

## **#Dialogue4Tech: Europeans are users, consumers, entrepreneurs... citizens!**

The new EU political leadership is clear: digitisation and tech innovation are both a huge opportunity and a challenge for Europe. We must find our place on the global digital map. In this context, key stakeholders gathered for our 3rd #Dialogue4Tech, dedicated to the EU approach to digital services. One thing clearly emerged from the conversation: in their relationship with fast evolving technologies, Europeans are primarily digital “citizens”. This means they have a range of diverse needs, as users, consumers, entrepreneurs, innovations.

During our “Dialogue for Tech Leadership” on June 25, we brought together representatives from consumers, users with disabilities, start-ups, SMEs and business users. Our guests were: **BEUC** (Maryant Fernández Pérez), the **European Disability Forum** (Alejandro Moledo and Mher Hakobyan), **Allied for Startups** (Benedikt Blomeyer-Bartenstein), **INTUG** (Danielle Jacobs), and **SMEUnited** (Katarzyna Koziol).

### **More innovation is coming: let’s make the most of it**

Emerging technologies such as 5G, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence or Blockchain are no longer brand new concepts for the EU’s sophisticated consumers and European companies. However, most consumers do not fully grasp the implications these technologies can have on their lives. There is a huge enabling potential, but also several concerns to address. For SMEs to start-ups, consumers, including users with disabilities, and others, a digital wave is on its way. We need to ensure that all are included in the decision-making process and that all can make the most out of it. The way in which digital technologies can be used in Europe will be crucial.

Inclusive digital technology can be a powerful ally when people’s rights are respected. It embodies outstanding potential to update and modernise the educational systems of today by inserting digital in the curriculum of consumers, workers who represent the digital users of tomorrow.

Already today, accessible technologies are empowering more than 80 million Europeans with disabilities and bringing down the costs of making online services inclusive. This is not enough. We need to ensure that all users are included. For this reason, a close dialogue with technology experts and industry with users is essential.

### **Future priorities: trust, fair competition and empowering users**

Based on the discussions with stakeholders, ETNO has identified at least 3 main areas to be prioritised going forward.

First, **trust is paramount**. Building trust takes years, destroying it takes a day. In the past years, digital consumers have been at times deceived by digital services. Issues related to privacy and data protection, among others, contributed to eroding trust. For this reason, companies should be wary of their behaviour and ensure all possible efforts are made to protect the privacy of users, be fully transparent as to their use and putting them in control. Trust is at stake, and so is the eagerness to take up innovative services, such as those based on AI or blockchain, that deliver for all consumers.

Second, **fair competition along the value chain** is of essence. Regulation, enforcement and dialogue are essential tools to avoid bottlenecks and consumer detriment in the digital value chain. While views

on the if and the how might differ across stakeholders, participants identified other key priority areas such as taxation, data access and control policy.

Third, the new political leadership should focus on **empowering innovation**, especially from start-ups, that contributes to societal progress and the well-being of consumers. **Inclusion** through digital skills and accessibility-by-design will be important. More in specific, ETNO believes that the new European Parliament has an opportunity to scale-up their political focus on start-ups as enablers of European innovation, but also on consumer rights and accessibility and how Europe can lead in this field. Most importantly, these two worlds can interact and come-up with innovative solution to promote social inclusion of all.

### **Coming up**

The “Dialogue for Tech Leadership” meetings continue at ETNO. The next report will capture the key points from our discussion on digital networks with ECTA, Cable Europe and the FTTH Council Europe. Stay tuned.

To join and to find out more, you can e-mail us at [gropelli@etno.eu](mailto:gropelli@etno.eu). To read more reports about the findings, just follow the hashtag #Dialogue4Tech or subscribe to our #ETNODigital newsletter.

*(This blogpost represents ETNO’s views only and does not necessarily reflect those of the participants)*