

Boost digital single market with apps and stop geo-blocking, say MEPs

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Innovation-friendly policies are needed to boost the sharing economy and online platforms but unjustified geo-blocking must be stopped, say the internal market and industry committees in a resolution passed on Monday night. They point out that developing e-government and e-skills could help the EU digital single market to generate €415 billion a year.

"We have achieved a great deal with this report. The European Parliament has not only complemented the Commission's digital single market strategy but has broadened the perspective. We have incorporated crucial aspects of digitization, most importantly how it is reshaping the landscape of labour and social welfare schemes," said the internal market rapporteur, Eveline Gebhardt (S&D, DE).

"To ensure that all the talent and innovative ideas can be turned into businesses that scale up and create jobs, we need to adapt and simplify the rules so that we have the best environment in Europe for innovation to flourish. I am happy that today in this report we clearly gave our support to digital innovation such as the sharing economy," said the industry committee rapporteur, Kaja Kallas (ALDE, ET).

The draft resolution, "Towards a digital single market act", adopted by a big majority of 80 votes to 6, with 3 abstentions, will provide Parliament's response to the digital single market strategy presented by the EU Commission on 6 May.

Policies to promote internet-based apps and the sharing economy

The two committees are concerned that member states are currently pursuing different approaches towards regulating the internet and the sharing economy, representing new business models for selling goods and services online (such as Uber, eBay or Airbnb). They say the sharing economy increases competition and consumer choice and helps create a more inclusive job market. They point to the opportunities that new technologies, such as big data, cloud computing or 3D-printing, could create for the economy and society.

The resolution calls on the Commission to check whether potential issues related to online platforms could be resolved by applying existing rules properly and to give clear guidance on how consumer rules apply to traders using these platforms. MEPs also want the Commission to identify and address barriers to their emergence and scale-up.

In addition MEPs calls on the member states to ensure that social policies are fit for the purpose of the digital economy and are flexible enough to maintain existing employment rights and social welfare schemes.

Stop geo-blocking

MEPs want businesses to end unjustified geo-blocking practices, such as limiting consumers' access to goods and services on the basis of an IP address, postal address, nationality or the country in which a credit card was issued, because this often leads to monopolies and causes consumers to resort to illegal content.

Press release

They welcome the Commission's proposal to enhance portability and the free circulation of legally-acquired content or services as a first step towards putting a stop to unjustified geo-blocking. "There is no contradiction between the principle of territoriality and measures to remove barriers to portability of content," they say.

E-skills

The committees say the current shortage of digital skills is preventing society from reaping the full benefits of the digital economy. They call on the Commission to use the Youth Employment Initiative to develop the digital skills of young people and suggest promoting media and internet skills at schools and colleges.

E-government

The resolution urges the Commission to lead by example and work with the member states to develop an e-government action plan in public administrations based on the "once only principle", whereby citizens and businesses should not be asked for information already provided to a public authority, whilst ensuring citizens' privacy and a high level of data protection.

Next steps

The resolution will be tabled for a vote in plenary in Strasbourg in January 2016.

Further information

- EP IMCO rapporteur Evelyne Gebhardt (S&D, DE):
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/1913/EVELYNE_GEBHARDT_home.html
- EP ITRE rapporteur Kaja Kallas (ALDE, ET):
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/124697/KAJA_KALLAS_home.html
- Procedure file:
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2015/2147\(INI\)](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2015/2147(INI))

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