Nicola Caputo says EU's digital single market must also include social dimension of technical innovation

There are still too many barriers within the EU to the free flow of online information and services, according to Italian MEP Nicola Caputo.

The Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group deputy hosted a breakfast briefing for MEPs earlier this week in the European Parliament on the topic of bridging Europe's digital divide.

The event, organised by Huawei, examined the barriers, challenges and opportunities surrounding digital enablement. Opening the discussions, Caputo said that the term 'digital divide' referred to "the inequalities in accessing and using information and communications technologies."
Across the world, an estimated 1 billion people are believed to be unconnected to the digital world. Caputo - highlighting warnings contained in a recent Millennium Development Goals report - said that despite the growth of mobile phones and internet use across the world, the digital gap between the rich and poor was widening.

"In Europe we also have a digital divide. North-western Europe performs better than southern, central and eastern Europe. This digital gap impacts [across a range of areas, including] education, culture, market conditions, businesses, job creation and rural development," he said.

The event saw the launch of an extensive new study by Huawei entitled; "Digital Enablement: Bridging the Digital Divide to Connect People and Society". The report examines how the world can achieve long-term economic, social and environmental benefits by bridging the digital gap.

"Bridging the digital divide can deliver many things to different people," said Caputo, adding; "Some will benefit from better access to healthcare; others will enjoy safer transport, profit from greater productivity or benefit from improved education."

The Italian deputy warned that bridging the divide had "never been more urgent," and called for more effort to tackle the problem "before it becomes even harder to reduce".

"The next [few] years are essential to bridging that gap and to bringing the power of 5G networks, the internet of things, advanced cloud analytics and more to Europe's citizens"

"Across the EU, too many barriers still block the free flow of online services and entertainment across national borders. These existing online barriers mean that citizens miss out on goods and services while internet companies and start-ups have their horizons limited and businesses and governments cannot fully benefit from digital tools."

Referring to the new Huawei study's focus on tackling barriers to digital enablement, he said, "It's time to make the EU's single market fit for the digital age."

"This could contribute €415bn a year to our economy and create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, so it's important that we address these digital issues."

Caputo concluded by saying that completing the Digital Single Market was essential, and that, "we, as MEPs, should also argue for a broader approach that also highlights consumer and data protection aspects, the social dimension, education, and culture."

About the author

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