

The European Commission's new digital agenda duo



Sally Broughton Micova, LSE Fellow and Acting Director of the LSE Media Policy Project, looks at what to expect from the new digital team in the European Commission.

The new **European Commission** took office over the weekend, starting officially on 1 November, and I cannot resist pointing out that it seems new Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker realized it would take two men to do the job of one woman. Filling the shoes of Neelie Kroes, who was Vice President and Commissioner for the Digital Agenda for 5 years, will be former Estonian Prime Minister **Andrus Ansip** in the role of Vice President for the Digital Single Market and Germany's **Günther Oettinger**, who will move from being responsible for the energy portfolio to being the Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society.

Oettinger will be at the head of the Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT). Oettinger has been reported to be weak on the technical side of his portfolio, so may not be taking the lead on moving forward the **Connected Continent proposals** to change the telecommunications package that are currently on the table of the EU's Council. However, DG CONNECT has received more responsibility for content within the new structure. Oettinger's DG will now be responsible for copyright rules, and manage the **Creative Europe** programme that subsidises the European production sector, as well as run Euronews and Euranet and support the European Audiovisual Observatory.

A more likely champion for the Digital Agenda, Ansip has already made some strong statements on data protection, challenging the US by threatening to abolish the "safe harbour" agreement that allows the transfer of data from the EU to the US. He also took a subtle stab at Google, without naming the internet giant, during his confirmation hearing when he argued that abuse of dominant positions should not be allowed and complained that European SMEs were not getting visibility in searches.

Ansip will be working closely with **Věra Jourová**, who has the strange amalgamation of Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality as her portfolio, on the data protection issue, and with the new Competition Commissioner **Margrethe Vestager** on the ongoing negotiations in the **Google anti-trust case**.

There are a number of useful guides to the new Commission including **the diagram of the new structure** and the **detailed list of the new portfolios**, and our LSE MPP interns Stacie Walsh and Anja Noster have provided these short background pieces on the two men set to be the key figures in EU media and communications policy.

Andrus Ansip

by Stacie Walsh

Andrus Ansip, former Prime Minister of Estonia, has joined the European Commission (EC) as acting Vice President of Digital Single Market. The longest-serving Prime Minister in European history, Ansip **resigned from his position in government** in March 2014 expressing a desire to work in Brussels. He was praised for the severe and strict austerity measures he implemented to deal with the global market crisis in Estonia (although his popularity has slumped recently).

Ansip also hails from the state that brands itself **as e-Estonia** and is known for advances in e-government, e-education, e-citizenship and various "digital society" initiatives. He gave a strong

performance at his hearing and **was described as a “real digital commissioner,”** which may be exactly what Juncker needs at this time. In his personal letter to Ansip, President Juncker **set out a long list of tasks** with the objective of making Europe “a world leader in information and communication technology”. Data protection is possibly Ansip’s most time-sensitive issue, with push from the President to “[conclude] negotiations on common European data protection rules” within six months. Ansip has said he was open to the idea of a charter of internet rights and has made strong statements on data protection and on competition among internet companies.



Ansip’s position is one of two new positions created by President Juncker when he split the Digital Agenda portfolio, one of three structural and procedural changes that Juncker put into place.

Günther Oettinger

by Anja Noster

Günther Oettinger, former Commissioner for Energy, is the new **Commissioner of Digital Economy & Society**. As such, he will be in charge of media and information issues, the reform of the EU’s telecoms rules, the modernization of copyright rules and the development of measures to make online communications, digital infrastructure and data more secure.



Since his appointment in early September, European parliament members have been calling him a “mis-appointment”, and even in Germany there was considerable surprise over President Juncker’s decision. The new portfolio is not a natural fit for Oettinger: he has not previously demonstrated any expertise or interest in the area of digital issues. Rather, he repeatedly made known **his wish to take over the trade portfolio** – a move that would have put Germany at the centre of negotiations over the controversial EU-US trade agreement, TTIP.

Whatever the **German perspective**, Oettinger’s portfolio will be a decisive one and the politician, who can look back at a long career in German regional and European politics, declared himself “motivated and curious” about his new role. As Minister-President of the Federal State Baden-Württemberg from 2004 to 2010, he was already responsible for cultural issues (amongst other things). He also dealt with media policy issues as Chairman of an expert group from 1999 to 2010, so one could assume he has **knowledge** of media policy making.

However, during his confirmation hearings, Oettinger revealed a lack of knowledge and sensitivity for his new portfolio. He was not able to provide a clear statement on the Telecoms Single Market proposal, which aims to unify the national telecom markets of the 28 EU member states, and upon which may be voted by the end of the year. His biggest faux pas so far was the **misconception of privately accessed cloud services** as the open Internet, calling those involved in #CelebGate “dumb” and not worthy of government protection (while at the same time suggesting cloud storage for the Commissions’ documentation). Finally, Oettinger also introduced the idea of **making Google pay** a levy as compensation for using copyrighted content to draw traffic and generate revenue. Outgoing EU digital commissioner Neelie Kroes and other EU commission members **criticized** this approach.

This article gives the views of the authors, and does not represent the position of the LSE Media Policy Project blog nor the London School of Economics.

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