



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

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Dear Chair,

EU Informal Competitiveness Council, 26 – 27 March 2015

I represented the UK at the Informal Competitiveness Council that took place in Riga on 26 – 27 March, discussing the Digital Single Market.

The Council opened with remarks from the Presidency, Commission and Vicky Ford, the Chair of the European Parliament Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee. In his opening address Vice President Ansip emphasised his determination to bring forward an ambitious Digital Single Market package in May, which would be the start of a process to make the single market fit for the digital age – including by promoting cross-border e-commerce, price transparency in parcel delivery, ending unjustified geoblocking, simplifying VAT processes and ensuring cross-border access to content. Vicky Ford spoke about the potential of e-commerce, highlighting that only 6% of businesses currently engaged in cross-border e-commerce.

The opening working session focussed on the ‘the role of EU single market in the digital economy,’ and had a mix of political and business speakers leading the discussion. I gave a keynote speech, calling for all Member States to respond to the technological revolution, pointing to the need for better regulation, the right incentives and widespread engagement as the main ways of achieving this. Many of the other businesses and Member States speakers echoed these themes and spoke of the dangers of over-regulation in restricting innovation. One Member State highlighted the importance for digital policy to be industry led, as well of developing standards and cybersecurity, whilst another emphasised the importance of access to finance, better support for start-ups and platform regulation.

Day two focused on digital transformation of industry and digital entrepreneurship. In the industry and digital session I delivered a keynote speech, highlighting the approach the UK has taken to supporting industry through the industrial strategy.

I called for the EU to focus on areas where it could add most value, such as ensuring flexible data regulation to support the free flow of information and to maintain consumer confidence. I also stressed the need for early action to establish EU standards for new technologies and to try and make these the global standards; and smart regulation to ensure new rules did not unduly hamper industry's efforts to digitalise. In other key interventions, one business group called for better data regulation, improved ICT infrastructure and early action on skills and standards. One Member State stressed their concern about 'technological independence' whilst other Member States called for a 'Magna Carta' for data.

The Commission summed up both sessions by reminding the delegates of the importance of services in advanced manufacturing, as well the need to tackle the barriers to services that support manufacturing. Ensuring free flow of data, smart procurement and more investment would help support the necessary industrial transformation.

A copy of this letter will be placed in both libraries.

I am writing in similar terms to Chair of the Select Committee on the EU, House of Lords and Les Saunders (Cabinet Office) and Marzena Bujalska (BIS Parliamentary Scrutiny).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Neville-Rolfe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BARONESS NEVILLE-ROLFE DBE CMG