Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - European Cloud Initiative - Building a competitive data and knowledge economy in Europe (COM(2016) 178 final).

FINAL DOCUMENT

The Committees on Transportation and on Economic Activities of Italy's Chamber of Deputies,

having examined, pursuant to Rule of Procedure 127 of the Chamber of Deputies, the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The European Cloud Initiative - Building a competitive data and knowledge economy in Europe (COM(2016) 178 final),

Whereas:

Cloud computing offers a host of benefits to consumers, businesses and governments in the form of lower costs, greater access to information and online content, increased content-sharing capacities, the improved coordination of collaborative projects, and a broad range of innovative and quality services and products;

The ability to analyse and use big data has had a great impact on the economy and society and has opened opportunities for industrial and social innovation. One of its key dimensions has been to transform the world of research, which is now moving swiftly towards open science;

Based on the results of the European Cloud Computing Strategy, the European Commission estimates that implementing policies to support public cloud computing could contribute to an increase of €250 billion in the GDP of the EU by 2020, compared with €88 billion in the absence of cloud technologies, and create 2.5 million new jobs;

The EU is lagging far behind other world regions, notably the United States, China, Japan, Russia and India, which are making rapid progress in the delivery of infrastructure and high-performance computing power, and is therefore at risk of being left behind and accruing a strategic deficit in know-how;

As a consequence of the delays, the data produced by EU researchers and industry is often processed elsewhere, with the result that European researchers often feel compelled to travel to places that can offer greater data capacity and faster processing speeds;

The initiative under examination seeks to create a European Open Science Cloud, i.e., a storage space accessible via the internet that gives researchers and professionals a virtual, open and free of charge environment for the storage, management, analysis and reuse of research data generated by various countries and scientific disciplines;

The initiative aims to make access to scientific data simpler, less costly and more efficient, and to lay the groundwork for new market opportunities and new solutions, including in other areas such as health, the environment and transport;

The ultimate goal envisioned by the Communication is to ensure that every research centre, project and researcher in the EU has access to world-class supercomputing power, data storage and analysis, which are the essential ingredients for success in a global system of data-based innovation;

The European Open Science Cloud initiative aims to give the EU a pre-eminent role in the building of the scientific data infrastructure, and has the potential both to revitalize the field of information and communication technologies and to stimulate competition in an industry that is currently dominated by large American corporations;

It is therefore of the utmost importance to create an environment that, with recognised technical standards built into it from the earliest design stage, will be secure, reliable and protective of personal and data privacy;

The expansion of the user base of the European Open Science Cloud and of the European Data Infrastructure to include the public sector will lay the groundwork for the roll-out of cloud-based services by public administrations in Europe;

The public and private investment needed for the realisation of the European Open Science Cloud is an estimated €6.7 billion, of which €2 billion has been earmarked from Horizon 2020 funds, leaving the remaining €4.7 billion to be raised through additional public and private investment over a five-year period;

The European Commission's proposal is experimental and assumes that the European Open Science Cloud will become more widely used. Additional provisions will therefore need to be discussed with Member States for enlarging support for the initiative beyond Horizon 2020;

The Commission reckons that over time the initiative will generate revenues of its own as its use by the scientific community, innovative start-ups and the public sector takes off;

Mindful that the present final document needs to be transmitted promptly to the European Commission as part of the political dialogue, as well as to the European Parliament and the Council;

do hereby express a favourable opinion

with the following remarks:

a) In light of the huge cost implications of this initiative for the EU budget, individual Member States and private players, a sound cost-benefit analysis ought to be made of the planned investments. The analysis might consider how the project affects, on the one hand, scientific research and potential users (consumers, companies and public administrations), and, on the other, innovation and technological progress in the European economy;

b) At the same time, an assessment needs to be made of the financial viability of the project both with respect to Horizon 2020 (it is not specified which programmes would be tapped to cover the investment costs of the European Open Science Cloud) and with respect to the other funding sources named in the document: the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF); European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF); and the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI). It needs to be ascertained that the resources have not already been earmarked for other projects that would therefore stand to lose their funding. Finally, greater use should be made of the expertise and potential of the EIB for the realisation of the project;

c) The initiative proposes to change incentive structures for academia, industry and public services so that they will become more disposed to the sharing of their data, but fails to offer specific details either about the changes or about the nature and source of the funding for bringing them about. It would therefore be useful to carry out a comparative analysis to identify best practices and make sure they are put into effect.