

ASEM High Level Policy Dialogue: A Renewed Global Agenda in a Digital World- Mirek Dusek

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Good Morning to those in Europe and Good Afternoon for those joining in from Asia. I hope you and your loved ones are staying safe during these unprecedented times. I am glad to join you all virtually today and let me also take this opportunity to thank Minister Bui Thanh Son and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam for bringing us together.

It is an honour to be here, at such a critical moment.

We are, of course, meeting at a moment of both immense challenge and great promise.

As we meet today, we can see rays of recovery emerging. The largest vaccination campaign in human history is underway. Close to 10 million doses are being administered per day.

This has helped to bring back confidence in the global economy. According to the World Bank's latest forecast, the global economy is set to expand 5.6%- its strongest post-recession pace in 80 years.

While this indeed [is](#) a positive signal, we cannot afford to get complacent. As per the World Economic Forum's Chief Economists Outlook report, the global economy will remain below pre-pandemic levels till the first half of 2022.

Furthermore, this recovery is uneven and largely reflects sharp rebounds in some major economies such as the US and China, while emerging and developing countries especially in Asia and Africa [are](#) facing subdued prospects amid highly unequal vaccine access.

Exiting the pandemic stronger than we entered it therefore requires purpose driven and collaborative action on part of all stakeholders. One area where this cooperation will be needed the most will be the digital sector. Advancing on the digital transition will be crucial to the global economic recovery.

Nearly a year and a half into this pandemic, the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the continued need for agility in our thinking and action - especially when it comes to harnessing new technologies.

During the first two months of the pandemic itself, according to McKinsey, the world leapt ahead five years in terms of digital uptake. And it remained high over the course of the year—up almost a third compared to 2019. From another report by Bain, Google and Temasek , 40 million new internet users were added alone in Southeast Asia in 2020.

The Forum's survey on more than 68,000 youths in ASEAN in 2020 revealed a significant increase in youths' digital footprint: 87% of youths increased usage of at least one digital tool during the pandemic.

Also notably, a significant portion of respondents said they had learned to be more resilient and more prepared for future pandemics; acquired new skills, and even found new business models and new ways to improve income during the pandemic.

Because of significant investment in digital infrastructure in some parts of the world, an estimated 10% of the global labor force was able to work remotely. And, as many as 200 million students were also able to maintain access to education through online portals.

This clearly shows that we are now firmly in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, when innovation is the engine of growth.

From Europe to Asia, technologies from AI to Blockchain to IoT will continue to drive the Fourth Industrial Revolution forward at tremendous speed and scale. Every business, every market, and every economy need to have technology part of its DNA.

Yet we live in a very challenging and complex environment. The bedrock of the 4th Industrial Revolution is universal internet connectivity. Today an estimated 3.6 billion people around the world are offline because of the lack of affordable connectivity, poor literacy, and other challenges.

This is a stark reminder to the global community that any level of inaction on our part at this critical juncture will widen digital inequality and undermine an inclusive economic recovery.

This message was amplified not only in the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Risk Perception Survey where leading businesses voices identified digital inequality as the 5th most likely risk to occur over the next two years, but also by UN Secretary General António Guterres who warned us that under current policies and regulations, this inequality is likely to continue.

To address this global challenge, the Forum launched The EDISON Alliance during the Davos Agenda Week earlier this year.

The EDISON Alliance is a first-of-its-kind platform comprised of leading technology, finance and energy companies, as well as government entities.

The Alliance is working to foster affordable and accessible digital access for everyone by 2025 and this year it will specifically focus on increasing digital inclusion in healthcare, education and financial services.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, we need this level of multistakeholder cooperation to spread across all sectors and industries.

The past year has shown that multistakeholder coordination is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

And when it comes to unlocking the promises of 4th Industrial Revolution, we need a high level of multistakeholder cooperation.

This is why the World Economic Forum launched the Centre for the 4th Industrial Revolution Network in 2018. Today we are present in 14 countries working with governments, companies, and experts on issues of technology adoption and governance.

In serving as a focal point for cooperation, these Centres are creating positive feedback loops that drive impact on critical global challenges, related to technology, the environment, and people. The Centres are pioneering an agile and human-centred model for the development, implementation, piloting and scaling of technology governance policies and regulatory framework.

For example, our Centre in Norway is developing the world's first open source ocean data platform which will allow countries to better manage the fisheries industry, track oil and gas emissions amongst others. In Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and South Africa, the Centres are developing frameworks that reduces the barrier for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to adapt IoT technology.

Our aspiration is that this network over the next year will grow to cover over 25 jurisdictions, hopefully including Viet Nam, and help develop protocols that maximize the benefit of new technologies in a responsible way.

Another important area in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution is around the use of data. Data is the key to unlocking the potential of the 4IR. It fuels AI, precision medicine, robotics, and the Internet of Things. How we use data and how we safeguard it will determine the ultimate success or failure of the revolution. This is why the Forum has launched across our entire network, the Data for Common Purpose Initiative (DCPI).

DCPI is built on the belief that orienting data policy and data models around common purposes, such as specific use cases, will unlock opportunities for both the public good and commercial spheres. In Japan, UAE and India we are looking to create a data marketplace that will help to promote the exchange of data as a strategic asset.

Growing our twenty-first century economies requires recommitting to forward-leaning investments and ensuring innovation is widespread. After a year of great uncertainty, one thing has become clear: if we commit to driving innovative solutions, there is so much promise we can achieve in the year ahead.

Thank you all for your time and I very much look forward to our discussion.