

# EDIT4tomorrow – 23 November, 2017 – Sofia, Bulgaria

## Conference Report

On 23 November, 2017 MOVE.BG and EDIT in partnership with the Ministry of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria and Google organized the international conference *EDIT4tomorrow*.

The conference provided a forum for a high-level discussion on the role of Bulgaria in Europe's digital transformation and the relevant national and EU policies with their practical implications for the Bulgarian digital ecosystem. Organised in the context of the upcoming Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in January 2018, the conference brought together the pioneer startup leaders from Bulgaria and the Balkans, high-level government and EU decision-makers with the special participation of the Bulgarian Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel.

This report summarises the main lines of thought and key takeaways from the conference.

## Welcome Address

The **Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Ms Lilyana Pavlova**, opened the conference and outlined the key digital priorities of the 2018 Presidency. Paraphrasing the slogan of the Bulgarian Presidency “United we stand strong”, she underlined that Bulgaria is working for a strong and digital Europe. Ms Pavlova also outlined the future digital economy events during the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council, including the ones which will be done partnership with MOVE.BG, such as the “SHELeader” conference on April 12, 2018.

**The head of the European Commission Representation in Sofia, Mr Ognyan Zlatev**, stressed that the development of a digital economy is a complex process the success of which depends not only on the knowledge, skills and self-confidence of the sector's employees but also on the existence of a digitally-adapted business climate.

**Founder and Board chair of MOVE.BG & initiator of the network for Economic Development via Innovation and Technology (EDIT), Ms Sasha Bezuhanova**, accented on the crucial role of the digital economy in the current digital, interconnected world we live in and on the latest technological solutions and regulation for such an economy which are developed by the Bulgarian startup ecosystem. She explained that the “leocorns” are the

Bulgarian modern, digital leaders and innovators who push for the progress of the Bulgarian digital businesses and startups and who, through their efforts and potential, also work towards a more inclusive, prosperous and secure European digital economy.

## Keynote Panel

**EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Ms Mariya Gabriel**, outlined the challenges for the completion of the EU Digital Single Market, and emphasized the importance of the development of digital skills, the free movement of data, the implementation and scope the end of geo-blocking, and the need for support for digital hubs across all of Europe, including in Bulgaria. The Commissioner's also highlighted the proposal for common European coordination mechanism in the case of large-scale cyber-attacks, as well as her intention to extend connectivity initiatives such as WIFI4EU to the Western Balkans.

**President of EMEA Business and operations for Google, Mr Matt Brittin**, pointed out three transformational trends for digital business: wider access for everyone to the world's computing power, but also to new markets, development of smarter tools empowering both consumers and entrepreneurs, and digital skills improvement, regarded as a tool for acquiring other skills and sharing knowledge. Mr Brittin focused his speech on everyday businesses and the need to "clear the path" for them to support initiatives as the Digital Single Market and for the legal frameworks and regulations to take into account the potential of small companies as an engine for growth for the economy.

## Session 1 – Acceleration the Leocorn ecosystem

During the session dedicated to the Bulgarian startup ecosystem and its innovators, the Leocorns, speakers indicated that Bulgaria has a healthy digital ecosystem which generates millions of companies competing in the global market. Moreover, the [InnovationShip 2017](#) survey shows that technological clustering in AI, blockchain, VR, AR and fintech has also been observed in the country, where 70% of the digital companies provide services while the others develop products. Further, 78% of Bulgarian startups operate on international markets and 31% of them employ internationals.

**Ivaylo Hristov, founder of DEV.BG**, noted that the presence of many outsourcing companies in Bulgaria is a positive sign contributing to the increasing growth of successful product-development businesses. Speakers in the panel discussion also noted that digital businesses in Bulgaria are stabilizing both financially and as business models. Moreover, speakers concluded that successful ecosystems develop by initially following the example of

other developed economies. Thus, it was pointed out that the Bulgarian startup ecosystem needs a similar successful example to follow, so that it can then specialize and find its unique niche.

## **Session 2 – Elevating the European Digital Market**

During our “Pitch me your policy” panel, leading European decision makers **Bulgarian MEP Eva Maydell, Counsellor for Digital Affairs at Permanent Representation of Estonia to the EU Luukas Ilves** and **Austrian MEP Paul Rübzig** pitched to the audience key EU initiatives related to the Digital Single Market such as the e-privacy regulation, the free flow of non-personal data, the support for cross-border e-government and the support for 5G wireless technology.

Following the presentations, **Mr Vihar Georgiev, Assistant Professor in European Studies at Sofia University** explained and analyzed the policies in more details. He underlined that the new regulations and initiatives related to the EU Digital Single Market, such as the e-privacy regulation, will have a direct impact on citizens and businesses and more awareness is needed on both. On the flow of non-personal data, Mr Georgiev noted that this is a key policy that will allow businesses to have more access to significant data related to research, economy and innovation and thus holds huge potential. On cybersecurity, he urged for more and adequate measures which would lead to strengthened trust by all EU citizens in their security online. His overall key message to the audience and the private sector in particular was not to underestimate the importance of these EU regulations and to get involved in the process of their implementation in order to reap benefits.

## **Session 3 – Balkan Startup Horizons**

According to **Mr Ivo Spigel, co-founder of Tech.eu** thanks to funding, co-working spaces, mentorship, education, entrepreneurs today have opportunities like their colleagues from five years ago haven't imagined. He described the process of Europeans “taking back” digital music and becoming leaders in mobile gaming through the work of bootstrapped companies, headquartered in all corners of Europe. He also insisted that, on the one hand, we need to push policy leaders and, on the other to encourage entrepreneurs not to be so dependent and worry so much about local legislation and regulatory issues, because they are all addressing the global market.

The panel discussion dedicated to the development of the Balkan startup ecosystems, identified common challenges and opportunities Balkans related to the startup ecosystem infrastructure as well as to attracting young innovative minds and engineers to the region, as opposed to them going abroad. All speakers agreed there is a need for more investment in R&D, universities and researchers.

## **Session 4 - Security challenges and solutions in the digital era**

During the session dedicated to cybersecurity **Mr Jean-Pierre Nordvik** from the **Joint Research Centre at the European Commission** presented the key initiatives and strategies that the EU has put in place in order to ensure cybersecurity, and urged for a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach where citizens, academics, industries, businesses and government officials work together on a regional, national and European level to ensure the cybersecurity of the EU.

During the panel discussion on cybersecurity, speakers from different sectors agreed with Mr Nordvik on the need for a multi-stakeholder approach and underlined the challenge of legislation and regulation when it comes to cybersecurity. All speakers agreed that regulation can be increased but cannot be overcomplicated, and that cybersecurity should be made understandable by all, so that everyone is involved in its development.

Through his “Hack the System live” presentation **Mr Radoslav Miltchev (Dept. Computer Systems and Informatic, University of Forestry)** illustrated how the hacking of a common Wordpress website can be easily and quickly done with resources which are freely and publically available, thus highlighting the need for the utilization of additional security measures to prevent the most basic of cyber attacks.

### **“Initiative for Pan-Balkan collaboration for digital development” – signing of agreement**

Initiated by MOVE.BG, an agreement for the creation of an [Open Initiative for Pan-Balkan Digital](#) Cooperation was signed between the digital leaders from the Western Balkans and MOVE.BG. Its aim is to ensure future cooperation and collaboration on a Balkan level in three key topics: **startup ecosystem and digital businesses collaboration, support for women in technology and cybersecurity**. The initiative will see a direct follow-up via a further conference in March, 2018 which will be organised by MOVE.BG and will address the three key topics of the agreement and their further development.