EU Digital Single Market
Why is it important to create a European Digital Single Market? Which characteristics should it have?
There are too many barriers on our continent and we are losing out on unexploited potential. Every citizen should be able to enjoy digital content and services – wherever they are in the EU, including government services. It means every company should be able to share and sell its products to a market of 500 million, using seamless online channels.

Today, a small business trying to spread across the EU faces 28 rules for consumer protection, data protection, contract law, tax rates. Citizens trying to buy online face endless obstacles.

This costs too much, both for citizens and businesses. I want to make sure we can do online what is possible offline. I cannot accept that new barriers are coming up in the Digital Single Market that we fought so hard to take down in the traditional single market, like the possibility to purchase and sell across borders without discrimination.

It's a golden opportunity. By fostering a Digital Single Market, we can create up to €250 billion in additional growth, hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and a vibrant knowledge-based society.

A first area of our work will be about building trust and confidence in the online world: if people can't trust e-services, they will never use them.

EU-Estonia
Do you see the digital Europe like a big Estonia?
I do not see Europe like a big Estonia, but I believe there are some very good and interesting practices we can draw inspiration from.

When I arrived at the European Commission back in November, I was surprised to see so much paper.

The Estonian government stopped using paper for its cabinet meetings back in 2000. It's so more efficient; it saves a lot of time, money and resources. And it reinforces my belief that Europe as a whole needs to move to a more paperless society, particularly in public services. I know from personal experience in my own country that it can, and does, work.

e-Government is a reality in Estonia. Digital signatures are considered equivalent to hand-written signatures. When we discussed the efforts in Italian Public Administration reform with Minister Madia on 1 December, we spoke about this as one of the first steps to make the project work.

In Estonia, citizens can vote or fill in their tax forms online. The system is secure and simple. Estonia uses a unique ID methodology across all sectors, from banks to hospitals.

Foreigners are now able to benefit from Estonian public services and easily create a start-up based in Estonia thanks to the e-residency system.

This is not about "nice to have things": these are core issues for a Digital Single Market and let's not forget that certain principles – like the once only principle where citizens do not need to give their information more than once to the government – stimulates and forces

interoperability between systems, something we are lacking today. These developments are really exciting and can contribute to the discussions we have at the EU level. Steps have already been taken, I think about recent progress in electronic identification for example, and I am looking forward to going further.

Telecoms Single Market
The TSM package is being blocked because of differences between Member States. How do you think this deadlock can be broken? Why is it important for the Digital Single Market?

The Italian Presidency made great efforts to achieve progress on the Telecoms Single Market package – and I would like to thank once again our Italian partners for their strong commitment.

Despite this good work, we could not reach an agreement. I am worried about this situation and I encourage EU ministers to start negotiations with the European Parliament as soon as possible.

We need to end roaming surcharges – this is key to develop new services, think about the future, like connected cars: they will need Internet wherever they go, without costing an arm and a leg in roaming costs! We also need to adopt strong rules on net neutrality and advance on the coordination of spectrum.

The Telecoms Single Market is an essential building block of the Digital Single Market. Without it, we cannot achieve the rest. The European Council asked for it in October 2013, and the European Parliament supports it.

I really hope that an agreement can be reached over the coming months. Otherwise, I fear that we may lose momentum.

That said, I still believe that there needs to be more ambition to make the package worthwhile: we cannot break down barriers with weak rules that appear to bring minimum standards into line with each other, but in fact allow each country to go its own way.

We need the Telecoms Single Market as a solid basis for the Digital Single Market.

New initiatives are already on the agenda of the European Commission for 2015.

One of our top priorities is to modernise EU copyright rules.

We want that everyone – citizens and businesses – has online access to digital services they enjoy and pay for, including between and across the EU's own borders. Europe's creative industries have a great capacity for generating growth and jobs, and stimulating innovation across the whole economy.

We will also be looking at how to simplify consumer rules for online and digital purchases, how to stimulate more e-commerce – thinking in particular about small companies – enhance cyber-security and get digitalisation into the mainstream of European policy.

In May, we will present a strategy for a European Digital Single Market detailing the different steps we will take to stimulate the digital environment, minimise legal uncertainty and create fair conditions for all.

Telecoms regulation
How do you see the European telecoms market? Does a digital single market require a single regulation authority?

We need investment in networks and more competition in telecoms markets so that all online users get the maximum benefits.

To achieve this balance, the best stimulus is effective competition, which is linked directly with consumers being able to switch service provider and to have proper choice in a vibrant open market.

BEREC will play an important role in developing the guidelines which ensure consistent regulation. A stable chairmanship of BEREC – fully accountable to the European Parliament – will promote BEREC's effectiveness and stability, and strengthen the Telecoms Single Market. At this stage, the Commission does not propose a single regulator.

Net neutrality
The net neutrality principle will be included in the European legislation – which are the objectives ?
Net neutrality has to be solid and clearly defined. Everyone should be able to access services and applications, and to distribute online content, without being blocked or throttled – regardless of the country they are in.

The Internet is universal. We want to keep it like that.

But if 28 countries have 28 different approaches, it makes the market even more fragmented. To avoid that happening, the principle of net neutrality needs to be enshrined into EU law – also to provide clarity and certainty for investors.

Spectrum
Another objective is the harmonisation of spectrum – why is it important ?
Spectrum is the key raw material for the Digital Single Market. It can't work properly without connectivity that is high quality, high speed and decently priced.

Open spectrum is the basis for a digitally-enabled society and digital demand. But the more this natural resource is divided, the less efficient it is. Ideally, EU countries should be working together much more on allocating spectrum.

After all, radio waves know no borders. Why should the internet? We don't need national fragmentation of internet traffic.

US
Which attitude/position should the EU have towards the OTTs from the US ?
Clearly, the issue of platforms operating on the European market should not be avoided in a functioning Digital Single Market but let's be clear, the issue is not about dominance but

about potential abuse of that dominant position. And let me say this very clearly: It is not about going after successful US companies.

The Digital Single Market is about encouraging trust, choice, competition, growth and secure, free flow of information and data cross-borders. It is not about fear of competition or blocking businesses.

Europe is innovative, one of the best places on earth for businesses and consumers. But of course we can do better and the EU needs to be prepared to reap the benefits of the digital economy and not just react to outside influences. The Digital Single Market will help us do this.

Collaboration
The EU has two Commissioners for digital issues: you and Commissioner Oettinger. Even if your competences are different, don't you think this can be obstacle ?
The cooperation is very good, working together brings a real added value to our work.

The new structure of the College is organised in project teams that mirror the Political Guidelines of President Juncker. This ensures a dynamic interaction of all Members, encouraging discussions, breaking down silos and moving away from static structures.

I steer and coordinate the work of the Digital Single Market team. More than 10 Commissioners are involved. We had a first meeting in November and another one will take place later this month. You may wonder why nearly half of College participates in this project. That's because digital is everywhere, stretching into all aspects of our lives. Some areas obviously need to be represented: regional policy, internal market, competition, trade and consumer policy, for example.

Others may be less obvious. Take agriculture: as far as digital is concerned, this means the rural development part of the Common Agricultural Policy. This is really important, because it can be used to connect people in remote non-urban areas across the European Union – hilltop farmers on a Greek island, a fishing village in northern Scotland, a mountain community in the Austrian Alps – and make sure they have reliable and high-quality internet access.

Our team will come up with a fully developed strategy by May 2015. We'll be listening carefully along the way, consulting all the time to make sure that we get it right.