

## **Benelux Summit - Joint Declaration 2016**

### **Digital Benelux**

As the Prime Ministers of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, we recognize that the digital economy is a powerful catalyst for innovation, growth and social prosperity. We underline the ambition and potential of our three countries to be digital pioneers and to act as a role model in advancing the Digital Single Market within the European Union.

The Benelux Union will continue to embody the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, addressing issues at the most appropriate level. Within the EU, the Benelux countries are able to cooperate in an intensified way (through article 350 TFEU) allowing them to function as an incubator for further European integration.

Representing a market of 28 million customers, the Benelux countries have in the past been at the forefront when it came to boosting our economies through the use of ICT technology. Thanks to a highly skilled IT workforce, a state of the art broadband infrastructure with a high level of interconnection, highly secured datacentres and smart research projects, we can act as a key driver for new business models. The Benelux Action Plan for jobs and growth, adopted in April 2015, already identified a set of measures aiming to foster the idea of a **Digital Benelux**. Now is the time to go further.

Our three countries are ready to take the lead in the EU's ambitious move towards "smart Regions". Therefore, we want to explore the following sets of measures and projects in order to develop a **Digital Benelux**:

- Digital (trade) initiatives at EU level such as the Digital Single Market package, will be screened for common positions at Benelux level where possible, as for instance the abolition of roaming charges, the issue of geo blocking, or the proposed European Electronic Communications Code. A further initiative could be the monitoring and support of the implementation of the Transaction Network Analysis at EU level.

- Develop a common and targeted approach in promoting the digital sectors of the Benelux in third countries, which, based on shared values and practices, would function at a regional level and benefit our digital ecosystems.

- Closer cooperation by developing transnational innovation-driven projects. Building upon the existing level of cooperation among the Benelux countries in the fields of cybersecurity innovation, will increase the cybersecurity of both our businesses and public institutions by exploring the subject of responsible disclosure of technical vulnerabilities while taking care not to increase the administrative burden.

- Bring our digital ecosystems closer to each other to facilitate and accelerate the development of digital champions out of the Benelux.

- In light of our common efforts to establish a Benelux Retail Union and following up on the 2016 Retail trade study, we aim to reduce existing obstacles for companies and consumers with regard to e-commerce and the Digital Single market, by fostering online and mobile payments, rules on parcel services, and joint market surveillance.

- Take advantage of the opportunities arising from online platforms and enhance the cross-border provision of information, with regard to:

- the Benelux Business Scams Fraud SharePoint to make information on present cases of fraud and common types of scams available and easy accessible.
- the Online Energy Platform available to experts through the Benelux Energy Expertise Network.
- cross-border labour mobility in order to provide a comprehensive and user-friendly platform useful to both employees and employers.

- Expand our cooperation in fighting cross-border bogus employment schemes, fraudulent employment agencies and various forms of benefit fraud.

- Concerning transport and logistics, foster the function of the Benelux as gateway on a global level:

- to assert its role as front runner in using intelligent transport systems (ITS) and to make the best use of the digital component.
- to pursue work on the creation of an Intelligent Transport System Corridor through the Benelux countries.
- through pilot-projects, explore ways and means to expand the digitization of administrative operations and the optimization of data exchange. This will enable economic operators to do their administrative formalities related to international trade online and paperless.

- in the general context of striving to enhance our cooperation in the fields of logistics and innovation, facilitate through pilot projects the use of digital freight documents and other paperless freight documents.

- Facilitate the interoperability of eHealth services and strengthen patients' rights in cross-border healthcare in order to further promote equal and quick access to high quality and secure health services based on a modern and efficient health system.

Taking into consideration that some of these measures shall be introduced in the Benelux Annual Working Plan 2017, the Prime Ministers request the Secretariat general of the Benelux Union to play a role coordinating and supporting the implementation of these measures and report back to the Benelux Committee of Ministers.

Done at Schengen, 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2016

The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium      of      The Prime Minister of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg      The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Netherlands