

SHORT REPORT

Smart Solutions for Digital Economy in South East Europe

Liberal Institute for Political Analysis

On 5 June 2018 a conference was held in Sofia as a part of the ELF project ***Smart Solutions for Digital Economy in South East Europe***. The project is supported by the Liberal Institute for Political Analysis and with the partnership of Institute for Liberal Studies, Romania; International Educational Centre, Croatia; Friedrich Namann Foundation Sofia.

The project is part of ELF content coordinated “New Economic Models”. The aim of the project is by sharing experience within and outside the Southeast Europe region to bring it closer to the most advanced. Thus we would like to promote the development to a more coherent and advanced digital single market and digital economy.

First part of the project – the conference was attended by business circles, academia, NGO, journalists and practitioners. During the Conference, liberal solutions for the digital economy development were looked for.

The conference was held in five panels with 18 speakers from both SEE region and wider.

Most of the speakers emphasized at first place the need to speed up the change towards digital economy in Southeast Europe. Combination of best practices and examples from more advanced countries were considered a good approach to move forward. The regulatory environment was considered as very important in order to build trust and not suspicion. This is even more valid for the development of sharing and platform economy.

Personal data and privacy issues are where Europe is most advanced. Legal clarity and legality are crucial, but need extensive discussion on how not to be an obstacle to innovation. The debate on whether or how to regulate technology such as blockchain is forthcoming. From a liberal point of view sound institutions and legal clarity are crucial in order to be able to reduce barriers on independent work and to clear the way to the selfregulation.

One of the mostly discussed topics was education. In the sense of school, university education but also digital literacy and life long process. It was mentioned by most of the speakers and considered crucial for the possibility to advance with a digital economy.

The importance of the human capital was also discussed as a follow up of the education topic. It was underlined that myths about technology stealing jobs should be denied. Instead statistics was mentioned that one digital job helps creating several more.

Public and/or private financing is a dilemma with regard of the speed of the development of technology. On the one hand, one has to mind the approaches Europe’s global competitors have and the advantage it gives them. Particular attention was given by speakers to the financing of the SMEs and a real support for start-ups.

The financing topic provoked also a very active discussion on the taxation of the digital economy and the welfare state and equality issues arising from it.