

BRUSSELS, 24 SEPTEMBER 2026

SOTEU 2026: Technology at the heart of Europe's security, defence and prosperity

Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl, Director-General of DIGITALEUROPE, said:

"We are very pleased to see President von der Leyen recognise technology as a driving force behind Europe's security, defence and prosperity. By putting AI and digital-security alliances at the heart of Europe's strategy, and opening a new chapter in EU–Canada cooperation through a dedicated Tech Alliance, she has sent a clear signal: Europe's capacity to innovate, scale and work with trusted partners will shape its future."

Here are DIGITALEUROPE's key takeaways from President von der Leyen's State of the Union 2026.

EU–Canada & Trusted Partnerships

Europe will not win the technology race by going it alone. We welcome President von der Leyen's announcement that Canada is on track to becoming the first associate member of the European Union, and the launch of the EU-Canada Tech Alliance. We share the commitment to bring EU-Canada collaboration to the next level and are ready to bring industry priorities to the EU-Canada Summit in Ottawa in October 2026.

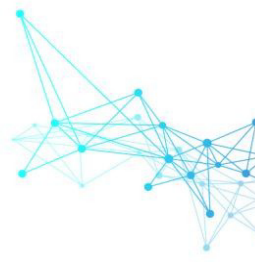
Collaboration with our partners in the world remains crucial. This is why we support SOTEU's commitment to step up AI cooperation and advance trade deals with partners. As the President said herself: "Business is asking us for more".

Investment to scale European innovation

We strongly welcome President von der Leyen's commitment to develop new ways to use public and private funds to invest in the most promising European start-ups and companies, as well as her call for more joint procurement, especially on defence.

The €5bn Scaleup Europe Fund is a positive first step but more is needed to provide growth capital and demand for European scaleups. ICEYE's success shows that Europe can build the technology, if the funding and market is available.

DIGITALEUROPE calls for an ambitious €450 billion Competitiveness Fund and 25% of the next MFF for critical and digital technologies. The EU must expand instruments like the Scaleup Fund to provide growth finance and accelerate work on the Savings and Investment Union to put European savings to work.



Defence and Ukraine: turn investment into capability

DIGITALEUROPE stands ready to support plans for a European Security Council that strengthens European security and complements NATO, with trusted partners such as vCanada, Ukraine, the UK and Norway at the table. We also welcome a new European Security Strategy and the proposed Emergency Security Protocol to address hybrid threats.

The new European Instrument for Strategic Enablers, the Freyja air-defence project and joint projects with Ukrainian companies are welcome. Europe must now turn defence spending into deployable capabilities through faster procurement and accreditation, interoperable systems, and rapid scaling of AI, cyber, drones, space and secure connectivity.

Real sovereignty means stronger European capabilities and greater freedom of choice, not closed markets or the exclusion of reliable partners.

A workable framework for AI adoption and safety

We welcome the Commission's focus on applying AI in the real world and accelerating its adoption across European industry. Europe's AI opportunity will be won through investment and deployment at scale - not overlapping layers of regulation. To create real value, businesses need a clear and workable AI rulebook, with timely standards and guidance.

We support closer cooperation with like-minded partners on frontier AI risks, building on existing efforts to make advanced AI safer through industry expertise and shared values.

Digitalisation and electrification of our grids

President von der Leyen rightfully acknowledges that electrification is key to cutting Europe's fossil-fuel imports and lowering energy cost in Europe. To turn the Commission's ambition, doubling DIGITALEUROPE calls for a binding electrification target across Member States.

Electrification needs also a smarter grid that ensures that the clean energy generated can be made available to users. Existing digital and AI solutions can boost grid performance [by 20 to 40%](#), helping Europe use its networks more efficiently and reduce connection queues. Our members are already leading by [example](#). The Grids Package is an urgent first step.

The President highlighted access to the grid and permitting as significant bottlenecks that are causing costly delays to strategic projects. We welcome the President's focus on these topics. Success now depends on implementation, across Member States, Success now depends on implementation, across Member States. ensure permitting timeframes of maximum one year, straightforward processes, and clear deadlines for EU countries.

Protecting children online

Protecting children online is an urgent and shared responsibility. We support age-appropriate experiences, effective tools for parents and guardians and a proportionate approach that

reflects the different risks of different services. One harmonised European approach is better than 27 different national regimes that create fragmentation.

The goal must be to keep children safe online, while empowering young people with the skills and support to engage in the opportunities of the digital world.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Diem Tran

Associate Director for Communications

diem.tran@digitaleurope.org / +32 490 22 00 93

About DIGITALEUROPE

DIGITALEUROPE is the leading trade association representing digitally transforming industries in Europe. We stand for a regulatory and investment environment that enables European digitalising businesses across multiple sectors and citizens to prosper from digital technologies. We wish for Europe to grow, attract and sustain the world's best digital talents, investment and technology companies. Together with our members, we shape industry positions on all relevant policy matters, and contribute to their development and implementation. Our membership represents over 56,000 businesses who operate and invest in Europe. It includes corporations and scaleups who are global leaders in their field of activity, as well as national trade