

Andrus Ansip rubbishes suggestions that Brexit will kill off EU's digital single market plans

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News

EU strategy could create three million new jobs in digital-related industries, says commission vice-president



The UK could miss out on benefits of EU's Digital Single Market | *Photo credit: Fotolia*

EU ICT chief Andrus Ansip has refuted claims that Brexit will spell “the end” of plans for a European digital single market.

Speaking in Brussels on Tuesday, Ansip said he was “saddened” by the UK’s decision to leave the EU.

The Estonian European Commission Vice President for the Digital Single Market said the UK was “one of the most foremost countries in the EU” in the European digital market and for innovative technologies.

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But he rubbished suggestions that Brexit would kill off ambitious EU plans for the creation of a digital single market.

“Some have said the strategy is dead without the UK but, while I concede there is a basis for some pessimism I do not share that viewpoint,” he said.

“Yes, the UK is a big, powerful country with a highly developed digital sector but, in or out, the EU will still need good relations in this field with the UK.

“Even so, the outcome of the EU referendum vote in the UK is sad, not least as the digital single market strategy would have been beneficial to UK citizens as well as those in other member states.”

EU data shows that in the digital sector, which covers areas such as broadband, internet activity and skills, e-government, ICT in schools, research and innovation, the UK performs better than the EU average.

The UK has an overall score of 0.61 and ranks sixth in the EU. In the past year, it has progressed in the use of the internet, with increases in reading online news, use of video calls and social networking.

At 90 per cent, the UK exhibits a high rate of internet use amongst its population. The digital skills of the British have also increased substantially over recent years, says the commission, with 67 per cent of the population now having sufficient digital skills to operate effectively online.

The UK also ranks first in terms of online shopping amongst Internet users and by fostering a digital single market, it is estimated the UK could create €340bn in additional growth.

The Commission's digital scoreboard reports that 315 million Europeans use the internet daily and 360 million each week - reflecting huge demand for online services.

In an informal briefing with Brussels-based journalists, Ansip, a former Estonian prime minister, also conceded that the commission's strategy for a digital single market would “destroy” some jobs.

But he believes this will be more than offset by the creation of up to three million new jobs in digital-related industries.

“The strategy is all about start-ups and job creation. Everyone will benefit,” he said.

Just over 12 months ago, the commission presented its plans, setting out 16 major projects that target areas such as e-commerce, audio-visual media services, cyber security, telecoms and

copyright.

It recently launched a series of public consultations and impact assessments in connection with the strategy.

Other proposals will follow in the autumn and later this year. Today, only 15 per cent of consumers shop online across borders in the EU and only seven per cent of SMEs sell abroad.

The aim of the strategy, said Ansip, to overcome these borders.

Ansip said, "Sellers of goods and services must treat all customers equally. This year is all about delivery. But there are still plenty of obstacles in the European single market so there a lot of work still to do."

About the author

Martin Banks is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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[Brexit](#) [9]

[Digital Agenda](#) [10]

[European Commission](#) [11]

[Internal Market](#) [12]

[Foreign Affairs](#) [13]

Categories

[Business and industry](#) [14]

[Internet of Things](#) [15]

[International Relations](#) [16]

[Science, technology and research](#) [17]



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