

Brussels, 29 January 2020

Press release: “Digital Challengers” in the EU Parliament: SME growth and evolution prospects in CEE countries

On 28 January 2020 MEP Eva Maydell from the EPP political group hosted a conference in the European Parliament dedicated to [Digital Challengers](#) and the realisation of digital growth in Central and Eastern European countries. Organised by the European Enterprise Alliance (EEA) and the Polish Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP), and drawing from a [recent report](#) published by McKinsey, the event brought together a high-level panel of digital pioneers and policy experts to discuss economic and operational barriers and opportunities to the current growth of the digital economy in the CEE countries from a SME perspective.

MEP Eva Maydell set the scene: *"In CEE we have a huge potential, but we need to take concrete measures if we want to move from the category of challengers to the category of frontrunners. All levels of the economy benefit from digitalisation, no matter if we are talking about large companies or micro, small or medium-sized businesses. That is why as part of one community, we have a clear task to advocate for the need to invest in all measures to fulfil this digital potential of the region: digital infrastructure, strengthen education, invest in digital and soft skills, increase the adoption of digital tools in all sectors."*

The panel, chaired by EEA Secretary General Glenn Cezanne, consisted of Marta Mikliszanska, Head of Public Affairs of [Allegro.pl](#), Dr. Horst Heitz, Executive Director of [SME Connect](#), Izabela Albrycht, Chair of the [Kosciuszko Institute](#), Agata Nowacka, Public Affairs Lead at [Seznam.cz](#) and Attila Rác, CEO & Co-Founder of [Magic Solutions](#).

The panellists exchanged views on the need for favourable conditions to accelerate the digital transformation of SMEs, with Ms. Mikliszanska and Ms. Nowacka highlighting the role of bigger firms as digital enablers. Dr. Heitz referred to the current positive trend of eCommerce creating “digital regions” going beyond national borders, but also reminded of the current wide range of SMEs that still struggle to achieve the concrete potential of digital technologies for their business. Cybersecurity emerged as a critical topic of discussion, with Ms. Albrycht emphasizing the need for SMEs to be able to understand and effectively manage cyber risks, as well as the importance of integrating cybersecurity in every and each phase of digital tools development and implementation.

All panellists agreed that tailored training and education programmes are crucial pathways towards vibrant and competitive digital SMEs, building on the already existing entrepreneurial potential. Furthermore, for a full-fledge digital evolution, there is a need for a solid digital entrepreneurial culture and easily accessible financial assistance, not least with a view of developing the necessary infrastructure.

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