Introduction

Good afternoon to every one. My name is Simon Delakorda. I am director at the Institute for Electronic Participation non-governmental organisation. The institute is focusing on electronic democracy and digital government. I am also advocacy coordinator at the National network of NGOs for an inclusive information society in Slovenia. The network is a member of the Digital Transformation Cluster of the Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe.

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Panellists' introductory interventions

Yes, the **policy language of a Europe fit for the digital age EU strategic goal** is including a strong reference to empowering people with a new generation of technologies. However, **there are several grey areas and gaps in the digital transformation of Europe**, that we, the NGO network, think should be given more attention.

The first grey area relates to digital skills. The EU created t**he Digital Skills and Jobs Platform** that strives to make Europe more **competitive** in the **global digital econom***y*. What is missing here is the dedicated EU programme for **digital literacy** and **competences** empowering all generations of Europeans for the use of digital technologies in their every day life **out side the European single market**. I believe European as citizens should be able to tackle issues such as **disinformation**, **hate speech** as well **digital data and surveillance capitalism** and not only creating a higher added value as a **working forc****e**.

The second grey area is relating to e-inclusion from the view point **internet infrastructure and digital technology connectivity** (my colleague Maša will refer to it from the view point of web accesibility). Despite the WiFi4EU initiatives, commercial and government interventions a significant gap among EU urban and rural area in **terms of accessibility of fast and reliable internet** remain. On of the main reasons for remaining gaps lies in governmental implementation deficit and lack of capacities to deliver these interventions in the field. Also the **monthly costs for telecommunication service** are still high in some countries despite Roaming regulation. The telecommunication cost are especially hard for **social vulnerable groups of Europeans with a low income**. In relation to e-inclusion and before mentioned digital skills there is hardly any **policy debate about the digital transformation of the civil society**. The are is no relevant EU level investment dedicated into building up civil society digital capacities comparing to large public money investment into small and medium enterprises, research and development facilities and regional and local governments in Europe. The European Commission could address this issue as a part of its **Open Source Software Strategy**.

The third and for me personally the **key challenge for the digital transformation in Europe** is about t**he Europeans trust into digital technologies**. Because the level of trust mirrors the true empowerment of people. One among grey areas here is the EU **ePrivacy regulation upgrade** which was proposed 5 years ago and the process is still not completed. Building trust by adopting the regulation that works for people is a key, as **28 % Eurobarometer respondents in 2017** said that the **digital technologies have negative impact on their quality of live**. In relation to building trust into digital transformation as well enhancing Europe digital sovereignty more emphasis should be given to **popularizing open source programmes** such as Libre Office, **open source** on-line services such as NextCloud, Jitsi and **open format standards** for the EU institutions, national and local government files and data management.

Last but far from being the least grey area of the Europe digital transformation that should gain

much greater policy recognition is relating to the ***impact of digital technologies on European physical and mental health***. There two issues acknowledged by the civil society. The first is about ***rising inequalities due to increased and mandatory use of digital tools in healthcare service*** (my colleague Neja will address this in a more detail manner in discussion part). The second relates to digital technologies ***overuse and addiction resulting in digital stress, anxiety and depression*** (my colleague Sara will talk about this latter from the children and youth perspective). The future of digital transformation in Europe should also ***educate Europeans about the smart use of digital technologies*** and to ***consider possibility for being digitally disconnected.***

To conclude, I think civil society should consider ***altering business as usual policy debate*** on digital transformation by introducing a ***new narrative based focusing digital cohesion of Europe***. This would mean that the public money investment in digital technologies must ***contribute to the sustainable development goals***. At the moment there are plenty of evidence that certain patterns of digital services usage, platforms, applications and business models ***are simply not sustainable in terms of social justice, environmental footprints and human rights*** (social media platforms are one example). I think this is also due to the ***dominant corporate - engineering approach to the digital transformation*** which directly or indirectly contributing to grey areas presented. Thank you and I will ***refer to digital democracy and e-participation in my second intervention***.

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Q: There are a lot of promising outcomes of democratic innovation projects that use technology in order to advance democracy. This is taking place mostly on a local level, some at a national level. However, they still seem to remain as isolated experiences. What needs to be in place to ensure a sustainable learning curve, which can lead eventually to both mainstreaming and upscaling of these democratic innovations at the EU level?

First of all, digital democracy advocates, including myself, are sometimes ***a bit naive in expecting that digital technologies*** will improve democracy in a quick way by doing a few clicks.

We can not ***expect that 30 years of experimenting*** with democratic innovations enabled by the present Internet technology will solve ***3 hundred year old problems with democratic political systems***. It takes time and we should ***be patient here***.

What is keeping my ***cyber optimism alive*** is growing evidence of a ***successful digital democracy*** practices such as participatory budgeting in ***Scotland***, on-line initiatives in ***Latvia***, policy crowdsourcing in ***Iceland*** and e-voting in ***Estonia***. Even ***EU institution*** occasionally experience an extensive e-participation of citizens when drafting regulation in an area for climate change for example.

I believe these practices are representing ***little seeds which will grow over time*** and become sustainable enough to create a ***spill over*** national borders or decision-making levels. This has not happen so far not because of limitations of technology available but ***because of lack of the conditions necessary to transfer digital democracy practice from one political community and culture*** to another.

We have to be aware that despite being part of the EU, ***the member states differs*** in terms of democratic development, needs, process and capacities. What is more, there are ***very limited evidence for European democracy*** that would originate from ***the European public sphere***. The ***European citizens initiative*** and the ***European elections*** are still ***not developed*** as a complete democratic mechanisms. What I am referring here a***re political, societal and cultural conditions***

needed to fully exploit the potential of digital technology for improving democracy. It safe to say that ***one can not fix a broken democracy by introducing yet another app***.

As observed by the ***Varieties of Democracy project***, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2020 is down to levels last found around 1990. And being a ***bit sarcastic to myself,*** this time frame is corresponding to the launching of present Internet. To make long story short, if we truly want o***ur democracy to benefit digital technology***, we firstly ***need to change the current way of understanding and handling politics***.