

"The Silver Economy and digital innovation for active and healthy ageing"

Dear Madam Anne-Sophie Parent, Secretary General of AGE Platform Europe

Dear First Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions Markku Markkula,

Dear panellists and participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to be here today and to be the **godmother** of the First European Silver Economy Awards Ceremony.

Today's event shows in many ways the true value of collaboration in Europe – not only collaboration among Member States and the different regions of Europe but also between society and the market as well as between different sectors, and – not the least – between different generations.

This is a milestone on our way towards becoming a truly age-friendly Europe a society that embraces the idea that demographic change is **not** a challenge or a burden but that a lot of good can come from the fact that we are living longer than ever before.

The Silver Economy Awards, their categories and prospective winners acknowledge great achievements. Today's ceremony is

also a unique occasion to send a very positive message on how we see the future of ageing that is as a valuable resource for our society. Older adults can and do contribute to our society and live active, meaningful lives. Acknowledging this is important for promoting solidarity between all generations.

But we cannot take it for granted: Ageing comes with unique challenges such as reduced mobility, chronic conditions or difficulty accessing medical care when travelling.

This is why being a society for all ages requires *common* efforts - a "movement", a dialogue between generations: about work, about leisure, about how we live at home, how we travel as well as how we give and receive care.

So let me reflect on three aspects of our silver challenge: the economic opportunity, its relation to the digital single market and, finally, how to take it forward.

Starting with the opportunity itself:

I believe that a creative and positive approach to the effects of population ageing will create the space for new business models. It will inspire developments in innovation and technology for an ageing society.

We see, for example, that older people are more likely to spend more not only on healthcare services but on recreation, culture, furnishings as well as household items than younger generations.

Ideas and business models for these markets will, however, only be successful if they are developed with the needs of real people in mind. This applies to new forms of independent living with assistive technology as much as it does to tourism, transport, healthcare and active and healthy ageing in general.

The global market for ICT solutions for healthcare monitoring in private homes is expected to almost triple by 2021 compared to 2016. By 2025, 60 percent of all healthcare spending - public and private - will originate in the Silver Economy.

These figures show that in many cases there are **great** opportunities for products and services **specifically** designed and tailored for older users. But we should also encourage mainstream ideas that seek to break the boundaries between a "senior market" and younger consumers – inspired "perhaps" by what the tablet computer did with its simpler, intuitive interface: It removed age barriers in using digital technology.

As we see, entrepreneurs and service providers embrace the opportunities of the silver market with new ideas and technologies. The European Commission wants to facilitate the best possible conditions for this to flourish and to create jobs and growth.

For that, we need the right environment and the right conditions so that Europe can become a global leader in the Silver Economy.

And this leads me to my **second point** which is how a Digital Single Market in Europe can create these conditions.

Europe will reach a median age of 45 years old and be the oldest region in the world within the next 15 years. This happens at a time when the digitisation of society is changing work patterns blurring the lines between goods and services, between consumers and producers.

There is obviously a strong ICT component here: think about the growing markets for telehealth and telecare, think about mobile health solutions, think about smart homes.

I believe that today as part of the Silver Economy Awards and in the future, we will see great examples of how we can use new and emerging technologies like the Internet of Things, 5G, artificial intelligence or supercomputing to improve our lives and wellbeing as we age.

But for the true impact on our society and economy in a Digital Single Market, we need scale. We must work together to move from ideas and pilots to services and products that have large scale reach.

This is why the Commission has made "Digital tools for citizen empowerment and for person-centred care" an integral part of its proposals for the transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market, adopted last week.

So, what are the concrete measures that we put forward?

First, we will facilitate cooperation to stimulate the supply and the uptake of digital health. We will do so by promoting shared and mutually recognised principles for validation and certification of technology.

Second, we will provide support for the exchange of innovative practices, capacity building and technical assistance; for example, on person-centred care and digital solutions for the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Third, we will mobilise EU programmes and financial instruments to make better use of investment possibilities and innovative procurement.

Fourth, we will promote skills in using innovative solutions for citizens and health and care professionals.

And it doesn't stop here. A flourishing Silver Economy in all sectors depends on regulatory aspects, resolving questions about privacy, standardisation, usability issues and data protection.

All these points are essential if we want digital transformation to be meaningful for businesses and for people.

So, finally, how do we take this all forward?

We have seen lots of great initiatives already at national level and in regions across Europe.

Take, for instance, the Irish National Positive Ageing Strategy with its exemplary way of taking a holistic approach on ageing: It crosses the boundaries of government departments and portfolios. Another example is France, where the Sectoral Agreement on the Silver Economy has already led to some very concrete steps: a sectoral fund, a forum for living labs, calls for innovative projects and ideas for labelling and quality certification, something we also see in other countries like Poland.

Bottom lines, there are great regional initiatives for active and healthy ageing in many regions, including integrated care strategies.

The challenge is to make them work for **all** Europeans. The European *digital* economy must go hand in hand with the European *Silver* Economy.

Our actions on innovation must cross the lines of different policy sectors. They must be built on active participation of older people in the labour market. They must also support older people's own ideas for entrepreneurship.

And we must listen and learn from each other.

The foundations for this inaugural Silver Economy Award ceremony were laid by a group of colleagues in the European Commission services who decided to take on this issue in a truly silo-breaking manner:

Colleagues from many different departments contributed to the background paper on "Growing the Silver Economy in Europe": from regional policy to growth and employment, from research and innovation to transport and education, from digital to health and consumer protection.

I want to thank the organisers, the SEED project, which we're proud to fund through the Horizon 2020 programme.

I would also like to thank our hosts, the Committee of the Regions, the Members of the Pre-Selection Panel, the Peer Reviewers, and – of course – the High Level Jury selecting the winners.

And now, a short word to all finalists and also the other applicants: Pursue your trail-blazing endeavours and your fantastic ideas as a contribution to this – our – digital economy and society!

You are the ones making the difference for better lives, for us all.

To the eyes of the millions of Europeans that will benefit from your projects, you are all winners.

Best of luck and thank you very much.