



Maurice Lévy Speech
Opening the du e-G8
Tuesday May 24, 2011

Monsieur le Président de la République,
My dear friends,

First, let me say a heartfelt thank you to all of you, for coming here to be part of a moment that I believe will be historic.

Monsieur le Président de la République,

It is a joy and an immense honor for me to welcome you to this Forum on Internet and the Digital Economy, the first ever to precede a summit meeting of the G8 nations.

In a few moments you will officially launch this gathering, which takes place at your initiative. You asked that the Internet should be placed on the agenda of the G8 summit that will be meeting in two days' time in Deauville, and which you will preside. It was your wish that the key players of the Internet, and all its stake-holders, should be able to express their insights here in open and unrestricted debate, and that the conclusions of their discussions should be made known to the Heads of State and government of the G8. In other words, you wanted this Forum to take place in the same spirit in which the Internet functions: that it should be open, participative, and free. You can be sure that this will be the case.

I was particularly moved by the honor that you did me in giving me the responsibility for organizing this eG8 Forum, and it is with great pride that I observe the assembly that has gathered here today. Despite their heavy schedules and our very short lead-time, all the key players of the Internet, with few exceptions, are present among us. They have made huge efforts to shift their agendas in response to your invitation. I think I can say that all of them fully understand how important this meeting is, and the challenging task ahead of us. I won't take the time—or take the risk—of citing every one of their names: the list is too long; and I might forget one of my friends.

Allow me to emphasize that in our audience are represented all the components of the digital ecosystem, in all of its diversity and dimensions: infrastructures, manufacturers, software, telecommunications, search engines, social networks, e-merchants, content, and the start-ups of today and of tomorrow. All of them are present—even advertizing is here!—alongside representatives of the academic world and social communities, in order to debate the future of the Internet and its impact on our economies and our societies.

There have been a number of conferences about computers and about the Internet. But none was destined to nourish the debates of Heads of State. I think, then, that I can say, without a trace of an advertiser's habitual exaggeration, that this Forum is truly historic.

It is historic, first, because in two days' time, a summit will take place in Deauville in which the Heads of State and government of the eight major industrialized countries will discuss, under your Presidency and at your initiative, a number of specific issues regarding the Internet phenomenon as it develops at a speed never before observed in human history.

Historic, too, because this sector is a global phenomenon. Almost two billion people are connected to the Internet: one person in three. More than four billion have a cell-phone: two-thirds of the planet.

And as you know well, *Monsieur le Président*, the digital industry, more than any other, abolishes frontiers, erases distinctions and creates a new paradigm in every sphere: knowledge, technology, information, creation, innovation, relationships, exchanges, commerce, economics, communication—in short, every aspect of life.

Finally, what makes these two days so special is the very nature of this Forum. It gives voice to the economic and social actors of this sector—to content creators: powerful generators of innovation, platforms or companies; to players, big and small; to inventors, trend-setters, citizen-bloggers or entrepreneurs, whether they be freshly minted or simply vigilant of that common good that is the Internet.

These individuals will debate freely, exchanging points of view, laying down their own conclusions and proposing fresh ideas. It is a signal honor, and I am certain that they will show themselves worthy of it.

Thus this is a historic moment, and a historic responsibility.

Of course it would be easy to use this occasion to express a few platitudes: opinions that we all share.

Every day the Internet does indeed transform the way in which people live, work, communicate, bond, play, enjoy themselves, live and love.

And indeed, the Internet is a powerful motor for economic development, a mine of productivity and job-creation.

This exceptional space of technological innovation is indeed also a source of individual initiatives, pioneers, trend-setters, inventors.

And the Internet does indeed create a wind of openness and democracy wherever it is accessible. It offers those who use it possibilities for communication and self-realization unparalleled in our history.

But we know that. We are convinced of those truths. The real questions that we need to ask—and debate here, in this Forum—are: How will the Internet contribute to the creation of more wealth, more jobs, more freedom? How can we go further? How, too, can we be even more respectful of the rights of others—their intellectual creations and their private lives? How can we ensure a proper balance in value sharing? How can we be both free of constraint and responsible?

We have organized round-tables and workshops for debate with the world's most pertinent players in the field and all participants, in order to attempt to discover paths towards more effective thought about the questions that we all ask ourselves.

How can we improve our products, our services and practices so that they can be more easily adapted and used? How can we reassure consumers and clients about the dangers—some of them very real—of using digital tools? How can we eliminate or restrict some practices that penalize our digital sector in the eyes of the public, for example in terms of protection of privacy or the fight against cybercrime? How can we organize the transition so that actors from the physical, non-digital world can move, as they need to do, increasingly on-line, to the virtual world? For that is the real world of tomorrow. How can we convince the

reticent—all those not born in the digital universe—of its interest and its importance? How can we balance our exchanges? Respect intellectual and artistic property? How can we finance major infrastructures in this sector, as it continues its exponential growth? And, let's dare to use the word—what regulation can be put in place that would prevent abuses but would in no way restrict the liberty of the Net, its development or use, particularly in tomorrow's mobile world.

If we want this Forum to succeed, we absolutely need to ask ourselves these questions with sincerity. We need to imagine, in a spirit of responsibility, possible paths towards solutions capable of bringing to you, *Monsieur le Président*, and to the Heads of State of the G8, some elements of deeper thought and the viewpoint of the key actors in the field.

As you can see, we have a lot of work ahead in order to make this e-G8 Forum a success. Of course we don't plan to resolve everything in two days; far from it. But I am convinced that we have here a historic opportunity to move the Internet forward, and to bring our experiences and insights to the table of the G8 Heads of State.

Monsieur le Président, my dear friends, I have a particular affection for a quote from Albert Einstein: "Imagination is more important than knowledge". Einstein would definitely have loved the Internet. It is both the fruit of human imagination and a space for sharing knowledge that makes it accessible to all humanity. All of us here today have a little knowledge about the Net. But now it's time to mobilize our imagination: to create a collective picture of how Internet will develop in the world of the future.

I thank you all, and without further ado I give the floor to Monsieur Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of the French Republic, who will open this e-G8 Forum. At the end of his speech, President Sarkozy has agreed to answer a few questions.