksi Euroopan isoin ongelma on se, että me olemme jääneet teknologiassa liikaa jälkeen Yhdysvalloista ja sen takia meidän tuottavuutemme ei ole yhtä hyvä.

Mutta kolmantena haluan vielä nostaa esiin sen, että meidän on huolehdittava ihmisten osaamisesta. Tämä meidän menestyksemme voi perustua pelkästään siihen, että meillä on hyvin osaavat ihmiset ja saatavilla osaavaa työvoimaa.

1-0038-0000

**Jussi Saramo (The Left)**. – Olet ehdolla vastaamaan turvallisuudesta, demokratiasta ja teknologisesta itsenäisyydestä. Onnittelut! Tämä on varmasti yksi tärkeimpiä kokonaisuuksia mitä meillä voi olla, varsinkin Yhdysvaltain presidentinvaalien jälkeen. Tietysti nyt kaikki sanovat, että toivotaan, että kaikki jatkuu kuten ennenkin, mutta ei se tähänkään asti ole ollut ihan täydellistä. Ja nyt me olemme riippuvaisia valtiosta, jonka johtaja ja hänen ympärillään pyörivä joukko

muistuttaa vastuullisten päättäjien sijaan ehkä joidenkin vanhojen huumoriohjelmien hahmoja, jotka eivät enää naurata.

Sinun tehtäväsi kuuluu aseteollisuuden kilpailun edistäminen ja Draghin raportin mukaan me käytämme järkyttävän suuria summia aseisiin ja valtaosa siitä rahasta menee Euroopasta pois Yhdysvalloille. Yhdysvalloissa aseiteollisuus ei kuitenkaan perustu vapaaseen kilpailuun vaan valtion avoimeen piikkiin. Me ostamme myös aseita paljon Israelista, joka testaa niitä viattomilla siviileillä eikä anna esimerkiksi Ukrainan käyttää niitä puolustautumiseen Venäjältä. Niin kysyn hyvä komissaariehdokas, kun on vaarallista ja taloudellisesti kallista olla riippuvainen tällaisista valtioista, miten me aseiteollisuudessa saavutamme teknologisen itsenäisyyden, jos jäsenmaita ei ohjata vahvasti EU:n taholta toimimaan yhteiseksi hyväksi? Miten me voisimme ohjata EU:n kautta jäsenvaltioita?

1-0039-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Komission jäsenehdokas*. – Arvoisa jäsen, puolustusteollisuus on selvästi yksi alue, missä Euroopan unionin pitää vahvistaa omaa kapasiteettiaan. Siinä on itse asiassa hyvin sama tilanne kuin teknologiassa. Jäsenmaat tekevät tällä hetkellä lähes 80 prosenttia puolustusteollisuuden hankinnoista Euroopan ulkopuolelta ja se ei tietenkään ole huoltovarmuuden eikä talouden turvallisuuden kannalta kestävä tapa. Meillä pitää olla enemmän myös omaa kapasiteettia ja se tarkoittaa sitä, että jäsenmaiden pitää myös investoida enemmän puolustushankintoihin niin, että meidän puolustusteollisuutemme saa tilauksia ja pystyy tekemään lisää investointeja.

Mutta että olisimme kilpailukykyisiä tällä alueella, koska totta kai jäsenvaltiot hankkivat puolustusteollisuuden hankinnat sieltä, missä on paras laatu, mikä vastaa parhaiten heidän puolustusteollisuuden tarpeisiinsa, meidän pitää varmistaa, että meillä on myös huippuluokan teollisuutta tällä alueella. Tarkoittaa sitä, että meidän pitää investoida myös tutkimukseen ja tuotekehitykseen Euroopassa, että meillä on kilpailukykyistä aseistusta, että jäsenmaat tekevät hankintoja Euroopan markkinoilta.

1-0040-0000

**Arno Bausemer (ESN)**. – Bei der Beschäftigung mit dem Benennungsprozess der Kommissionsmitglieder oder Kommissare ist mir aufgefallen, dass Frau von der Leyen offensichtlich großen Wert darauf gelegt hat, eine gleichmäßige Besetzung von Männern und Frauen darzustellen. Sie, Frau Virkkunen, waren einige Jahre Ministerin in Finnland und sind zehn Jahre Mitglied hier im Parlament. Würden Sie sich selbst als Quotenfrau betrachten, oder wäre es auch Ihnen gegenüber nicht respektvoller, wenn die Besetzung der Kommission sich ausschließlich an der Leistungsfähigkeit bemessen würde und nicht am Geschlecht?

Weiterhin würde ich gerne wissen, welche Position – ganz ruhig! – Sie vertreten im Hinblick auf verpflichtende Quotenregelungen in Unternehmen und bei der Aufstellung von Parteien für Wahlen. Ist das aus Ihrer Sicht notwendig im Hinblick auf die Förderung von Frauen oder nicht doch eher ein schwerwiegender Eingriff in die unternehmerische Freiheit und den demokratischen Willensbildungsprozess?

1-0041-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Of course it's a very important question, how we can promote the working careers of women and men.

I very much see myself that everybody should have the same opportunities in our societies, regardless of their gender. So I'm very much encouraging everybody to use your own potential and use your talent.

Often when it comes, for example, to politics, also technology, I think the girls, they need more encouragement because we are losing a lot of potential, if all the people are not using all the talent and potential they are having.

But of course, now you are the ones who are scrutinising if I'm fit for this job, but if confirmed, I will also work for all the girls and women, and I'm very much encouraging them to use all their potential in this world because it's really needed.

1-0042-0000

**Arno Bausemer (ESN).** – Sie haben die Bedeutung der Chip-Industrie betont. Ich komme aus Sachsen-Anhalt in Deutschland, das ist aus der Region in der Mitte Deutschlands. Rund um die Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg gibt es einen der fruchtbarsten Ackerböden in Europa, die Magdeburger Börde. Jetzt bestand die Hoffnung vieler Bürger in Sachsen-Anhalt darauf, dass dort in Zukunft nicht mehr Kartoffelchips produziert werden, sondern Computerchips – durch die Ansiedlung von Intel.

Nun hat zunächst Intel erklärt, die Ansiedlung zurückzustellen. Dann kamen sofort Stimmen aus der nun gescheiterten deutschen Bundesregierung, die Förderung, die 10 Milliarden Euro ausmachen sollte, ganz zurückzuziehen.

Meine Frage an Sie wäre: Werden Sie Einfluss ausüben, dass diese Ansiedlung doch noch durch eine Förderung zustande kommt? Oder – zweite Frage – welchen Einfluss werden Sie ausüben, dass in Deutschland durch eigene Firmen – z. B. durch Forschung – eine eigene Chipindustrie entsteht, um genau diesen Bedarf, den Sie richtigerweise angesprochen haben, zu erfüllen?

1-0043-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Of course, farming and the agricultural sector are also playing an important role in our economy and our society. We have a specific Commissioner for Agriculture and Food in this field and it's also a very important priority for us.

But as the nominated Commissioner-designate for the field of technology, I'm more focusing on these chips here, and why are we paying so much attention to these chips?

It's the reason that we are so dependent on third countries, so it's an important part of our technological sovereignty because there's also risks when we are exporting most of the chips from the outside, from the third countries.

So we want to make sure that we have also our own capacity here, that we are competitive also, but we also have a value chain where we have partners all over the world. So we are trying to de-risk our economy this way.

Now when we are going to continue with the Chips Act, I say it's very important that we are contacting our Member States, industry and also the regions, to really see what strengths they are having here, because one of the most important things is to create ecosystems here. The society and need for talented, skilled people is a very important part of this Chips Act.

1-0044-0000

**Borys Budka**, *Chair of the ITRE Committee*. – We've just finished the first round and it is our tradition that we exceeded five minutes till now, so remember that time is money.

Let's start immediately the second round – one and two. One and one would be better!

1-0045-0000

**Anna Cavazzini**, *Chair of the IMCO Committee*. – One in, one out?!

So now we start with the second round.

1-0046-0000

**Pablo Arias Echeverría (PPE)**. – Señora Virkkunen, permítame comenzar recordando a las víctimas y a los afectados por las terribles inundaciones que han devastado Valencia y otras regiones de España. Las riadas han arrasado con todo y los ciudadanos nos piden respuestas ante situaciones como esta que, de conformidad con el informe Niinistö, son la nueva realidad a la que nos enfrentaremos y para la que debemos estar preparados. No podemos cambiar lo sucedido, pero tampoco podemos olvidarlo. En este sentido, si queremos ser útiles ante situaciones como esta, debemos agilizar procesos frente a la burocracia que obstaculiza y ralentiza el acceso a ayudas para los damnificados.

Teniendo en cuenta el Fondo de Solidaridad de la Unión Europea y la propuesta de Reglamento RESTORE, ¿qué herramientas digitales pueden emplearse para simplificar y agilizar el proceso burocrático y garantizar que la ayuda sea accesible y efectiva?

Asimismo, debemos aprovechar el potencial de la inteligencia artificial y de lo digital para ofrecer respuestas concretas de prevención y evaluación. ¿Qué soluciones tecnológicas nos propone para anticiparnos a estos fenómenos y minimizar su impacto?

1-0047-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – First of all, my deepest condolences and solidarity to the victims' families and to the whole region. I want to thank and pay respect to everybody who has been taking part in this emergency and rescue response in your area.

It's now our collective responsibility to learn from these tragic events and develop solutions to prevent such losses in the future. You were referring to Niinistö's report, and it was clearly underlining that we must be better prepared in the future.

Here, I will work together with the Commissioner-designate for Preparedness and Crisis Management to ensure that we take proactive actions at EU level. We have to make better use also of technological solutions, and ensure that all available tools are in place to make the access to aid as flawless as possible.

Also, at EU level, we must be stronger on both climate mitigation and climate adaptation. In this work, I think also that the digital tools are very helpful. For example, in the future, we can have help from our Destination Earth project. This initiative is currently being developed and uses a blend of physical and AI-based models to predict extreme weather events. This will improve response capabilities and better support civil protection and responders. So this is making use of our Copernicus satellite observations and other relevant data, and exploits also the power of our leading supercomputers and generative AI models. And all the key stakeholders are working here. So, in the

next few months, I will make sure that the Destination Earth system becomes available to all public authorities so that they can start using it.

1-0048-0000

**Matthias Ecke (S&D).** – Commissioner-designate, you mentioned that 80% of US digital products and services are currently imported, and we have heard about and spoke about the unacceptable threats of Trump’s Vice-President-elect Vance over Elon Musk’s platform, X.

So it’s absolutely clear we need more tech sovereignty. We need to reduce Europe’s dependence on Chinese and US tech giants. So my question is: how do you really envision the EU’s role in developing a digital public infrastructure, a robust ‘euro-stack’ comprising hardware infrastructure, data, AI applications, governance elements?

What exactly, Ms Virkkunen, do you plan to do to improve the EU’s capacities to be less dependent on digital solutions developed outside the EU? And I mean not only like the title, not only some act and some strategy and some plan, but concrete measures. What do you want to have achieved by 2029? Thank you.

1-0049-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – I also think that the act is not always the answer for everything. But often now when it comes to frontier technologies, it’s also the way we are gathering the expertise together, because we often have the challenge that Member States are doing very fragmented actions.

So an act is also the way we can have the best researchers, industry and Member States together also. And we can pool our resources and expertise. But, like you said, we are far too dependent on third countries when it comes to the technologies, and we have a lot of work ahead of us. When it comes to digital infrastructure, we are lagging behind on our digital decade targets, and also when it comes to data centres, cloud supercomputing, quantum and smart connectivity.

So in all of these fields, we have to take actions. And often it means that we have to do investments and we have to be an attractive place for private investors. And we have to work towards that together. But you also were mentioning an open internet stack. And of course it’s an important part also our approach, and I can tell that I will also work towards equipping the EU with this open internet stack, because it’s a collection of open services and platforms. As already mentioned here, that’s one of our strengths. And there are open services and platforms which are an alternative to proprietary solutions.

So the aim here is also to have more competition with lower barriers for our startups and empower our users and improve also privacy in this field. And when we are linking these open components to what we already have: to digital IDs, payment systems and data management and in exchange platforms, it means that then we can also provide public services such as health care and education.

So I say that this is also an important part: how we can encourage our SMEs and startups and give these open opportunities to everybody. But we have to now act in many fields. And I say that really the part of infrastructure is crucial for us.

1-0050-0000

**Pilar del Castillo Vera (PPE).** – Vice-President-designate, welcome once more to this former House that will continue to be also your House, I’m sure.

We know that competitiveness depends, to a large extent, on our capacity to innovate in the tech sector. On the other hand, development on advanced technologies such as IoT or AI requires massive amounts of data, and data requires robust, fast, low latency and secure networks for effective flow, storage, sharing and access.

By the way, talking about access, the vertical regulation on e-vehicle data is still to be presented.

As you know, the EU faces a gap, on the other hand, of EUR 200 billion to deploy 5G and 6G coverage. We know from the White Paper on the future of European connectivity that they need to tackle all these challenges.

My question is, in the context of competitiveness, could you elaborate a bit more on your view about the announced Digital Networks Act and when we can expect the Commission proposal?

1-0051-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – The Digital Networks Act will be one of the Acts I will propose. But it's also that now we are reviewing our telecom legislation with this act because we are really trying to use now this opportunity to reduce bureaucracy and administration and make sure that Europe is an attractive place for the investments, and especially we have to prepare for 6G also.

We know that our markets are very fragmented when it comes to telecoms and spectrum, for example. In many Member States, investments are lagging very much behind when it comes to connectivity. Like you said, honourable Member, EUR 200 billion investments are needed to meet these digital decade targets.

So it's crucial that we have that kind of legal framework that encourages investments in this field to make businesses easier, to make Europe competitive, and also, of course, to benefit our consumers and citizens.

1-0052-0000

**Pascale Piera (Pfe)**. – Madame la Vice-présidente désignée, à l'instar de toutes les autres lettres de mission qui ont été adressées par la présidente de la Commission, la votre recèle des habituelles formules labellisées par l'Union européenne. Je veux parler par là de renforcement de la résilience, d'utilisation d'un bouclier démocratique et de menaces en tout genre qui promettent de s'abattre sur notre continent. Ainsi, au prétexte de renforcer notre approche de l'État de droit et de réaliser la transition numérique, il vous est demandé de développer des technologies numériques et l'intelligence artificielle qui offrirait des opportunités significatives pour renforcer les capacités d'application de la loi.

Madame la Vice-présidente désignée, comme nous le disons en français, l'enfer est pavé de bonnes intentions. Alors, dans ces conditions, comment comptez-vous mettre en œuvre vos objectifs, si ce n'est en pratiquant un fichage généralisé des données des Européens et des entreprises européennes et en promettant des procédures de sanctions toujours plus lourdes envers les États qui seront réticents au titre des libertés publiques?

1-0053-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think in Europe we have a very robust base for all our legislation when it comes, for example, to AI or to the DSA, because it's based on our values and democracy in Europe. So we always want to make sure that all our legislation, when it comes to digitalisation, that these applications are respecting our core values, our fundamental rights, our

democracy, our rule-of-law principles. And when it also comes to our AI regulation, which is a risk-based approach.

So for most of the use cases and applications there are no risks and we are encouraging everybody to innovate in this area, but then, when it comes to AI, there is more risk, for example, if the AI applications are used for the kinds of services which have huge impacts on people's lives. If they are deciding about recruiting people to a job, giving places in education, deciding about bank loans, then these applications have to meet higher standards, and also they have to be assessed before they are entering into the markets.

So I think we have a very robust basis for our digital legislation, which is based on our European values, and everybody who is operating and making business in Europe has to respect our values here.

1-0054-0000

**Carlo Ciccio** (ECR). – Signora Virkkunen, la sovranità tecnologica è un pilastro del suo portafoglio. Per l'Unione europea ridefinire l'autonomia tecnologica è una sfida molto complessa, considerando la nostra forte dipendenza da paesi extraeuropei.

Vorrei evidenziare due aspetti chiave. Il primo: la sovranità tecnologica europea deve essere sviluppata in linea con i nostri valori di sicurezza, trasparenza e tutela dei cittadini, senza cadere in approcci ideologici. La sovranità non è da intendere – secondo – in senso assoluto ma in un bilanciamento tra costi, benefici e collaborazione tra Paesi.

In questo contesto, i dati e i servizi *cloud* sono particolarmente strategici. Lei ha già sottolineato l'importanza di rimanere aperti a partner internazionali affidabili, pur considerando soluzioni di *cloud* sovrano e annunciando una nuova politica unitaria al riguardo.

Come intende sviluppare questa iniziativa senza ostacolare l'accesso al mercato europeo per partner di fiducia e senza minare la fiducia dei cittadini? Quale ruolo immagina per le soluzioni di *cloud* nazionale in questo percorso?

1-0055-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – In the cloud services, we are very dependent on third countries currently, and there's some very big players in this field. And often it's not good also for innovation if some services are in the hands of only a few players.

That's why it's important that we are also encouraging European innovations in the field of cloud, because then we can have better services and, of course, then we are also de-risking when we have more opportunities in this field. Of course, it's also an important part of our own sovereignty that we have our own capacity when it comes to the cloud services.

That is the reason why I'm going to put forward the Cloud and Development Act to boost investments in Europe's cloud computing capacity. It will also be important for our public services that they are taking a part of this exercise, because with their public procurement they can make also big efforts when they are investing to European clouds. There, I will be working very closely with Vice-President Séjourné in this field when it comes to this public procurement.

So the main reason for why we are now so much focusing to cloud is that we want to give access to AI development for our startups and for our SMEs. We want to make sure that we have also a European market when it comes to the cloud. And there is an environmental aspect, because, at the

same time, we want to make that kind of criteria that we are investing into the best and most energy-efficient solutions here when it comes to the cloud, because also our ICT sector is using very much energy currently and we have to find solutions for that.

So there are many reasons behind all of this AI Act and I'm very willing to cooperate very closely with Parliament now when we are developing this idea, if confirmed.

1-0056-0000

**Sigrīd Friis (Renew).** – Dear Executive Vice President-designate, in your written answers, you commit to de-risk from actors that do not adhere to European values. I welcome that statement and my question will be short and simple. Do you believe that Chinese hardware or software has a place in any of our critical infrastructure?

And taking into consideration that Chinese companies are obliged by law to share any kind of information with their intelligence service, will you make the 5G toolbox legally binding, and will you apply this approach more broadly to other technologies?

1-0057-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Cybersecurity has been a field where we have been focusing very much in the European Union during the last years. We were working with many of you during the last term with the NIS2 Directive, the Critical Entities Resilience, the Cyber Resilience Act and the Solidarity Act, just to mention a few.

So we have been discussing and making decisions on a very big package of cyber legislation during the last years. But, of course, it's not enough if we have the legislation, because it has to be now enforced in the Member States, and we also have to have skilled people to do this. It's also one of our challenges that we are lagging very much behind when it comes to cyber experts.

But, especially, we have to also de-risk the communication when it comes to 5G. And this 5G toolbox is our main tool here. And I have to say that I'm not very satisfied when it comes to our critical infrastructure here, because currently it's the case that 42% Europeans who are using 5G, their communication is transmitted via radio equipment from high-risk vendors. So I'm not satisfied at all.

So only 12 Member States have been imposing obligations on vendors to de-risk mobile operators. Or they have imposed to mobile operators that they have to also de-risk these high-risk vendors from the infrastructure. So this is something where we have to take more actions, because I think the Member States haven't been taking this seriously enough.

And at the beginning of next year we will have also the revision of our Cyber Act. And I think this is certainly a place where we also will focus to this. But I will also, if confirmed, have a discussion on this topic with the Member States, because I think they have to take this now seriously.

1-0058-0000

**Alex Agius Saliba (S&D).** – We have all seen last week how an eccentric billionaire uses a global social platform to spread false information, target and profile people using personal data, using addictive algorithms and also commercial spyware to ultimately change public opinion.



We know Donald Trump will put the US digital giants first. This means that the EU needs to guarantee a European approach to trustworthy, ethical digital services that protect people, their rights and our democracies.

So my first question: will you stand firm against US actors when fines will need to be imposed? And how do you see the cooperation with our US counterparts?

More than ever, the EU needs also a strong data economy – your Cloud and AI Development Act will play a crucial role in it, but your initiative remains vague on the interplay with data protection rights.

So my second question: can you commit to upholding the robust GDPR requirements, enhancing cybersecurity protection and encryption? Will you also commit to updating the e-privacy rules to complete the EU data protection reform without delay?

1-0059-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – When it's coming to some online platforms which are not complying with our regulation, we know that the Commission has opened procedures against them. And of course I'm also hoping that they could speed up the processes, because of course it feels that it's taking a very long time, even though the regulation came into force just one year ago.

It's also important, at the same time, when we want to speed up the processes that the Commission will take actions. If the online platforms are not in line with our regulation, with our rules in Europe, we also have to work in a very evidence-based manner. And that's why it often takes also time from the researchers and from the investigators really to make certain that they have a case there.

But I will make sure that we will use all the tools we have in our DSA, and we will fully enforce it and make sure that everybody who is operating in Europe is respecting our legislation, our rules in Europe. So there is no doubt on that.

When it comes to data protection, it's very much the core of our digital rules in Europe. So we want to have a high level of privacy and be sure that the citizens' personal data is protected.

It said in the mission letter of the Commissioner-designate for the rule of law and justice that he has to look also that our GDPR is in line with technological developments. And of course we have to look at that also, especially when we are coming to the Data Act. But all the time, GDPR and the privacy of the people will be at the heart of our digital legislation and the rules, because trust is needed and trust is key in this area.

1-0060-0000

**Arba Kokalari (PPE)**. – I'm impressed to see that we have a candidate who really knows tech and has worked with tech policy, because digital legislation right now is moving so fast in being able to keep up with the technological developments and protection of citizens' rights.

But the amount of new laws in the EU and in the Member States has led to overlaps and very high compliance costs, especially for startups and scaleups. This is hindering innovation and the European economy, as we all see. And that's why we now need a clear legal framework when all of these laws are being implemented.

Commissioner-designate, Europe's companies need more engineers, not more lawyers trying to navigate in the jungle of bureaucracy. Considering both existing and new proposed laws like the GDPR, Data Act, AII, DMA, DSA and the Digital Fairness Act, what will you do to remove these overlaps and minimise the regulatory burden and the bureaucracy so that companies can succeed in Europe?

1-0061-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This will be one of my main priorities during the next term, or this term, if I'm confirmed as a Vice-President of the Commission, to really look that we are cutting our red tape, we are cutting our bureaucracy and administrative burden from our SMEs and from our industries.

First, what I will ask from my services, if confirmed as the Vice-President, is to really list all the reporting obligations and all the legislation we have for our industries, especially when there is some overlapping tasks, when there is legislation that could be simplified, that could be consolidated. I will do that.

I think the first two sectors where we have good possibilities to really look at how we can simplify and be more in the general level in our legislation is the Digital Networks Act, which will come, where we are going to review our telecom regulation on next year. There I'm willing to finally complete a single market when it comes to telecoms and also look how we can consolidate and simplify the framework we have. It's the oldest part of our digital legislation.

I have to say also that most of our digital legislation is from the last ten years, because before that, really, internet didn't exist and we didn't have rules. So we have a big amount of new rules. And, like you said, often we have been working too much in silence, so we should have a more general approach and we should consolidate our legislation, what we have been doing in the last years.

So the Digital Networks Act, I think, is a good opportunity for that and then also all the cyber legislation, like I was earlier already listing – different initiatives, acts and directives. We have been making decisions during the last years. I think now we have to also have an overall look to the cyber security part and how we can consolidate these different pieces of legislation.

1-0062-0000

**Damian Boeselager (Verts/ALE)**. – Dear Commissioner-designate, I have two questions.

First, on industrial data. The Commission estimates that there is a potential of hundreds of billions of euros if we would be sharing industrial data more, and we clarified some of the commercialisation rights for industry data in the Data Act, but we are still missing large European industrial data marketplaces.

So, can you commit to set up a competition for industrial marketplaces and give prizes to the 10 best competitors?

And second, on talent. By 2050, Europe will be short 44 million workers. One in two European SMEs identifies shortage of talent as a key issue preventing their scaling up and growth.

So, can you commit to making it easier for startups and SMEs to hire across EU borders for remote work? And will you work with Mr Brunner, if he also gets confirmed, to attract international talent with new labour migration schemes?

1-0063-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This data topic, it's very crucial for Europe because now when we want to create our AI continent, we know that a lot of data is needed to train AI and it's one of our main obstacles that most of our industrial data in Europe is not used.

During the last term, we were deciding a very big package of data regulation also. We have the Data Governance Act and also the Data Act coming into force. But now we have to really look at where are the obstacles? Why the data is not used? That's why we have to look also at a new strategy for that, where we are identifying the obstacles we have, because data is really needed to train AI and to make our continent competitive in this area.

I think this is a very interesting idea from your side about this industrial data market competition. I'm very willing to also continue discussions on that when we are now preparing our new data strategy.

When it comes to the talent, this is one of our biggest challenges when we speak about our competitiveness and our technological sovereignty, that we really need skilled people in Europe. We are an ageing population in Europe and Europe has to be attractive always when it comes to talented people, to digital skills.

We have already some actions they have been taking, like the EU Talent Pool and also during the last term, the Blue Card Directive was also revised. But I think we have to now work very closely with the other Commissioners and especially with the Vice-President for Skills and in this area, really look that what kind of more attractive measures we could do?

It's very much up to Member States nowadays and that kind of startup visa is used. Some Member States have it and this approach. But I think also when we are trying to be attractive for the talented, skilled people, we should have a more also European approach here, not only Member States acting on their own.

1-0064-0000

**Oliver Schenk (PPE)**. – Ich komme zurück auf ein Thema, was wir heute Abend ja schon gehört haben: Halbleiterindustrie – eine der wahrscheinlich derzeit wichtigsten Technologien, die es auf der Welt gibt, wenn man bedenkt, dass in jedem Mobiltelefon, was wir hier im Raum haben, jedes etwa 100 von solchen Chips hat. Und wie verletzlich wir als Volkswirtschaften in Europa sind, haben wir ja spätestens in der Pandemie gesehen, als Hunderttausende von Autos nicht produziert werden konnten.

Europa hat reagiert mit dem *Chips Act*. Es gibt einige durchaus erfolgreiche Projekte – ich denke an TSMC, die dort nach Deutschland kommen, in Frankreich, in Italien – aber auch eine ganze Reihe von Projekten, die nicht funktionieren, weil wir gesehen haben, dass es nicht das Geld alleine ist, sondern es ist das *Cluster*, dieses Netzwerk dort, was Sie schon angesprochen haben, aus Forschung, Ausbildung, Zulieferketten.

Und meine Frage ist: Was dürfen wir an Vorschlägen erwarten, damit wir diesen *Chips Act* – der ja richtig war – so justieren, dass wir in Zukunft mehr Investitionen sehen, dass wir wirklich das Ziel, was wir uns vorgenommen haben – 20 % der Weltproduktion auch in Europa herzustellen –, erreichen können?

1-0065-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I agree that this chips sector is maybe the most urgent sector now, when we speak about our technological sovereignty, because chips are really needed in all our technologies and we are so dependent on third countries in this sector. We have been successful with the Chips Act, where Parliament was taking very rapid actions when the Commission was proposing this Chips Act, and you were negotiating this in super-fast time.

In the first year we can see that it has been successful because 80 billion of investments has been done for the semiconductor production in Europe. We also have pilot lines in Europe where we are bringing together research and industrial players across the supply chain, from materials to equipment, to production and packaging. But now we have to take the next step on this, also.

I think it's important that we are now monitoring the success of this first Chips Act and looking what we could do better and what are the next steps. And here I'm very willing, if confirmed as a Vice-President, also to work closely with Parliament because you have very close contacts to your regions and your industries. And I'm very willing to hear also your feedback on what could be done.

But my main idea is that we have to follow with the Chips Act to strengthen and boost especially the design and manufacturing, now, of chips in the EU, and also working towards the creation of a semiconductor ecosystem for very advanced chips, because this is now the missing part of our sectors, really. Very advanced chips also have to be produced in Europe.

As I already said, I'm also planning to add a Quantum Chips Act to this package, but here I'm very willing to work very closely with the Members of Parliament and hearing your feedback, also – what you say that we have done and what we should do now as the next step in this urgent area.

1-0066-0000

**Gaetano Pedulla' (The Left)**. – Signora Commissaria designata, pochi giorni fa, in Italia, ha destato un fortissimo allarme la scoperta di accessi illeciti ai dati personali e patrimoniali di migliaia di persone. Migliaia!

Questo è stato possibile per le mancate allerte delle banche dati pubbliche, per la cui sicurezza sono stati assegnati 623 – 623! – milioni di euro dell'RRF. Di questi soldi, oggi, è stato speso solo il 14 %. E pure male, essenzialmente in consulenze.

La Corte dei conti, infatti, scrive che i piani per la ciberdifesa in Italia non stanno potenziando le strutture di sicurezza ma si limitano a una mera analisi delle strutture esistenti.

Dunque, Lei, qui, può impegnarsi ad agire sui governi degli Stati membri affinché le risorse europee destinate alla sicurezza delle banche dati pubbliche non siano sprecate? E ancora: proporrà degli aiuti economici alle imprese costrette a fare forti investimenti per la sicurezza digitale, come stabilisce la direttiva europea NIS 2?

1-0067-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – It's an important topic for all of us. We want to make sure that our data is safe and can be secured, and all our information also in the digital world, and that's why GDPR is such a crucial part of all our legislation in Europe. That's why we have also been paying so much attention to cybersecurity during the last years.

But the legislation is not enough, because it has to be also enforced, and we have to have also expertise for that. So I very much agree that we have to invest much more in cybersecurity and not

only the technologies, but also the expertise in this field. We are lacking hundreds of thousands of experts in this field, and that's why I'm very much encouraging the Member States to pay attention to the skills part. Here I will work also very closely with the Commissioner for Skills to look at how we can encourage investments in skills and cybersecurity, also when it comes to expertise.

Many Member States were also planning that they are using quite much resources from the Recovery and Resilience fund for digitalisation, and often the skills path was the one to where they are focusing, so we are also expecting results from this part.

This was a very important topic you were raising and it certainly will be one of our main priorities now to make sure that cybersecurity is well taken into account in all the Member States, and we are also sharing information in this field and learning from best practices.

1-0068-0000

**Eero Heinäluoma (S&D).** – Nopeat verkkoyhteydet ovat välttämättömyys niin tavallisille kansalaisille kuin liike-elämällekin. Olennainen osa myös huoltovarmuuttamme. Nämä nopeat 5G- ja valokuituverkkoyhteydet eivät kuitenkaan tänään ole kaikkien eurooppalaisten ulottuvilla. Erityinen ongelma on harvaan asutuissa maissa ja maaseudulla. Nopeissakin yhteyksissä tärkeätä on, kuka päättää, kenelle näitä nopeita yhteyksiä tarjotaan. Muutaman amerikkalaisen tai kiinalaisen miljardöörin ei tule hallita yhteydenpidon, tietoverkkojen tai digitaalisen infrastruktuurin tulevaisuutta Euroopassa.

Arvoisa komissaariehdokas, komission varapuheenjohtajaehdokas, mitä käytännön toimia voitte luvata tälle parlamentille nopeiden yhteyksien takaamiseksi koko Euroopan unionin alueella? Ja lupaatteko, ettei investointi ja vauhdittaminen johda käytännössä internetin avoimuuden rajoituksiin? Sitoudutteko turvaamaan internetin tasa-arvon, verkkoneutraliteetin toteutumisen?

1-0069-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Komission jäsenehdokas.** – Tässä on kyseessä erittäin tärkeä tema ja yksi isoimmista haasteista Euroopassa. Kun katsomme ihmisten verkkoyhteyksiä Euroopassa, olemme pahasti jäljessä. Meidän pitäisi investoida 200 miljardia enemmän verkkoyhteyksiin, että saisimme tavoitettua 2030 tavoitteet, mitkä on asetettu Digital Decade-ohjelmassa. Eli se tarkoittaa sitä, että nykyvauhdilla emme siihen pääse.

Meillä on kaksi tärkeää keinoa, miten voimme vauhdittaa investointeja. Toinen on uudistaa lainsäädäntöä. Ensi vuonna uudistettavaksi on tulossa Digital Networks Act eli teleoperaattoreita koskeva lainsäädäntö, ja siinä pitää pyrkiä poistamaan turhia esteitä niin, että saamme vauhditettua investointeja kaikkialla Euroopassa. Tässä on isoja eroja jäsenmaiden välillä, mutta toinen on tietysti sitten myös rahoitus.

Tällä hetkellä todellakin vain 64 prosenttia eurooppalaisista on hyvän, nopean kuituyhteyden päässä. Ja kuten sanoitte, maaseudulla tilanne on huonompi, vaan noin 50 prosenttia maaseudun asukkaista, heillä on nopeat verkkoyhteydet. Ja se vaikuttaa tietysti yritysten toimintamahdollisuuksiin maaseudulla, maanviljelijöiden toimintamahdollisuuksiin, ihmisten asiointimahdollisuuksiin. Joten kyllä tässä on kyse aivan peruspalvelusta ja sen vuoksi on tärkeää, että katsomme myös kaikki rahoitusvälineet, joita tähän on käytettävissä. Varsinkin kun puhutaan harvaan asutuista alueista, meillä on koheesiorahoitusta käytössä. Aika moni maa aikoo käyttää myös elvytysrahoitusta yhteyksien vauhdittamiseksi. Ja silloin kun on puhe sitten hyvin kehittyneistä yhteyksistä, 5G-yhteyksistä, voidaan käyttää myös Digital Europe -ohjelmaa ja tuota Connecting Europe Facilityä myöskin.

Eli huolellisesti on käytävä läpi jokaisessa maassa mikä tilanne on. Meillä tulee tuo Digital Decade -ohjelma päivitettäväksi muutaman vuoden kuluttua ja sitä varten kootaan nyt jokaisesta maasta tietoa siitä, missä ollaan menossa ja haetaan myös keinot siihen, että miten voidaan vauhdittaa tätä. Ja juuri kuten sanoitte, on tärkeää, että internet säilyy kaikkien käytössä. Teknologia toki tuo tähän muutoksia, tuo paljon nopeutta ja kaistaa myöskin, mutta nettineutraliteetti on ollut tärkeä periaate Euroopassa.

1-0070-0000

**Ernő Schaller-Baross (PFE).** – Commissioner-designate, you have been appointed to oversee an extensive portfolio involving regulation of the digital single market and social media. This includes combating disinformation, unethical online practices like dark patterns, influencer marketing and addictive digital design. However, considering the Commission’s selective approach till now to issues within the Digital Single Market Act, often disregarding concerns from conservative voices as well.

How do you justify the Commission’s lack of balance in regulating online content? Why has the Commission chosen to target platforms like X under Elon Musk’s management, while consistently ignoring similar practices in left-leaning media platforms? How can the European Commission claim impartiality while seeming to stifle free speech from certain ideological perspectives? And how would you ensure the Commission adopts a more neutral stance going forward?

1-0071-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Of course it’s a most important principle here that everybody is having the same rules in Europe – everyone who is under the scope of the regulation. So there are some numbers and a number of users which are making some online platforms very large on online platforms, and then there are stricter rules for them because they are also having more power than smaller operators in Europe.

So those very big online platforms who are meeting these targets, they are under the remit of the Commission, and there are also more requirements for them because they have to assess that they are not posing a systematic risk. And it comes from the fact that they have so much economic and social power. So they also have to behave in a very responsible way, and they have to have practices in place.

At the same time, when we in Parliament were negotiating with the Member States on this legislation, Parliament wanted to make sure and be sure all the time that freedom of speech is respected here, and the illegal products and content have to be taken down – everything that is illegal offline is also illegal online.

But then online platforms also have their own terms and conditions and they also have the responsibility to look that they are not posing systematic risks. And that’s why they are often hiding also some legal content, for example if they see that there can be negative impacts to society, for people’s well-being, for example, and it’s posing risks. Or, for example, if they are spreading disinformation, this is harming democracies very much, and it can pose systematic risks.

But it’s important also for the online platforms that they are deciding about the practices in this field, that they find the right balance here, that there are not over-removals of the content as well.

1-0072-0000

**Reinis Požņaks (ECR).** – Paldies par pacietību un atbildēm uz jautājumiem. Tā kā es esmu no Latvijas, tad vairāk pieskaršos drošības sadaļai un ekonomiskajiem faktoriem, mazāk — digitālajai pasaulei.

Protams, ka karš Eiropā ir izgaismojis ārkārtīgi daudz vājās vietas, kas mums ir ātri jārisina. Tādēļ man prieks, ka jūs esat no Somijas, kas, šķiet, ir vienīgā valsts Eiropā, kas nav nevienu dienu pārstājusi gatavoties karam. Es ceru, ka jums šo 80 gadu pieredzi izdosies sekmīgi arī Eiropā realizēt.

Bet, kas attiecas uz Eiropas konkurētspēju ārienē, mums daudz arī izaicinājumu iekšienē šajā ziņā. Ja mēs nonākam līdz jautājumiem par "ražots Eiropā", tad gribot negribot arī par to — kur. Un ir tādi reģioni, sevišķi Krievijas pierobežā, kuri zaudē savu konkurētspēju savas atrašanās vietas dēļ vienkārši. Un kādus jūs redzat risinājums, kā mēs šo varētu kompensēt iekšējā konkurētspējas izlīdzināšanā?

1-0073-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – It is totally right what you said about the eastern border of Europe.

Because of Russia's war of aggression towards Ukraine, we have closed the eastern border, as we know, and it has had an impact on our logistics, our SMEs, our industries, on people's everyday life. Because often, especially when it comes to the eastern border, people who used to live near the borderline, there was, of course, a lot of cross-border activities, industries and businesses, and now we have stopped them because we don't want to work with Russia anymore. We have also been setting sanctions against them because they are attacking Ukrainians, whom we are protecting and supporting very much and as long as it takes.

But now we have to look also at the eastern border and the regions there. How they could also build their strengths, how they could find new businesses, how people could continue their lives. Because it's also an important part of our security that people can live in these areas, because it would be dangerous if people have to move out from these eastern border areas. It's an important part of our security that there are industries, SMEs, civilisation in our eastern border.

I'm very happy that it's also stated in the mission letter of Vice-President-designate Fitto that he has to pay special attention to our eastern borders now in regional politics, how to support these regions, who have been affected by the closure of the eastern border, and especially the elements that have to be provided for these areas.

I'm also very willing to work very closely with the other Commissioners and, of course, also with the regions, to find out how, at the European level, we could support these regions, because it's also a European question. It's not only the responsibility of these Member States and regions, because this is the security of the whole of Europe and those regions who have been affected by the consequences of the war, we have to support them together.

1-0074-0000

**Anna-Maja Henriksson (Renew).** – Honourable Vice-President-designate, dear Henna. You know, it's quite clear that we must do more to strengthen Europe's defence and security. And in your mission letter, you are asked to work towards a European defence union that not only strengthens defence but also enhances the competitiveness of our defence industry.

How do you plan to work together with Commissioner-designate Kubiľius to create a single market for defence that strengthens the competitiveness of the European defence industry, strengthens the defence of Member States and helps us supply Ukraine with the material it needs. And how will you ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises have possibilities to operate in the single market for defence? And finally, how will you take into account the recommendations in President Niinistö's report?

Miten arvoisa komissaariehdokas aiotte edistää eurooppalaisen puolustusteollisuuden kilpailukykyä?

1-0076-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Defence Union and our defence industry and building up our defence industry will be one of the main priorities for the Commission, and it's also one of the top priorities now in the next months if we are confirmed, and if I'm confirmed I will be working closely with the Commissioner for Defence and Space in this sector and with High Representative / Vice-President Kallas as well, because the Commission is preparing a White Paper on defence. There we will set ambitions and targets for the next years what we want to deliver in Europe.

We don't have to start from scratch. Like you said, we now have the Niinistö report, where there's a very good basis for how we should be better prepared for the worst-case scenarios in Europe. Also we have a defence industrial strategy from last spring, and I think we can build on both those.

But of course, when it comes to defence, also this is a competence of Member States, and there we have to also have very close coordination with the Member States, because they have to now do also their part. We know that one of the most important actions the Member States could do is something that the European Parliament has been very much encouraging the Member States to do during all these years: to meet the 2 % target, to invest at least 2 % of their GDP in defence. It would help our industries a lot as well, because then it would be an extra 60 billion every year for our defence.

We have also set the target in our industrial report that in 2030 Member States should buy 50 % of their military equipment from the European markets. And of course it means that we have to also have very high quality and a much more effective and stronger defence industry than we have today.

So we need short-term actions now, ramp up the industry and investments there, but also we need investments in research and development to be competitive in this area.

1-0077-0000

**Henrik Dahl (PPE)**. – AI is often discussed with a focus on the downside, for instance, inadequate data protection or inadequate protection of vulnerable groups. But there is also an upside in areas such as health care or tax administration or public service delivery, AI could potentially streamline processes, reduce errors and improve decision-making.

But balancing upsides and downsides presents a challenge to the EU. There is much to be gained by AI in terms of efficiency and innovation, but there is also the question of good governance. Given the EU's approach to AI, what steps will the Commission take to ensure that public-sector bodies can adopt AI effectively and safely? And how will the Commission strike a balance between innovation and responsible oversight to guarantee an ethical deployment of AI in public services?



1-0078-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Here you are very right that AI is giving a lot of opportunities for our public services, but we have to also put it right and look at the risks there. And we also need to be sure that we are embracing AI in a responsible way.

And that's why I think it's a very good basis now that we have also our AI Act, because it's a risk-based act. And there we are also setting standards when it comes to that kind of services. But often in the public sector the services provided have an impact on people's everyday life. When the decisions made by AI, people are recruited by AI or, for example, social benefits are decided by AI. Then there have also been – and we know examples when these systems have been tested – cases of discrimination of AI.

So the data, how it's used, plays an important role here. And that's why we have this risk-based approach. So when AI is used for those kinds of application – especially in the public sector, of course, but also in the private sector – then the applications have to meet higher standards and there have to be assessments before they are entering into the markets. And also there have to be disputes or complying elements for the citizens on whose services the AI has been making decisions.

So I think this is good basis that we have the AI Act now. And now we have to also encourage the public sector to use AI. And that's why I will propose applying an AI strategy to really actively support the uptake of AI not only in the private sector but also in the public sector, including those important segments, as you mentioned: health care and also smart cities.

So I think we should be without fear here. And that's why I want to support very much the uptake of AI in the public sector, because we have the AI Act, on which we can base new applications. And currently we have an AI office in the Commission, and they are also preparing guidelines on this topic.

1-0079-0000

**Elena Sancho Murillo (S&D)**. – Señora vicepresidenta propuesta, mejorar las capacidades digitales es esencial para una transición digital inclusiva. Los objetivos de la década digital también exigen una digitalización del 100 % de los servicios públicos clave, incluidas la sanidad electrónica y la identidad digital, de aquí a 2030. Sin embargo, la brecha digital persiste, con más del 40 % de europeos que no pueden utilizar las herramientas digitales necesarias para acceder a los servicios en línea. Y la brecha de género, como ya ha comentado, también sigue siendo un problema.

¿Qué iniciativas propondrá para promover la educación y la formación en el sector digital, garantizando que los grupos desfavorecidos digitalmente no se queden atrás? ¿Puede comprometerse a que la digitalización de los servicios esenciales sea complementaria y no sustitutiva de la asistencia presencial, en particular para esas personas más afectadas por la brecha digital? ¿Qué medidas tomará para cerrar la brecha de habilidades digitales, especialmente para las mujeres, y el déficit de talento en ciberseguridad?

1-0080-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – It's a very important question when we speak about digitalisation and technologies, because I want us to have an approach that nobody is left behind here. But now when we look at our digital decade targets, we have set the target that in 2030, 80 % of our citizens should have basic digital skills. And we know that currently it is the case that only 55 % of our citizens have digital skills. And of course, it's very difficult for the people who are in the job market, for example, because in most jobs nowadays, digital skills are needed. Especially now when we want to boost more technologies and digitalisation in all areas and also in accessing public

services, like you said, digital skills are also needed here. So also for elderly people, it's important that we can also update their skills here.

This is very much a competence of Member States also to organise it, but we have to also monitor the situation at the EU level, so that where we have obstacles in the Member States to access this kind of education and upskilling, many organisations are needed here – also educational institutions, of course, but it's very much up to Member States how they have organised this. I'm very happy that many Member States were planning to use the Recovery and Resilience funds for updating also the people's skills, and now we are looking forward to seeing the results. But more actions are needed now here, and I think we want to meet this target we have set in 2030.

Also, when it comes to ICT specialists, we are lagging very much behind, and especially – like you were underlining – the role of girls and women here, because we have to also encourage more girls and women towards the ICT sectors, because we know that this is a very attractive sector. If girls and women are outside this it will have impacts on their job and career, for their salaries, for their pensions later on.

So it's a very important part here, taking all the potential we have in Europe, using all the potential, and this will be my high priority, coming also from my background as a Minister of Education, I'm always putting a lot of emphasis on education and skills, because it's the basis for everything – for our technologies, digitalisation, competitiveness, for our democracy.

1-0081-0000

**Paulius Saudargas (PPE).** – Dear Vice-President-designate, let's continue about AI. I was really glad to hear that you want Europe to be an AI continent, but the last Europe looks more like an AI-uninhabited island still.

Artificial intelligence is sparking a global revolution. Yet Europe lags behind the United States and even China in the race for technological advancement. AI will play a key role in driving progress across sectors. Europe must focus on developing robust AI models and integrating AI into existing industries.

Hi-tech and AI competitiveness are not just economic priorities, they're matters of security and will be crucial in the defence sector. Also, it will have a significant social impact on our labour market and culture.

So it would be invaluable to hear more about the Commission's plans for AI, including the AI Research Council, the development of a European Centre of Excellence and Research for AI, and other initiatives.

1-0082-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Yes, maybe it sounds a little bit bureaucratic when I'm listing all these actions we are going to take to achieve this AI continent – the 'AI factories' initiative, the 'Apply AI' strategy and the EU Cloud and AI Development Act. But all these parts are needed, really, to boost investments and innovations in this area.

The first will be this 'AI factories' initiative, which will be one of my 100-days initiatives. Just last week, the first seven proposals for AI factories were submitted, on which 15 Member States cooperated. These AI factories are needed because the idea is that we are giving access to supercomputing for industry startups and researchers, because it's really a bottleneck now for our SMEs, for our researchers, that they don't have the computing capacity they need. So now they will

have it, and we will also upgrade our supercomputers. So around supercomputers we will have these AI factories, and also data is of course connected to that. So that's why we have to now also look that we are removing the obstacles to the use of industrial data.

The 'Apply AI' strategy is also an important part of our continent because we want to ensure that our public services will use AI, but also key sectors like you mentioned – automotive, robotics and pharma – that they can make everything out of AI. So that's why we want to also promote future-proof transformation here.

Earlier, we were also already discussing about this EU Cloud and AI Development Act, which is also an important part of this package. But like you said, we are also establishing a research council together with the Commissioner for Innovation, and the idea behind this is that we want to also be an attractive place for the best researchers in the world in AI. So we want to pool the best researchers here to make sure that we have very high quality science also in this field.

1-0083-0000

**Diana Iovanovici Șoșoacă (NI).** – Am văzut aici că vorbiți foarte mult de tehnologie, de 6G, dar cred că s-a uitat un lucru extrem de important. S-a uitat să vorbim despre om. Cred că în centrul atenției trebuie să fie omul. Cred că s-a vorbit foarte puțin de drepturile și libertățile cetățenești și, în calitate de avocat și ceea ce s-a întâmplat în România și în Europa, în special în timpul plandemiei, pentru că nu a fost o pandemie în care numai oficialitățile au avut dreptate, iar specialiștii au fost considerați că sunt împotriva variantei oficiale, vă întreb cum veți putea manageria - că văd că vă gândiți numai la sancțiuni, la închiderea de conturi, la încălcarea dreptului de libertate, de exprimare și opinie, însă nu cred că v-ați întregat ce doresc cetățenii și nu cred că cetățenii își doresc o dictatură și vă spune o româncă care a apucat dictatura comunistă.

1-0084-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – I'm very committed to European values and the European Union, as we know, is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as laid down.

So I think this is a very important basis for our legislation, all the actions we are doing. This is also the reason why the Member States have joined the European Union, that they are sharing these same values.

I think the rule of law principle is especially important here in the cases you mentioned, that we have to have the same rules and equality for everybody in Europe, and people can relate to that.

So I will work, if confirmed as the Commissioner, in the most transparent way and make sure that everybody is having equal treatment in the European Union.

1-0085-0000

**Virginie Joron (PFE).** – Chère Madame, la démocratie a parlé. Les Américains ont réélu Donald Trump largement. Pourtant, ces cinq dernières années furent un mandat de la censure en prétextant protéger les citoyens européens du Brexit, en prétextant sauver la démocratie du populisme de Donald Trump. On se souvient d'Ursula à Davos cette année, centrée sur la lutte contre la désinformation. On se souvient du harcèlement, cet été, du commissaire breton contre Elon Musk avec le DSA. Est-ce que le temps du harcèlement et de la censure est fini? Le futur vice-président américain vient de déclarer qu'il y aurait des représailles.

Madame, vous êtes finlandaise et la Finlande est un pays libre, bien géré. Savez-vous qu'en France des médias sont subventionnés? En France, la quatrième chaîne de télévision a été interdite. France-Soir, un site indépendant d'information, a perdu cet été son agrément pour des articles sur le vaccin Covid. Future commissaire du numérique et en charge de l'application du DSA, serez-vous une commissaire qui défendra la liberté d'expression, la libre concurrence entre les médias? Et pour finir, quelle est votre position sur la certification européenne pour les services du *cloud*?

1-0086-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Freedom of speech is one of our fundamental rights in Europe and I will protect that in all my actions.

Of course, freedom of speech doesn't mean that we can say whatever and we can spread, for example, hate speech or disinformation or violate people's privacy, for example, online. There is also a limit to what is freedom of speech. But I will support this as a fundamental right in all my actions.

Also we are preparing a Democracy Shield, together with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and Rule of Law, and one of the important elements is also strengthening the elements of freedom of speech.

So I can promise that in all my actions I will be supporting this important principle.

1-0087-0000

**Christel Schaldemose (S&D)**. – Dear Commissioner-designate Virkkunen, dear Henna, I'm happy that we speak so much about the Digital Services Act tonight. It is very important legislation and you know it because we were negotiating it together. However, I have a couple of questions in that respect.

One, we have talked about enforcement and the need of it, but we haven't talked so much about resources. Will you be able to find more resources, more staff, etc.? Because I think that's important in order to make sure that we can deliver a little more speedy enforcement than we have today.

The second thing is that your mandate will, if confirmed, last five years. Are you willing to commit to making suggestions for improvement of the regulations in case they are not protecting consumers enough? For instance, age verification for kids or making online marketplaces liable for products if they're not complying with the rules? Are you willing to commit to that because you have five years?

1-0088-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I checked today the resources also from the Commission on this topic because it's true, when we speak about DSA and DMA, we are working on these topics with the world's biggest companies. So we also have to have resources on our side then, when we are making sure that these big companies are complying with our rules, they are respecting all our rules.

Currently in the DSA enforcement team, there are about 100 staff members in the European Commission and by the end of next year it will double, reaching 200. So I will make sure that we have enough resources there.

There's also researchers and lawyers specially needed because we want to make sure that we have also a strong basis to all our actions. And also researchers are needed, especially because of addictive algorithms, for example, as mentioned many times today, and it's also very technical work they have to do the researchers to really look at how this is working.

In the DMA enforcement team, there are about 45 people now working and there we are working together with Vice-President-designate Ribera because it's a joint action and we have joint team there in DMA. So it's a competition policy, but also DG CONNECT is working on this topic.

Also, the AI Office is currently put to the place and there are currently 70 staff members, but next year it's supposed to be 130. So these are also needing a lot of resources and expertise when we speak about these very important legislations here.

When it comes to DSA and DMA, now I'm fully committed to fully enforce all the legislations and use all the tools we have there maximally. But then, of course, we have to look to next year. Technologies are developing very, very fast, that we know here, and our legislation processes often very slowly. So, we have to look also if there are loopholes and if we have to come with a stronger regulation, we will do that.

1-0089-0000

**Kamila Gasiuk-Pihowicz (PPE).** – Do roku 2050, Pani Komisarz, odsetek osób starszych niż 65 lat w Unii Europejskiej ma osiągnąć 30% i zgodnie z raportem Agencji Praw Podstawowych z września 2023 roku Europa doświadcza szarej przepaści cyfrowej. Osoby starsze napotykają trudności w korzystaniu z nowych technologii i w 2021 roku jedynie 25% obywateli Unii Europejskiej w wieku 65, 75, 74 lata będzie posiadało chociażby podstawowe umiejętności cyfrowe, a w krajach takich jak Polska wskaźnik ten będzie wynosił zaledwie 10%.

Więc Pani Komisarz, w obliczu starzejącego się społeczeństwa oraz postępującej cyfryzacji, jak zamierza Pani zredukować to właśnie cyfrowe wykluczenie osób starszych i uczynić internet bardziej dostępnym oraz bezpiecznym miejscem dla seniorów?

1-0090-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – A very important topic. We were already earlier discussing about this skills part, which is crucial to us to meet our digital decade targets, but also to make sure that Europe is competitive in the future and that people have access to public services.

This is certainly an area where we have to pay more attention with the Member States. At the same time, while I'm very much also boosting and supporting, of course, all the digital services and technical solutions, it's important that we have alternative services because everybody can't use digital services. So it's also important to take care of that and especially when we speak about elderly people.

But, at the same time, I'm also encouraging Member States and I will work closely with the Vice-President for Skills in this area. We have to have also possibilities for elderly people to update their skills, and we need the support of the educational institutions here and different organisations who can work together with Member States, because digitalisation can give a lot of benefit also for the elderly people to be in contact to their families and relatives and so on.

So there shouldn't be too high obstacles in this field. But I'm very happy that so many Members here are paying special attention to the skills, because it's really at the heart of our digital transformation. We want to make sure that nobody is left behind.

1-0091-0000

**Reinier Van Lanschot (Verts/ALE).** – Dear Ms Virkkunen, we want an innovative and climate neutral economy, and at the moment, we are on the brink of an unprecedented and exponential surge in technological infrastructure.

I must say, I share your vision for the urgent development of Europe's tech ecosystems, but we cannot ignore one critical reality, and that is the energy consumption of these new AI factories and data centres. It's enormous. In fact, their energy demand is predicted to triple by 2030 and that's basically tomorrow, so we must address this challenge head on.

So, to ensure we stay on course towards a climate neutral economy, could you confirm investments will be tied to clear conditionalities such as net-zero climate goals? And can you commit that these considerations will be part of the EU Cloud and AI Development Act?

1-0092-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – This is one of my priorities also, to make sure that we can meet our climate goals. The Commission is very committed to that, as well as the European Parliament and me, myself, to make sure that we can meet climate goals in an effective way, to make sure that it's also economically and socially sustainable what we are doing.

Like you said, the ICT sector is playing a very important role here. Because of technologies and digitalisation, we can do many services and actions in a much more efficient way than we did before.

But at the same time, the other side of the coin is that this is very energy consuming. So, I think we have to take now actions towards that we will set also requirements when we are making investments, that the best available technologies are used here to make sure that these are very energy efficient investments we are doing.

I think one of the important steps was when in the Energy Efficiency Directive we were including reporting scheme for data centre sustainability. So we have it there in the Energy Efficiency Directive and this data we are collecting now will also help us to decide about the future measures, for example labelling or also these minimum sustainability requirements we could set in the future.

And at the same time, now when we are planning to invest more to cloud and quantum computing, it's also good to remember that these are very energy efficient solutions also. So when we are using these better technologies, we are also saving energy.

So now it's important that we are really also monitoring not only the footprint of ICT technologies, but also the handprint at the same time, so we can find what is always the most energy efficient solution we can take. But this will be certainly important priority for me because I'm very committed to our climate goals also.

1-0093-0000

**Stefano Cavedagna (ECR).** – Signora Commissaria designata, il Suo mandato include la responsabilità di contrastare le pratiche pericolose online, che possono ovviamente danneggiare i consumatori. Tra queste, sicuramente c'è il marketing aggressivo da parte degli *influencer* sui *social media*, con conseguenze sulla salute degli utenti, dei quali vengono influenzate le abitudini e lo stile di vita, a volte con modalità preoccupanti.

Al contempo, notiamo pratiche scorrette da parte delle aziende digitali che provengono al di fuori dell'Unione e che ne aggirano di fatto le norme, con rischi anche qui gravi per i consumatori e la loro salute.

Sono quindi a chiedere quali azioni intenda intraprendere rispetto a queste due fattispecie per garantire una protezione efficace dei consumatori e dei cittadini europei.

1-0094-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think we are in a good position now in that respect: we have a very strong tool here, the Digital Services Act. And now we have to fully enforce it and use all the tools we have there.

We know that the Commission is maintaining on all the time dialogue with these online platforms, but they have also opened investigations and also procedures against these online platforms, especially concerning the rights of minors. Because it's stated in our legislation that online platforms have to ensure that our minors have the highest level of safety, security and privacy in online platforms.

And, like you said, many of our minors are spending very much time on online platforms: young people under 23 years – so not all of them minors – more than 85% of them are using social media, and they are spending more than seven hours per day on online platforms. So it's quite a lot of screen time. And behind that there are also the addictive algorithms many of the online platforms are using.

So this is currently a case the Commission is now investigating: these addicting algorithms. Because, of course, it's also part of the online platforms' business logic that they try to get people to use as much time as possible on online platforms, but it's not good for our health and mental health. And that is also the reason why the Commission is carrying out the inquiry about the impacts of social media.

But then it comes also to the content: we have also to make sure that online platforms are taking their responsibilities here, that they make sure that the content that is shown to our minors online is also fit for their age. And that is something they are not doing well enough now.

1-0095-0000

**Michael McNamara (Renew)**. – Madam Commissioner-designate, I'd like to just continue on the theme of AI.

How will you ensure that the European Union is the locus of innovation and competition in the development of AI models, including but not only narrower specific models, and that that development is supported or at least facilitated and that existing foundation models don't come to stifle innovation? Will you consider using Article 19 of the DMA in that regard?

How will you tackle the potential subversion of the protections afforded in the AI Act to citizens by Member States availing of the national security exemption to acquire or utilise facial recognition and biometric databases accumulated by the untargeted scraping of the internet?

And will you work with Parliament to ensure that the EU AI office within the Commission will effectively implement and enforce the AI Act in a transparent manner?

1-0096-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – We are in a crucial time with the AI Act currently because it's now coming into force. In February, the first part, when we are banning some user cases, is coming into force. So it means that those applications where we see that there is an unacceptable risk, they will be banned. And currently the AI Office is preparing guidelines for that.

Of course, we have to monitor now very closely also the developments in the Member States, like you said, about the security part of that, because of what we wanted to achieve, as co-legislators, with Parliament and the Member States, was to make sure that we are prohibiting that kind of processing of biometric data. This is also classified – all the remote biometric identification systems, for example – as a high risk. This requires them to comply with the very strict requirements now.

So we have to look very carefully and monitor the developments in the Member States, because, at the same time, I want to very much encourage all the industry, SMEs, startups and public sector to use AI because there's big potential and in most cases there is no risk.

But we have clearly identified some of the user cases, some of the applications, there is such a high risk that we want to ban them totally in Europe. And then we have also the high-risk applications where we have higher standards, and special assessment has to be done before they are entering the markets.

But here I'm very willing to work now closely, if confirmed as Vice-President, with our LIBE Committee and our IMCO Committee, who have been setting this AI working group together and following the implementation closely currently.

1-0097-0000

**Arno Bausemer (ESN)**. – Ja, sehr geehrte Frau Virkkunen! Die gescheiterte deutsche Regierung aus Sozialdemokraten, FDP und Grünen hat zuletzt eindrucksvoll bewiesen, was rauskommt, wenn gegenseitige Profilierung zu Stillstand und Blockade führt.

*(unverständlicher Zwischenruf)*

Ah, das stimmt, dann fragen Sie mal Ihren Kollegen, Herrn Ferber, den Wahlfälscher. Sie haben nun, Frau Virkkunen, einen festen Vorgabenkatalog der Kommissionspräsidentin Ursula von der Leyen erhalten. Denn was ich eigentlich zu Beginn sagen wollte, war, dass es auch ebenso schädlich ist, wenn von oben jemand ganz alleine führt.

Meine Frage jetzt an Sie: Wo werden Sie inhaltliche Unterschiede zu den Leitlinien von Frau von der Leyen setzen, und wo werden Sie diese Unterschiede auch zugunsten der europäischen Bevölkerung zum Ausdruck bringen? Wie bewerten Sie als frühere Journalistin das Verhalten von Frau von der Leyen im Umgang mit der Nicht-Herausgabe von Unterlagen zu Pfizer? Trotz Anfragen von Abgeordneten, trotz Anfragen der EU-Ombudsfrau, trotz entsprechender Gerichtsprozesse, die ja anderes verlangen.

Und abschließend meine Frage: Wie können Sie ernsthaft für Transparenz und Demokratie Einsatz zeigen, wenn Sie gleichzeitig die Mitarbeit in einer EU-Kommission anstreben, wo eine Meisterin der Intransparenz und Demokratie ...

*(Der Präsident entzieht dem Redner das Wort.)*



1-0098-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Personally I can say that I have a very high respect for Ursula von der Leyen as a person and also for the work she has been doing during the last five years. She also had very strong support from the European Parliament in July, and it was based on the guidelines she published, and that's why the Commission programme is very much based on these guidelines, because the European Parliament supported these initiatives she has published in July.

We have all received our mission letters from President von der Leyen and these are all very much based also on those guidelines. So I'm very willing to work together with the College, if confirmed. As Ms von der Leyen has said many times and stated very clearly, we will work as colleagues and the whole College will take all the decisions together. So I'm very much looking forward, of course, to working with all the Commissioners, but also with the European Parliament, because you supported also President von der Leyen and her guidelines, and our programme will be based on those guidelines.

1-0099-0000

**Marc Botenga (The Left).** – I'm very concerned about a number of dependencies we have. Cloud services are obviously one of them.

In your written answers, you insist a lot on the fact that we need to stay open to third-party providers or third-country providers. Now, on the one hand, I get this because of the delay and the gap there is between us and others. On the other hand, we need to massively invest in it. And here the idea of the 'euro-stack' of the digital public infrastructure, you've said you look upon that favourably, which is great.

But do you have any timeline, any budget, any estimations, on how are we going to get there, when are we going to get there? Because it is urgent, especially if you see what's ongoing in the United States. And in regard to AI, a question on how to stop the money we're going to put into this from just going to reinforce existing concentrations of power, existing concentrations of corporations that already dominate this market. How to break that open?

1-0100-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – It is sure that it will cost a lot, these investments that are needed in Europe, but it's also costing a lot if we are not doing these investments, if we are becoming more and more dependent on third countries.

We have to build up our own capacity in the critical fields. At the same time, we will also need like-minded partners all over the world because we can't produce everything ourselves. Already now we know that many targets we have set, for example, in the chips, will be very, very challenging for us because the market is also growing very, very fast and the need for these chips as well. So we have to produce four times so much than now to also meet the 20 % target we have set there.

So it will cost. But I think it's an important part of our economy, our sovereignty, that we have also our own capacity in all these digital fields. And, like you said, we should avoid monopolies in the digital world and, of course, now we have to also look very carefully at the DMA – Digital Markets Act – and look that there is not becoming a closed ecosystem, that they are hindering innovations.

That is one of the main reasons why we have the DMA. We want to make sure that also European innovations can be encouraged and that's why we have to make sure that very big players are not abusing their market dominance.

1-0101-0000

**Borys Budka**, *Chair of the ITRE Committee*. – So we have just finished the second round. We are 12 minutes behind schedule.

I give the floor now to invited committees.

1-0102-0000

**Javier Zarzalejos**, *Chair of the LIBE Committee*. – Executive Vice-President-designate Virkkunen, your mission statement calls to continue working on the implementation of the Pact on Asylum and Migration, and on strengthening our internal security.

On behalf of the LIBE Committee, let me ask you, will you commit to keeping the strategic agenda focused on the full implementation of the Pact and involving the Parliament in such implementation?

With the increase of hybrid threats, what actions do you envisage to protect EU external borders while respecting Union law and international obligations? And what role do you see for the Democracy Shield in tackling such hybrid warfare, while at the same time ensuring the protection of the right to freedom of expression and information, as enshrined in the Charter?

1-0103-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Yes: implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum is a priority to me. I know how challenging it was to find agreement on this Pact, and I think it's a great achievement from the European Parliament and from the co-legislators that we found an agreement. So now we have to implement it.

At the same time it's also very important that, when we are implementing this package, we are creating safe and legal pathways for people in Europe, and the European Parliament will be informed on the state of play every six months. The Commissioner can provide the European Parliament with updates also more often, of course. So here I will work very closely with the Commissioner for Migration and Internal Security, Magnus Brunner, in this field.

We also have to find a new and common approach for returns – as we know, that's a missing piece of this package, and the current directive is quite old. But anyway, before the return legislation, we also know that Member States could take more actions here as well and be more active. When it comes to returns, there are also big differences between Member States in these areas.

One of the important initiatives will also be this Democracy Shield. There we will be working very closely with the Commissioner for the Rule of Law and Justice, Michael McGrath, and the special areas we will focus on will be electoral interference – so taking care that this is addressed – and also media freedom.

I'm also very much paying attention to reinforcing the societal resilience of our people. It's often forgotten, but when we speak about democracy, the role of people and their resilience is crucial.

1-0104-0000

**Ilhan Kyuchyuk**, *Chair of the JURI Committee*. – Ms Virkkunen, at the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the latest topic discussed was possible copyright protection of the artificial-intelligence-generated content in line with the human-centric approach.

So the Legal Affairs Committee would like to know how you see the next five years in this regard. Should the EU focus on supporting targeted actions in this area, such as facilitating the conclusion of licenses between rights-holders and artificial intelligence companies, and if yes, how? Or should the EU rather continue to take the lead and take a novel approach to copyright and generative artificial intelligence?

1-0105-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – It is very challenging when we speak about what developments we will see in the next five years when it comes to AI, because we can see that it's developing very fast. So we have to carefully now follow the developments and monitor the situation. We have, of course, the existing balanced system of rules, where we have data-mining exceptions. It's in the Copyright Directive and also in the AI Act. So it should be fully implemented here. We know that there is also a possibility to opt out for the rights-holders, and for the providers of general-purpose AI models to also identify and respect this opt-out.

At the same time, I would like to encourage also the stakeholders to find agreement here. And that's why I was mentioning, for example, the licensing solution, because I want to make sure that our creative sector, that they are also compensated in a fair way. This data is also needed to train AI, as we know, but at the same time, nobody should use other people's work and make business out of that without compensation.

So I think we have to look also at the copyright rules now, when we see that AI is developing very fast. In fact, we know that the Copyright Directive will be evaluated in 2026, and I think that there we have to consider what new improvements are needed now, when we look at technological developments, to make sure that the rights-holders' rights and creative-sector rights are respected here, and they will have also fair remuneration when their work is used.

So here I'm very willing to work very closely, if confirmed, with our JURI Committee to really elaborate the possible solutions we have here to find a balanced outcome.

1-0106-0000

**Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann**, *Vorsitzende des SEDE-Unterausschusses*. – Liebe Henna! Europa ist in kritischen Bereichen wie der künstlichen Intelligenz, über die wir jetzt sprachen, und der Verteidigung nach wie vor in erheblichem Maße von ausländischen Fähigkeiten abhängig. Vor diesem Hintergrund habe ich drei Fragen: Wie werden Sie sicherstellen, dass mit Unterstützung der Europäischen Investitionsbank gewährleistet wird, dass europäische Unternehmen modernste Verteidigungstechnologien liefern können?

Zweitens: Wie werden der Europäische Verteidigungsfonds und die *Defence Equity Facility* die Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem öffentlichen und dem privaten Sektor fördern, damit europäische Unternehmen im globalen Wettbewerb bestehen können?

Und drittens: Welche konkreten Schritte werden Sie unternehmen, um unsere Abhängigkeit von Zulieferern aus Drittstaaten zu verringern, unser Ökosystem im Verteidigungsbereich zu stärken und die regulatorischen und finanziellen Hindernisse zu beseitigen, die der vollständigen Integration dieser Innovation in unser Verteidigungssystem im Wege stehen, wie ja auch im Draghi-Bericht hervorgehoben wurde?

1-0107-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is one of the main topics now during the next month, to make sure that when we are preparing our defence white paper, together with the High Representative / Vice-President Kallas and with the Commissioner-designate Kubilius for Defence and Space, that we will set ambitions there and the targets that how our defence industry will look like in Europe in the coming years.

And funding is needed from many sources as you mentioned already. I think the Member States will of course be an important source also in the future, because most of the funding is coming from them. And not all the Member States, those who are members of NATO, are not meeting the NATO target 2.

But then also we need these European funds like you mentioned, especially when we have our common projects and we are planning to also identify those common projects now during the work we are going to do with the defence white paper. Often it's mentioned that, for example, cyber security would be one of the fields and also air shield. So there we need also European funding for that from our budget.

But especially we need European funding from our EU budget when it comes to resource and development, because it's really needed to make sure that we are also competitive in this sector.

But especially we have to also now work much more closely with the EIB. I already was speaking with the EIB President about this bank's lending policy, because we know that for the Member States, they were sending a letter during the spring that also the lending policy should be changed in EIB. And I'm very much encouraging also EIB to change their lending policy so that they could also better support our private-public investments in this sector and we could also leverage the funding, and I'm willing to continue these discussions, if I'm confirmed.

1-0108-0000

**Emma Rafowicz**, *vice-présidente de la commission CULT*. – Comment comptez-vous renforcer le cadre réglementaire européen pour protéger davantage les journalistes et les artistes – je pense par exemple aux réalisateurs, aux musiciens – de façon à les soutenir face aux défis de la transformation numérique – on peut parler de l'intelligence artificielle, qui a été au cœur de nombreuses questions et de nombreux débats –, mais aussi face à une concurrence internationale féroce?

Par ailleurs, comptez-vous assurer une meilleure utilisation des programmes de l'Union européenne qui soutiennent spécifiquement les innovations numériques et technologiques dans le secteur audiovisuel tout en préservant le soutien à la création audiovisuelle, notamment dans le cadre du volet MEDIA du programme Europe créative, qui est dans votre portefeuille?

1-0109-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Our creative sector is really a basis for all our innovations and for our rich culture in Europe, and I think we have to take good care of our creative sector.

The online world, internet and digitalisation have created many new opportunities, also for our creative sector, for our artists, because it's often easier to access more publicity via online platforms, new audiences via online platforms, but we have to take care of the fair remuneration of artists, especially when their creative work is used to make business.

So nobody should make business on other people's work without compensating that. I think it's one of the main worries of the creative sector, especially when they are working with very big online platforms. And that's why it's important that we have legislation in place. Especially, nowadays, we should look, for example, that filmmakers should have access to data, for example, on their performance, on the video and the on-demand services in order to better negotiate their conditions.

So transparency is needed more so that they would have better opportunities when they are negotiating their contracts, their licenses and about the compensation they are having from these services.

But you were specifically also asking how to protect our creative sector and our journalists. Of course, one important tool will be now our Media Freedom Act, what we will be enforcing together with the Commissioner for Justice and Rule of Law and, of course, we have our important media programme where we can fund also the important projects of our creative sector and/or journalists.

1-0110-0000

**Borys Budka**, *Chair of the ITRE Committee*. – Now we've got to the final round. We are more or less 15 minutes behind the schedule. So let's start this immediately.

1-0111-0000

**Anna Cavazzini**, *Chair of the IMCO Committee*. – So now we come to the final round, which as you know is in reverse order.

1-0112-0000

**Arno Bausemer (ESN)**. – Ich habe nur eine Frage: In den Wahlkampfzeiten in diesem Jahr war öfters das Thema, dass man sich ja nicht einig ist bei Bewerberforen. Und bei einem Thema, muss ich sagen, da war von links bis rechts eine große Einigkeit: Das war das Thema Initiativrecht des Europäischen Parlaments.

Und da wäre meine Frage: Werden Sie sich dafür einsetzen, dass da ein Anlauf unternommen wird, sowas einzuführen und damit das Recht des Parlaments gegenüber der Kommission zu stärken – da Sie ja selbst nun auch viele Jahre hier verbracht haben –, oder sehen Sie das als nicht möglich oder nicht zielführend an?

1-0113-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Being a Member of Parliament – I am currently still a Member of Parliament – I very much respect, of course, all the expertise we have among our European Parliament Members, and I know that Parliament has been very effective during the last years with the initiative reports and often also, nearly always, the Commission has always taken the advice of Parliament and came with a proposal after that.

So I'm very much, of course, supporting all the actions and all the coordination cooperation between Commission and Parliament. And, if I'm confirmed, I'm willing to work very closely with the Parliament and also listen very carefully to initiatives, ideas and the expertise Parliament has, because we know that Members of Parliament, you represent the European citizens directly and you have the contacts with your regions all over Europe, and it's important that the Commission always listens very carefully to Parliament.

1-0114-0000

**Hanna Gedin (The Left).** – As we have heard here today, Vice President-elect JD Vance has claimed that future American support for NATO could be withdrawn if the European Union regulates Elon Musk and his social media platform X.

In my home country, Sweden, Elon Musk is also known for not accepting the Swedish model with collective agreements and for circumventing EU legislation, when putting strike-breakers in his Tesla shops. You have touched upon it a bit today, but I would like to hear a very clear commitment.

Regardless of possible pressure and threats from the US and its new administration, can you guarantee that the DSA will be implemented and that foreign interference will not be tolerated?

1-0115-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Everybody who is operating, making business in the European markets has to respect our rules and our legislation, and I will fully enforce DMA and DSA and use all the tools we have there.

1-0116-0000

**Kim Van Sparrentak (Verts/ALE).** – Dear Commissioner-designate, we have known for years recommender systems based on clicks and interaction push radicalisation, hate and disinformation to the top of your timeline, because that is what people react and click on the most and keeps us glued to our screens the longest. By now, we also know these timelines are highly addictive.

Instead of us users having control over what we see online, tech billionaires choose profit over people and democracy again and again. Do you agree that, specifically, recommender systems based on clicks and interaction pose a systemic risk to public discourse and elections that need urgent mitigating measures? And what will you concretely do to tackle these divisive algorithms based on clicks and interaction?

You mentioned legal certainty can promote innovation, but right now it is unclear which recommender system settings are and are not allowed. Will you make more concrete rules or guidelines on this and will you give effective user choice?

1-0117-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – As we know, according to the DSA, the big online platforms have to assess their systematic risks and mitigate them. And also the DSA includes rules that give users more control and knowledge about algorithmic amplification and recommender systems and how they affect users online experience. So more transparency should be provided from the online platform side already.

And also online platforms need to provide more transparency about the recommender systems, clogs and the social media platforms and search engines. They must give users the possibility also to opt out from being profiled from the recommender systems. And they must also analyse the risks of design and functioning of recommender systems and algorithm systems and set out risk-mitigation measures.

Currently, I know that the Commission is investigating many of these online platforms and their algorithms. Also, to see whether they are in line with our DSA regulation and in several open cases, the Commission has included grievances on the design and functioning of platforms' recommender systems.

So I know that just last month, the Commission has sent requests for information to YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok on the design and functioning of the recommender system. So they are very closely now investigating the case. And of course, if these services are not in line with our regulation, there will be consequences.

1-0118-0000

**Nikola Minchev (Renew).** – Ms Virkkunen, online piracy of live content continues to undermine both the live content and sports broadcasting sectors and remains a serious issue despite the recent Commission recommendation. The EUIPO estimates that 12% of Europeans and 27% of young people watch sports content illegally.

This House has consistently called for robust legislative action to combat such piracy and protect intellectual property rights. Yet the response so far has been non-binding. If the EUIPO's ongoing assessment finds the current recommendation insufficient, will the Commission commit to proposing swift legislative measures to protect the live-content creative industries?

And, in addition, addressing the broader cultural and creative sectors, Europe's creative and e-sports industries face unique challenges in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. How do you envision tackling these challenges while ensuring the protection of IP rights and fostering innovation in European cultural and creative industries?

1-0119-0000

**Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner-designate.** – Like you said, online piracy is a key challenge for the creative and also sport sectors. It causes a significant loss in revenue for broadcasters and sports events organisers currently. And last year a recommendation was adopted at European level. And there the Commission was encouraging market players and Member States to take new measures to address this illegal streaming of live events.

But, like you said, it's still continuing. We can see it in many cases. And, like you were mentioning, a very big amount of people are watching this live content illegally.

So I will assess the impact of the recommendation next year. And in this assessment, I will also look at the effects on the DSA now because, of course, in the Digital Services Act there is also a requirement to fight against illegal content online. So it's covered in the DSA.

But we look at what the effects have been. And as well at the actions now taken by Member States in this field. And I will also consider additional measures if these recommendations do not have the expected impact.

1-0120-0000

**Fernand Kartheiser (ECR).** – Commissioner-designate, in your opening remarks, you have underlined that you want to be very strict and swift on DSA oversight. You want to fight disinformation, manipulation, misinformation and, of course, hate speech. You want our rules to be respected, but what are these rules? Are they in reality totally arbitrary? Because in reality there are no clear definitions of all these phenomena that you want to fight against and no clear rules.

And you're talking about, I quote the Commission, 'protecting civic discourse' and 'finding the right balance' even for legal content, and also looking for 'systemic risks' without any legal precision. Don't you agree that the Commission is becoming the new Ministry of Truth? And don't you think

that the so-called 'trusted flaggers' that should monitor the internet on your behalf are bringing about a shameful culture of denunciation to our societies?

1-0121-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Yes, it is the case that the Digital Services Act is not a content law. So it's not stated in the legislation how the content should be. It's stated that illegal content – which is based on all the Member States' own legislation – has to be taken down.

The DSA is regulating the practices online platforms should have in place. So they have to have practices for when content is flagged and how they need to react to that. There also has to be a disposal mechanism for the users of these platforms if they think that their content is taken down or hidden. We have a code of practice with online platforms in Europe, and we are together tackling disinformation. Disinformation is not always illegal, but it can be very harmful in our societies, and that's why most of the online platforms are very committed to that, because they want to create a safe and secure environment for their users.

1-0122-0000

**András László (PFE)**. – When it comes to European strategic autonomy and European sovereignty, the EU's weakness is particularly visible in the field of digital sovereignty. European citizens and businesses rely almost exclusively on non-European services when it comes to searching on the internet, using email, using social media, using cloud services, online shopping, etc.

And it's pretty shocking if you think about it. We are light years away from digital sovereignty. You have talked about regulation and pouring money into the sector, but I don't want to ask you about regulation, and I don't want to ask you about financing. I want to ask you about outcome, because, at the end of the day, we need a robust European digital sector. Regulation in itself is simply not good enough.

I just want your honest opinion. What do you think would be a desirable market share of European companies in the digital sector, to have both competition and European digital sovereignty?

1-0123-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – We have set our common strategy digital decade targets for 2030 and, in the coming years, we will monitor these targets and where we are. It's also a good opportunity if we want to set new targets.

But I think this is a good tool for us to follow also where we are when we speak about technological sovereignty, about the skills, about the infrastructure we have in Europe. We set the targets a couple of years ago, and now I think we have to also review them and look at what we want to achieve.

1-0124-0000

**Giorgio Gori (S&D)**. – Signora Virkkunen, torno su un tema che è già stato parzialmente accennato: nella Sua lettera di missione e nelle risposte scritte non viene posto abbastanza l'accento sul tema dell'impronta energetica dei centri dati e dell'intelligenza artificiale.

Quali misure metterà in campo per assicurare che il consumo di energia associato a queste tecnologie sia più efficiente e non implichi un boom di emissioni? Come evitare che possa avere un impatto sulle bollette delle famiglie europee?



Ancora: nella prospettiva di un incremento della domanda di energia da parte di questo settore, come intende contribuire alla strategia di elettrificazione per assicurare l'adeguatezza della rete?

1-0125-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is one of my main priorities: sustainability on the digital transition. Like you said, the ICT sector is very energy consuming. Currently, the ICT sector is using about 70 % of the world's electricity and it's about to double in the coming years. So that's why we have to pay now close attention to the energy efficiency of our investments in this field.

The EU has set a goal that we want to have climate neutral data centres by 2030 and I think that the important step towards that was when we were setting the goal in the Energy Efficiency Directive and the requirement also that it includes a reporting scheme for data centre sustainability. And now we have the data, so in the coming years we can better also decide on these future measures here, such as labelling or minimum sustainability requirements.

But I see it as an important precondition that when we are deciding about investments, we have to have also clean energy for those investments and we have to use the best available technologies and look really at how we can also encourage these investments in different regions in Europe.

Because at the same time, I see that the green transition and digital transition, they are going very much hand in hand and digitalisation can help very much also greening of our industries and societies. But also we have to look that we make the best choices when it comes to energy, energy sources and energy efficiency of these investments.

1-0126-0000

**Paulo Cunha (PPE)**. – Cumpre-me colocar-lhe, Senhora Comissária, a última questão desta sua audição e é justo felicitá-la pela clareza com que definiu todas as suas prioridades, assim como pela profundidade com que respondeu a todas as questões que lhe foram colocadas.

Senhora Comissária, hoje é consensual que há uma lacuna ao nível da infraestrutura digital europeia, principalmente ao nível do investimento em inteligência artificial, uma vez que a União Europeia investe cerca de sete vezes menos do que os Estados Unidos da América, sendo que este diferencial provoca ou pode provocar dependência tecnológica, ameaça a nossa autonomia estratégica e afeta a nossa segurança económica.

Assim sendo, Senhora Comissária, pergunto que estratégia pretende implementar para melhorar esta infraestrutura pública digital, assegurando maior autonomia estratégica e fortalecendo a cibersegurança?

1-0127-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is really the key of our technological sovereignty that we have very high-quality modern infrastructure here in Europe for our citizens, for our industries and for our SMEs in all our regions.

I'm preparing the Digital Networks Act to achieve this target, to really make sure that we can reduce red tape and bureaucracy, and we can also have future-proof solutions here when it comes to new technologies, because we know that nowadays the connections, they are more and more connecting, not only the connections we have in the ground, but also the space has to be connected and also the cloud infrastructure, edge computing. So we have to be prepared for all of this future also when it comes to our connections and infrastructure in Europe.

At the same time, we have to boost the investments in AI. And the first step will be the AI factories, so giving access to supercomputing for our SMEs and startups and for our researchers. And, at the same time, we have to make sure that Europe's industrial data is used for new innovations. So we have to remove the obstacles from there also. And, at the same time, we have to invest in the skills of our people, to educate people and make sure that we have the ICT experts needed in this field.

So there is not only one solution as to how to achieve these targets, as we have said in our Digital Decade Report. We need investments in research and development, in skills, we have to give access to capital and access to finance for our startups and SMEs. There, the capital markets union is playing a very important role. And we have to make sure that we have that kind of regulatory framework that encourages innovations and investments in this area. I'm ready to work together with you towards these goals.

1-0128-0000

**Anna Cavazzini**, *Chair of the IMCO Committee*. – Thanks so much, dear colleagues. This concludes the final round. I think it was a very rich and informative hearing. Of course, now we want to give the Commissioner-designate the chance for some concluding remarks.

1-0129-0000

**Henna Virkkunen**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Chairs, honourable Members, thank you very much for your questions and for the inspiring discussions in this late evening. I'm sure that you have had a long day before that.

I think we discussed many key aspects on my direct responsibilities, as well as responsibilities of the Commissioners belonging to my cluster. It has been a privilege to respond to your questions, to share my vision and concrete initiatives for a more prosperous, democratic and secure future for Europe. If you confirm me, from day one I will work together with you and the whole Parliament in the spirit of collegiality, respect and dialogue.

We have discussed many big challenges ahead of us. One challenge is transforming Europe into an AI continent: a leading hub for AI innovations where we channel investments into critical technologies; we turn research into commercial success stories; and our citizens can benefit from better services – public and private – empowered by AI. We have also discussed the importance of keeping our citizens – especially our kids – safe, both online and offline. We talked about my commitment to defend freedom of speech and to protect a free and independent press, while strengthening our societies against foreign information manipulation. We discussed the importance of securing our borders and a robust migration policy, in line with the expectations of our citizens. We also discussed how to establish a strong and common defence strategy for a safer and more resilient Europe.

Finally, security is key: we need to make Europe a place where every person feels safe, both online and offline. We must put Europe back on the path of competitiveness and growth, make Europe self-reliant in security, and unite around our core values of freedom, the rule of law and democracy. This is a now-or-never moment for a direction shift.

Technological leadership is crucial for our competitiveness. We owe it to the next generations to build a future where technology supports a green transition that is also economically and socially sustainable; a future where we put people at the centre of the digital transformation and leave no one behind.

I'm also committed to simplifying businesses: this is what especially our entrepreneurs and startups need. We also cannot enforce our legislation without legal certainty and clear rules.

Our discussions today showed the extensive responsibilities of the portfolio entrusted to me by the President of the Commission. I will not carry this responsibility lightly. Should you confirm my appointment, I will serve the interests of our citizens and the general interests of the Union, working closely with you, the Member States and the institutions.

I can say that I enjoy running in my free time, and as you know – if there are any other runners here too – running is not just about fitness. It's about stamina and strategy and the determination to reach the finish line. So if you confirm me, I will bring the same commitment over the next five years, sparing no effort and holding myself accountable to you.

If you confirm me, I will leave this House also with a heavy heart as a Member of Parliament, because it has been an honour to serve European citizens with you, as your colleague, for more than 10 years. If confirmed, I look forward in my new role to continuing to work in close collaboration with you and the whole European Parliament to make the bold shift needed for Europe.

So my door will be always open to you. Together, I'm sure we can do it.

1-0130-0000

**Borys Budka**, *Chair of the ITRE Committee*. – I'd like to thank all Members who took part in the hearing and, of course, Ms Henna Virkkunen for the replies.

We close this hearing and, of course, at 22:00 we will have the evaluation meeting. Thank you very much.

1-0131-0000

*(The hearing closed at 21:43)*