

Ms. Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age
Mr. Thierry Breton, Commissioner for Internal Market
European Commission

Brussels, 16/04/2020

Dear Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager,

Dear Commissioner Thierry Breton,

The COVID19 pandemic is dramatically changing the world. While the health crisis will hopefully soon be overcome, the upcoming economic crisis threatens the stability of the world and the wellbeing of our citizens.

We need to act, to mitigate the severe negative impact of the crisis on our economy and society, but also to build European resilience and strategic technological sovereignty, so that we are never again found unprepared in future crises.

The future will be driven by digital technology and connectivity. I know we agree on that. And yet the rollout of 5G technology, the backbone of our future economy and society, is now set to make us dependent on outside suppliers or vulnerable to foreign tampering. The European Union needs to build, own, and operate its own 5G infrastructure.

Alongside the severe damage it brings, the scale of the current crisis carries with it the opportunity to recast the EU's role in the world and to consolidate the future of our Union. For this, we need to think big and act accordingly. In what the future of our Union is concerned, this is a time for bold leadership and vision and a time to set moonshot goals that are fully backed by our political prowess, our policies, and our collective resources.

I thus call on you and the Commission to act, boldly and decisively, at the political, policy, and executive level to steer the EU in the new world and to secure our digital future.

At the political level, we need a Europe that is united and with a shared vision about building resilience and mitigating future threats. Economic self-interest and unilateral decisions by Member States to deploy 5G infrastructure that is dependent on third country suppliers or vulnerable to foreign interference is no longer an economic, but a security issue. I urge you to work with the Council and Member States to make geostrategic and European security considerations the key factor in 5G deployment in all Member States and all of Europe.

At the policy level, we need a radical paradigm shift and a new and ambitious industrial policy that reduces our dependence on foreign technology and supply chains from third countries, such as China, who do not play by the same rulebook as we do. This is not an ideological option; it is an imperative adaptation to a world in which our dependence and vulnerability to a non-democratic and non-transparent regime costs thousands of European lives and wreaks havoc on our economies. On one hand, we need to reassess our position on foreign investments and on international trade and investment mechanisms, accounting for

our imperative need of strategic autonomy, resilience, and security. On the other hand, we need to create a genuinely enabling policy environment so that European companies are incentivized to invest in 5G infrastructure and new technologies including, if needed, direct jumpstarting measures and incentives.

At the executive level, I call on you to assess the feasibility of launching a European-wide, large-scale project for a European 5G that is globally-competitive, secure, aligned with our values and in respect of our citizen's rights, and which serves as a foundation for our digital sovereignty, as a secure infrastructure for our data, and as an environment in which European AI can thrive.

This assessment should encompass a technological, competition, and industrial policy perspective on developing, testing, and rapidly deploying within the EU the critical components for 5G technology. It should be followed up by jumpstart intervention measures, including a funding mechanism for a European consortium of companies, research and excellence centres, and telecom operators to develop and begin manufacturing within a given timeframe the essential equipment for 5G networks. This needs to be complemented by financing of European disruptive innovation in 5G and by rules for phasing out foreign 5G critical equipment in ongoing projects in Member States. Strengthened collaboration with the United States in developing common security standards and interoperability for 5G technology will ensure that European technological sovereignty does not come at the cost of technological fragmentation across the ocean.

The crisis has highlighted our vulnerabilities. The strain on digital infrastructure will divert part of the private effort and investment into consolidating extant infrastructure instead of 5G, while, on the other, China, who has acted in questionable ways throughout the entire crisis, will use this window of opportunity to consolidate its technological and first-mover advantage in 5G technology.

We need to intervene - forcefully, ambitiously, and collectively - and secure our technological future.

Your sincerely,

Ioan-Dragoş Tudorache, MEP

Renew Europe

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ioan-Dragoş Tudorache', written in a cursive style with a large loop at the end.