

**REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE  
OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

**Mariya Gabriel**

**Digital Economy and Society**

**1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission?**

**What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

Today, two years after the launch of the Digital Single Market Strategy, the EU is taking action to address the major challenge of turning digital transformation into an opportunity for Europe's economy and society. We must show awareness and continue to invest in our successes and our potential, while using innovative tools to deal with new realities and challenges. The interests of our citizens must be at the heart of our policies. Regular dialogue and greater cooperation with all stakeholders is the only way for us to turn existing digital barriers into opportunities which will enable us to defend our values and principles.

The digital single market is one of President Juncker's ten priorities. In line with this, I will work towards completing the digital single market, with the essential objectives of contributing to growth and investment and protecting the interests and rights of citizens. This also means reacting speedily and with determination to the challenges posed by constant changes in technology, how it is used, and how it is abused, such as cyber-attacks.

I shall call upon my experience as a researcher in two European projects (EQUAL and PARENEL) to apply innovative working methods in the search for solutions. My work in these projects has helped me to appreciate how crucial it is to support scientific research – including with funding – in order to pool data and resources. This will bring Europe to the forefront of scientific and technological progress and thereby assert European excellence. In our capacity as European policy makers, we have a duty to act and I undertake to use all the necessary means and take all the necessary action to achieve this objective.

As a 30-year-old MEP, I was conscious of how fortunate I was and the opportunity I had to put forward my European vision and commitment. The interests of citizens were my priority from the outset. The topics I worked on further instilled in me the importance of seeking and applying cohesion between our internal and external policies. This cohesion should guide everything we do.

Discussion of digital issues involves a wide range of topics requiring development and implementation of coherent public policies, as between digital strategy and the investment plan, the social pillar, energy union and climate, and economic and monetary union. This involves a significant number of parliamentary committees, working on challenges as varied as the security of Europe's citizens and our freedoms and fundamental rights (LIBE), the role of women in information and communication technologies and the economy (FEMM), internet coverage in rural areas and generational challenges (AGRI), and Europe's role in the world (AFET), to name but a few. During my terms of office as an MEP, I have had the opportunity to contribute actively to this work. In the future, I undertake to promote a holistic approach – with Europe's citizens at its very heart.

All of these aspects are part of the portfolio and I intend to bring them to fruition working together with Vice-President Ansip and the Commissioners of the relevant project team. I intend to use my working methods – based on dialogue, cooperation and compromise – to bring about real results for citizens. I will continue to use these methods as Commissioner in the policy areas assigned to me.

In this context, I attach paramount importance to the role of the European Parliament – equal co-legislator with the Council and the primary vector of citizens' interests. I count on the support of MEPs and the Member States to achieve our objectives together and ensure our policies are implemented effectively.

I have at all times respected both the letter and the spirit of the EU Treaties and the obligation to act in the European interest. Since I took up my seat in the European Parliament, I have not held any other office or engaged in other professional activity. In my new role, I pledge to comply without fail, as soon as I am appointed, with the Treaty obligations on independence, transparency, impartiality and availability, as defined in Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union and in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. I will comply with the ethical standards set out in the same Articles and in the Code of Conduct for Commissioners.

I have ensured that the declaration of interests required by the Code has been duly completed and published and I undertake to update it with any changes and immediately inform the President thereof.

I am committed to avoiding any position or situation that would call into question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission. I will exercise the greatest care in avoiding or resolving any situation that might involve a conflict of interest in the performance of my duties.

## **2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

**What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

President Juncker has made a commitment to Europeans to create a digital single market, while making Commission policy-making more transparent at every stage – a prerequisite for bolstering our public legitimacy at European level. The Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Regulation has made this openness objective a standard for all Commission working procedures. I will fully adhere to this commitment and ensure this is reflected in my management style.

I intend to take sound policy initiatives, involving from the very outset all of my fellow Commissioners in the project groups set up at the start of this term of office, in order to accommodate all possible viewpoints and strike the best possible balance in our proposals. I will incorporate these aspects into my working practices with a view to: i) enabling Parliament and the Council to be fully involved in initiating, developing and implementing public policies; ii) managing these interactions in an open, transparent, constructive and effective way, to yield the best possible result; iii) ensuring that the relevant parliamentary committees are involved in any major developments at the same time as and on an equal footing with the Council.

Specifically, I pledge to promote regular and in-depth dialogue with the European Parliament at every stage of the legislative process, particularly with the ITRE, IMCO, JURI, CULT and LIBE committees, which are already working on proposals put forward by the Commission.

I also promise to take every available political opportunity to restate the importance of carrying out high-quality impact assessments and public consultations, without which political analysis at European level could be distorted.

## **3. Priorities**

**What are the main priorities you intend to pursue as part of your proposed portfolio, taking into account the emphasis on jobs, growth, investments and competitiveness? What timetable do you envisage for pursuing those priorities? How do you intend to facilitate the preparation and adoption of the legislative proposals to complete the Digital Single Market? What steps do you intend to ensure cyber security in Europe? How will you personally ensure the highest possible professional and ethics standards, good quality of legislative proposals, full transparency of lobbying activities (directed at you and your services), and consistent and balanced consultation of all stakeholders taking also into account the need to carry out thorough impact assessments?**

The Digital Single Market aims to ensure that the digital revolution is a source of growth, employment and competitiveness in Europe. In the current political climate of doubt, and

even mistrust, on the part of some of our fellow citizens towards the European project, I think it is essential to redouble efforts to achieve the policy priorities identified since 2014 and to swiftly implement the announced measures and ensure that tangible changes take place in the lives of citizens and businesses as rapidly as possible.

I am honoured to have been nominated for a rapidly expanding portfolio that is receiving considerable attention from the co-legislators. As announced in May 2015, the European Commission has already put forward 35 policy initiatives, 21 of which are legislative. These have already produced tangible results. I will be able to build on some of them in order to show citizens and businesses the benefits of our policies: the abolition of roaming charges, portability of content in the EU, reallocation of the 700 MHz band for very high-speed broadband connectivity, the 'WiFi4EU' initiative, which is designed to support the installation of free public Wi-Fi hotspots in local communities across the EU, and the copyright scheme implementing the Marrakesh Treaty in the EU, which will help to facilitate access to books and printed matter for the blind and visually impaired.

However, considerable work remains to be done to take the other legislative matters forward. In particular, we must reach political agreements with the co-legislators on the proposals relating to the Electronic Telecommunications Code, reform of copyright, audio-visual media services and on the subject of unjustified geo-blocking. I am convinced that, due to my experience in the European Parliament and the enhanced cooperation between Parliament and the Council in the legislative negotiations, it will be possible to respect the timetable set by the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.

As announced at the time of the mid-term review of the Digital Single Market strategy, I will prepare targeted new initiatives in the field of cyber security, fair relations between platforms and the businesses operating on them, the cross-border free flow of non-personal data and the accessibility and reutilisation of public sector data and publicly funded data.

It is essential for the European mechanism for preventing and combating cyber attacks to be more operational, including for the protection of the European institutions and political processes. That is why I will carry out a review of the EU's cyber security strategy by next September and present a proposal for a new mandate for the European Union Agency responsible for network and information security to better respond to the new challenges posed by the growing risks of cyber attack. The Commission will also work on proposals for supplementary measures on cyber security standards as well as certification and labelling to strengthen the security of connected devices.

I will pay special attention to the challenges that digital transformation poses for our European society and its social model. We must, firstly, ensure that digital innovations bring maximum benefits to all our citizens, while respecting European democratic and social values. Secondly, we have a duty to help citizens and businesses to make a success of the period of transition towards the digital economy and society, particularly through education and training schemes and better cooperation between the national approaches of welfare systems. Finally, having public administrations and services that are modern, flexible and interoperable is a key element of an open, efficient and inclusive digital economy. In this regard, I am going to continue to develop ongoing measures concerning interoperability and to pursue an ambitious programme of support for the digitisation of public administrations.

In order to prepare legislation and facilitate the adoption of legislative proposals in the coming months, I will rely on my experience in the European Parliament, on my ability to

work with different partners and on my listening and communication skills in order to contribute actively to teamwork within the Commission, in particular in the Digital Single Market project team chaired by Vice-President Ansip.

I intend to respect the highest quality standards when preparing future measures, in particular when it comes to legislative proposals or budgetary expenditure. I undertake to follow to the letter the rules laid down in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission and in the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. This is essential for the quality of proposals and, ultimately, for improving the quality and legitimacy of proposals and enhancing the image of the EU among our fellow citizens.

I will pay particular attention to in-depth impact assessments that allow Commission proposals to be better targeted and better calibrated on the basis of a through, multidimensional analysis. During my time at the European Parliament, I had many opportunities to observe the importance of impeccably organised public consultations, which must be open and accessible so as to improve the quality and legitimacy of proposals among European citizens.

Finally, I shall comply in full with the high professional and ethical standards laid down by the European institutions, on which the action of Commission staff is based, and ensure that my team and departments do so too. In particular, the transparency of the activities of pressure groups - whether directed at me or at my private office and departments - is crucially important for demonstrating open and impartial interaction with all stakeholders.

#### **4. Electronic communications**

**Regarding the current review of the framework for electronic communications and BEREC: what are your views on:**

- (i) the role of competition and investment in the sector,**
- (ii) the most critical internal market problems for fixed and mobile networks and services and their users, including your preferred solutions,**
- (iii) current developments in network deployment (local/regional networks, 4G/5G, market concentration), and**
- (iv) the future role of BEREC?**

(i) I believe that competition functions in synergy with connectivity and the investment needs associated with it; competition brings investment and so contributes to the connectivity objectives for Europe. The current priority must be to provide access to unfettered connectivity based on very high-speed fixed and mobile infrastructure, which is a prerequisite for a Digital Single Market. Europeans in urban and rural areas alike will increasingly need very high-speed broadband connectivity.

I am in favour of policy measures that take account of the role that competition plays in promoting investment, and hence connectivity, in Europe. We must ensure that we keep pace with the other regions of the world and ensure that our industries, which are increasingly dependent on telecommunications infrastructure, are competitive.

Experience proves that *ex ante* regulation of telecommunications is an important access-driving factor in competition, competition through infrastructure and promotion of co-investment. The last mentioned is crucial in rural areas which are lagging far behind or where costs per household are often very high. Although 76 % of Europeans have access to next-generation networks, the figure for rural areas is only 40 %.

User choice is also very important: modernisation of the universal service is necessary to ensure affordable connectivity for all citizens, regardless of their position in society.

(ii) Telecommunications networks must form an integral part of the internal market because the services that depend on them are provided and accessible across national borders. Digital service providers must be able to meet demand at European level and not just nationally. The new European Electronic Communications Code is designed to address these problems; I will deal with the most urgent ones.

As regards fixed networks, the main challenge is to make sure that statutory obligations are only imposed if their purpose is to resolve a genuine problem of competition which is harming users. The rules must also be proportionate and predictable.

In the case of mobile networks, we must guarantee timely access to the spectrum in conditions that are predictable and sustainable and take account of the financial challenge of deploying very dense, very high speed 5G networks. Better investment conditions go hand-in-hand with public-interest constraints, especially as regards geographic coverage or making spectrum resources available to operators. I am determined to strike a balance between the legitimate concerns of the Member States and the need for companies and European citizens to enjoy better coordination when it comes to certain aspects of spectrum management.

As regards fixed and mobile communications networks and their users, there are two main challenges: firstly, to ensure the effective protection of all users of communications services, irrespective of the technology on which they are based. This is essential for the security and confidentiality of electronic communications. Secondly, the rules on consumer protection must be brought into line with technological and commercial developments.

(iii) While it is true that connectivity is improving in the EU, it is not yet sufficient to meet future needs in terms of speed, quality of service and reliability of connections as set out in the objectives for 2025 laid down in the strategy '*Towards a European Gigabit Society*'.

The Member States must redouble their efforts, starting with a review of their national or regional plans for the deployment of very high speed networks up to 2025.

Despite the effort that private operators are expected to make, current estimates suggest that an additional EUR 155 billion in public and private investment will be needed in order to achieve these objectives by 2025. To meet this need, the rules on telecommunications have been updated to provide the legal predictability needed for the planning of long-term investment. It is therefore essential for the new rules to be adopted as soon as possible to provide investors with the legal certainty they need.

The Structural Funds, the European Fund for Strategic Investments and the Connecting Europe Facility are already involved; it is essential for us to be creative and to step up our contribution. The Commission will weigh up these various elements as part of its preparations for the next round of financial programming. I am counting on your support to ensure that

sufficient budgetary resources will be available to make our common ambitions for Europe a reality.

(iv) The Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) has contributed significantly to efforts to develop a genuine single telecommunications market. Its role is crucial in ensuring a harmonised regulatory approach. It has recently been called upon to play a more important role in such areas as network neutrality and roaming.

The importance of BEREC's role in defining a European strategic vision for electronic communications has also been recognised by the European Parliament in its Resolution 'Towards a Digital Single Market Act' of 19 January 2016. In particular, Parliament called on the Commission to further integrate the digital single market and ensure that a more efficient institutional framework was put in place which strengthened the role, capacity and decision-making processes of BEREC, along with its financial and human resources, and enhanced its governance structure. That is the objective of the Commission proposal and I will work together with the co-legislators to find the best possible solution.

## **5. Cooperation/scrutiny**

**As Commissioner responsible for Digital Economy and Society, how will you ensure coordination with the Vice-Presidents in whose teams your policy area falls and with the other Commissioners in your teams and how will you contribute to the productive working partnership with the Committee on Industry, Energy and Research? In particular, what steps will you take to facilitate scrutiny by the Committee of legislative and non-legislative procedures (including preparation of legislative acts and delegated and implementing acts) and scrutiny of their implementation?**

With a multi-faceted, politically strategic portfolio, which intersects with the work of several Vice-Presidents and Members of the Commission, coordination is not a choice - it is an absolute necessity.

Throughout my term of office I shall continue to cooperate closely with all my colleagues in the Commission, an in-depth interaction with Members of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Committees and with the Council of Ministers, and a constructive dialogue with EU citizens, civil society and all other stakeholders.

I will work in close cooperation with the Vice-President in charge of the digital single market in order to implement the current proposals, follow up the recent mid-term review of the Digital Single Market Strategy and prepare new proposals for the completion of the market. I will work with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Vice-President in charge of the Digital Single Market and the Commissioner for the Security Union to introduce measures that will increase the security and reliability of Europe online, a task for which my experience of such matters in the AFET and LIBE Committees will be most helpful.

I will contribute to the work of the project team led by the Vice-President responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness to create the right conditions for stimulating private and public investment. I will cooperate closely with the First Vice-President to defend freedom of expression, freedom of information and media pluralism, as well as the diversity and openness of the internet. In all of these areas, the Member of the Commission responsible for Budget and Human Resources will be a valued partner.

My close cooperation with the Commissioner in charge of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport will allow me to support the development of the European media, content and creative industries. I am delighted to be working with the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Mobility of Workers, the Commissioner in charge of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, and the Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality to improve and promote digital skills and continuous training.

I attach the utmost importance to dialogue and cooperation with the European Parliament - the institution that exercises the necessary democratic scrutiny within the European institutional triangle. I will continue to listen to your specific expectations and aspirations in the areas for which I am responsible. I am counting on you and your support to achieve our goals in transparency and a spirit of dialogue to defend and promote the interests of European citizens.

## **6. Portfolio**

**Under Article 167 (4) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, cultural aspects are to be mainstreamed across EU policy-making. Furthermore, the portfolio assigned to you explicitly underscores the need to guarantee and promote cultural and linguistic diversity. How will you ensure that culture will be taken into due consideration in the policies and actions you intend to implement? How will you ensure that the specific needs and characteristics of the cultural and creative sector, in particular of cultural and creative content production and consumption, are taken into account in the digital economy? Which efforts will you undertake to boost EU financial support, including through EFSI, for the cultural and creative sector, in particular for the audiovisual/film sector? You are responsible for the MEDIA sub-programme under Creative Europe. How do you appraise the performance of Creative Europe generally and the MEDIA sub-programme specifically? Which changes, if any, do you consider important for the next programme generation?**

The cultural and creative industries are major assets to our economy. The MEDIA sub-programme of Creative Europe is the main programme under my responsibility covering creative and cultural audiovisual content. It serves two main aims: to protect cultural diversity, and to strengthen the economic competitiveness of the sector. These aims complement one another: the diversity of our cultures inspires high quality in the things we create, while an efficient industry is needed to produce and distribute them across the continent. The Horizon 2020 Programme also has a cultural component, since digital technology offers tremendous potential for the dissemination of culture.

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I will make sure that our instruments supporting the cultural and creative industries are consistent with our rules. This will include:

- The MEDIA programme, which will continue to support the creation of audiovisual content and its distribution within the EU;
- Finalising negotiations on the Copyright Directive, which introduces requirements for certain file-sharing websites that allow users to download copyrighted content and that have become major content distribution channels. It also contains measures designed to increase transparency and balance in relationships between creators and their contractual partners;



- Finalising negotiations on the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which aims to strengthen the production and distribution of European works, especially with regard to distribution through video-on-demand services (minimum quota and prominence requirement).

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I believe access to funding is crucial for the creative and cultural sectors, which find it difficult to obtain private investment. In 2016, under the Creative Europe Programme, the Commission launched an innovative financial instrument - a Guarantee Facility - with a budget of €120 million for 2016-20, designed to facilitate access to funding for SMEs in the creative and cultural sectors and enhance the ability of financial intermediaries to assess the risks involved.

The Guarantee Facility is about to issue its first loans to SMEs.

MEDIA, a brand now synonymous with artistic quality and creativity, celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2016.

Our legislative proposals will be accompanied by a set of practical measures, financed in part by the MEDIA Programme. These measures seek to facilitate access to and showcasing of European works online. I will strive to implement them alongside the negotiations on the legal texts.

In December 2017, I will present to Parliament and the Council a mid-term evaluation report on the Creative Europe Programme, including MEDIA, together with some recommendations for the future.

The results are encouraging: excellent financial implementation, 400 films distributed in other European countries each year and a network of 1 000 European cinemas in 33 countries showing a high proportion of 'non-national' European films.

## 7. Priorities

**You are responsible for helping to deliver a successful European media and content industry that reaches new audiences and taps into the potential of the digital environment. A number of legislative and non-legislative initiatives have already been put forward, designed notably to update media regulation and modernise copyright law. What would you like to see these initiatives deliver if they are to be judged a success? Do you have further initiatives planned to further boost the media and content sector and enhance public access to cultural content, in particular audiovisual content? Do you have further initiatives planned to further boost the media and content sector and enhance public access to cultural content, in particular audiovisual content? Are you planning further initiatives to protect minors from harmful content? Which legislative proposals do you intend to come forward with and when, given that the end of the parliamentary term will mean some degree of discontinuity? A key plank of a successful digital economy is a well-educated digital workforce. How do you think the EU can help to plug the current digital skills gap? Building on the New Skills Agenda for Europe and initiatives like the Digitals Skills and Jobs Coalition, which further initiatives do you consider would help to boost digital skills across the EU?**

I will play a highly active role, building on the discussions ongoing in Parliament and the Council to make sure that the proposed reforms, particularly those concerning copyright and audiovisual rules, are adopted quickly and address our stated aims.

The **copyright reform** proposed by the Commission in September 2016 is crucial for adapting existing rules to digital technology and new ways of accessing content. I believe it is vital to uphold the stated aim in all of the areas covered: choice and access to online content; the modernisation of rules in the fields of research, education and inclusion of disabled persons; fairer rules for a more efficient copyright marketplace. The initiatives on the **portability of online content services** and **cross-border access to radio and television programmes** will facilitate access to cultural content, especially that of an audiovisual nature.

The **proposal to revise the Audiovisual Media Services Directive** is currently being examined by Parliament and the Council. I hope to bring about the rapid adoption of a balanced text that gives equal coverage to new operators, affords effective protection for television viewers and users of audiovisual content and enhances the competitiveness of the European audiovisual sector. The Commission's proposal is designed in particular to facilitate access to audiovisual content by tightening the obligations on video-on-demand services with regard to the **promotion of European works**.

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Minors, who increasingly view audiovisual content via video-on-demand services, must be protected in the same way as with TV broadcasting. For this reason, I will back the measures proposed for the protection of minors as part of the **revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive**.

I will continue my work with the **'Safer Internet Centres'** to make the Internet safer for our children. I intend to strengthen our cooperation with the **'Alliance to better protect minors online'**, using self-regulation to improve the online environment for children in terms of both content and harmful behaviour (e.g. cyberbullying).

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Just as with previous technological advances, the shift to digital technology brings with it huge gains in productivity. However, it also has consequences for society, especially the labour market. Some jobs will disappear, others will be created, and most will be transformed. Clearly, the digital shift calls for accompanying measures, above all by allowing all citizens to acquire the digital skills that will enable them to adapt to the changes already underway.

Under the New Skills Agenda for Europe, the Commission has invited Member States to develop national strategies for the development of digital skills. It has also launched the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition. I will work with Parliament to ensure that national strategies and European initiatives are implemented consistently.

I fully support the **'Digital Opportunity scheme for internships'** pilot scheme, which seeks to provide graduates and undergraduates with professional experience in the digital sector in another Member State. This project pilot should be extended to allow as many graduates as possible to acquire practical experience in the digital sphere.

## 8. Current issues

**The need to guarantee a high-quality and independent media is currently high on the political agenda. Simultaneously, there is a consensus that more should be done to provide EU citizens with informative, non-partisan coverage of EU affairs. How you think the EU can help to support that high-quality, independent news coverage of EU affairs across different media channels and especially using new media and new technologies? You have been specifically tasked with promoting a sustainable business model for Euronews. How do you intend to go about this? And how does Euronews fit within the broader mission of providing independent new coverage of EU affairs? What other initiatives do you intend to promote and support? You have also been charged with exploring how the EU might usefully help to protect citizens from “fake news”, specifically through online platforms. How do you intend to strike the right balance, recognising on the one hand the role online platforms play in enabling citizens and consumers to access media and cultural content and on the other the need to provide a sound regulatory framework for them?**

European affairs are usually covered from a national or regional angle. The latest Eurobarometer showed that only 38 % of Europeans felt ‘well-informed’ about European affairs. I believe that high-quality, independent journalism covering European affairs is essential for citizens and for the European democratic public space.

The Budgetary Authority has supported this vision through the Multimedia Actions budget line. These actions aim to strengthen coverage of European affairs in a pan-European perspective, that is to say one that rises above national perspectives to enable citizens to engage in European politics.

Even though its resources are modest compared with those of the Member States or the private sector, the Commission has tried to maximise their impact by supporting the formats that are most popular among the public:

- Television: with support for the pan-European channel Euronews;
- Radio: with funding for the Euranet Plus radio network;
- New technologies: with support for the production of online content based on data journalism. Two media groups were selected. This action facilitated cooperation for the first time between the German press agency DPA, the French agency AFP and the Italian agency ANSA.

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I am responsible for ‘developing and promoting a sustainable business model for Euronews, including by further developing its public service remit, by helping to identify new partners and by making better use of digital transmission technologies, in full respect of the editorial independence of Euronews’.

The Commission has supported Euronews ever since its launch in 1993. In 2010 it recognised that Euronews fulfilled a mission of general interest for the European Union because it was the only channel to cover European issues from a perspective that was broader than that of the European nations. It was therefore decided to conclude a partnership agreement and a stable cooperation framework for its funding.

The European Parliament has several times called for the support given to Euronews to be continued and increased in order to guarantee its multilingualism and its role both in creating a European public space and as part of the EU's cultural diplomacy. The various evaluations carried out since 2009 have concluded that the channel has fulfilled these tasks.

Euronews has recently adopted an ambitious strategy to adapt its production and distribution model to the new market trends. The Commission is closely following the implementation of this new model to ensure that Euronews continues its historic mission and to assess how the Commission's actions can be made more effective.

The Commission signed a new four-year framework partnership agreement with Euronews in February 2017. This will allow us to finance programmes on European affairs and also to support the channel's multilingual system.

The Commission is committed to protecting the linguistic diversity of Euronews. At the same time, there will be a need for continuous efforts to adapt to the public's new habits and to technological changes over the next few years. Two language versions of Euronews financed by the EU - Arabic and Farsi - have already gone digital. The most recent performance audit in 2016 showed significant potential for this transition.

As for the agreement with NBC, I am informed that this has just been finalised, following months of negotiations between Euronews' various shareholders. As you know, Euronews is a private company and thus free to take its own strategic decisions. However, as one of the channel's key partners, the Commission demanded certain guarantees from Euronews and pledged to analyse the potential impact of the agreement between NBC and Euronews on the partnership.

The Commission could withdraw from the partnership agreement if these guarantees are not honoured. During my term of office I will undertake to closely monitor implementation of the agreement and the arrangements for cooperation with Euronews, in order to ensure that our actions yield added value.

The budget for Multimedia Actions has been severely cut (20 % approx.) under the current MFF (2014-20), placing constraints on future plans. Nevertheless, with the support of Parliament, the Commission has succeeded over the past few years in maintaining the budgetary stability of Euronews' actions and ensuring the continuity of the Euranet Plus radio network.

The funding decision for 2017 introduces a new subsidy framework for Euranet Plus to enable the network to produce radio programmes over the next two years (from mid-2017 to mid-2019). This grant will be smaller than under the previous agreement because of budgetary constraints, but the aim of consolidating a framework for cooperation between European national and regional radio stations is maintained.

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As regards 'fake news', the Commission's approach prioritises effective, voluntary forms of self-regulation combined with targeted regulatory intervention.

In addition to the provisions put forward in connection with the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive to combat hate speech more effectively, I will propose further measures to promote proactive steps by online platforms and social media. Another element

of our policy will be to work with the High Representative to enhance our strategic communication to counter disinformation campaigns outside the European Union.

At political level, we have a number of tools to counter fake news:

- Checking content for ‘fake news’: the Commission is channelling Research and Innovation funding into developing tools to help operators identify and check content distributed online, including material that is illegal or harmful.
- The Commission has also established a constructive dialogue with the leading social media operators to monitor progress in resolving the main problems, such as ‘fake news’, by working with press contacts (e.g. fact-checking) and/or initiatives aimed at improving media literacy among users.
- Media literacy: our work involves proactive engagement with the main social media platforms, such as Facebook, Google and Twitter, and with experts in media literacy from all over Europe.
- Dialogue with the Member States: the aim is to set up a group of experts on social media in the Member States to identify best practice and discuss solutions, share research findings and help to develop harmonised approaches.