Session IV – A More Sustainable Digital Transition

The link between the digital transition and our efforts to halt the climate changes has been acknowledged for a while. Data-driven solutions, high-performance computing, artificial intelligence etc. hold a tremendous potential for optimizing production or city planning processes while minimizing the waste of resources and reusing generated heat from data centres in our cities.

However, it is evident that the rise of digital technologies constitutes a considerable carbon emitter in itself. Handling energy consumption has become a common issue for Large Language Models and data centres, as the use of AI and cloud services is expected to rise significantly in the coming years. The issue becomes all the more pertinent to solve when virtual worlds and other energy-intensive new technologies become mainstream.

The Dublin Declaration initiated this discussion in the D9+ with its emphasis on the potential of digital technologies in climate efforts, but also the need to gain greater understanding of the technology sector's own climate impact. The Council Conclusions from May 2024 ("The Future of EU Digital Policy") also stress the need for reducing the environmental footprint of the ICT sector and underline the need to promote awareness and develop solutions to reduce the digital environmental footprint and e-waste of businesses, the public sector and consumers.

Nationally, Denmark has undertaken initiatives to address the digital environmental footprint and realize our ambitious climate targets. For instance, the Agency for Digital Government has assessed how to roll out the EU's criteria for Green Public Procurement in the ICT-sector. This with the ambition of employing procurement as a tool to move the market towards more environmental and climate friendly digital solutions. Our first impressions in this endeavour are positive.

With this in mind, we wish to further discuss how to ensure that digitization becomes an enabler and not an obstacle to the green transition. We pose the following for debate at the D9+:

1. Building on the Dublin Declaration from the D9+, how do we ensure that digital technologies and systems are developed with a greater focus on sustainability?
2. To what extent could a Commission strategy on sustainable digitization aid this purpose and what could it contain?
3. Should a green target be included in the review of the Digital Decade Policy Programme? If so, what should the focus of this target be?