

Declaring our digital rights

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This implies efforts to safeguard our democracies, whether through measures to protect freedom of expression or rules against illegal content or disinformation. We want the online information ecosystem to stimulate democratic debate, not create filter bubbles or foment division and polarization. People should have access to diverse sources of information in a language they know. Fifth, safety, security, and empowerment are crucial. Everyone should have access to digital technologies, products, and services that are safe from cyberattacks and designed to protect user privacy. We especially must protect our children from crimes committed through, or facilitated by, the internet.

A final priority is sustainability. We must ensure that users have access to information about a technology’s environmental footprint, and we must promote technologies that will help us achieve our most ambitious climate targets. Fortunately, digital technologies have the potential to help us cut more emissions than they cause, by enabling more innovative business models, more efficient services, and better resource management.

In short, our declaration captures what matters most in Europeans’ daily lives. It is about empowerment, participation, accessibility, resource use, and security. It is about using technology in ways that unite, rather than divide, people. By articulating these principles and rights, we have a clearer point of reference – a blueprint for the digital transition. That is the first step for policymakers who are developing new initiatives, and for businesses that are working on new technologies.

With our digital principles, we are setting a European standard that we hope will anchor similar approaches around the world – just as we did with data protection and consumer rights. Many of our international partners are holding similar debates, and when I recently discussed our approach in Washington,



DC, I could see that it has a lot in common with proposals in the United States for a digital Bill of Rights.

To give the declaration the visibility it deserves, we want the declaration to be signed this spring by the presidents of the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission. We also intend to include it in our annual monitoring of progress toward the EU’s 2030 digital targets, and we will be consulting Europeans about their digital

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concerns and priorities every year. When we polled Europeans a few months ago, we found that eight in ten expected digital tools to bring at least as many advantages as disadvantages. But a significant share of the respondents (almost 40%) were unaware that they have the same fundamental rights (freedom of expression, privacy, nondiscrimination) online as offline.

Our consultations tell us that we are hitting a nerve. The more digitized our

societies become, the more we need to improve awareness and enforcement of our rights online. The declaration of digital rights and principles should become our default thinking. The human-centric approach to the digital transition must underpin everything we do. It is as simple as that. Respect for fundamental rights – both online and offline – is at the very core of what it means to be European.

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