Welcome note delivered by ecta Director General, Luc Hindryckx at the Joint ecta -VATM event: *"A Tale of Hidden Champions: The Telecom Challengers Reshaping Europe's Competitiveness."* On 10 April 2025.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Honourable Members of the European Parliament,
Distinguished Delegates from the Member States,
Esteemed Representatives of the European Commission,
Dear Friends, Dear Guests,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this timely and important discussion: *"A Tale of Hidden Champions: The Telecom Challengers Reshaping Europe's Competitiveness."*

As Europe stands at a pivotal moment in its economic and digital transformation, the issue of competitiveness has never been more urgent. The current geopolitical turbulence introduces profound uncertainty, and priorities are shifting rapidly. Defence and security have understandably risen to the top of the policy agenda—and likely on a lasting basis. In this context, we must ask: is this the right time to radically disrupt the regulatory framework for electronic communications that has proven its value, that is technology-neutral, and that is rooted in the enduring principles of competition law?

We recognise the immense challenge faced by our institutions in steering policy through this period of complexity. As industry, we are committed to supporting this effort in the best way we can. Today's event is part of that commitment. At a time when uncertainty is high, sound decisions require solid facts. The more we can reduce the unknowns, the more we can focus on what truly matters.

Last September, Mario Draghi's report *"The Future of European Competitiveness"* laid out a broad strategic vision for Europe. Among its insights, it highlights the telecommunications sector—a key driver of Europe's digital sovereignty and economic resilience. However, the report presents a decidedly negative view of the sector and calls for a reduction in country-level ex ante regulation—an approach we believe is misguided.

Why? Because we must first acknowledge the successes achieved by both policy makers and the telecom industry. The current ex-ante, SMP-based regulatory framework has delivered on its objectives, including deployment of networks and access to networks, the promotion of competition and citizens interests, and in specific cases, the Single Market. This has resulted in innovation, consumer welfare, and crucially, fit-for-purpose services for businesses relying on telecommunications and related services. We believe that the framework must be preserved—alongside the existing list of relevant markets—because:

- It is essential for ensuring competition, and therefore for protecting end-user interests;

- It is essential for enabling meaningful cross-border consolidation;

- It is essential for advancing EU harmonization, especially in view of future enlargement;

- And it is essential for safeguarding the independence of regulators.

At the same time, the Draghi report overlooks a crucial part of the story: Europe's "hidden champions" in telecom—dynamic challenger operators who are already reshaping the sector. These national and pan-European providers are building the networks of tomorrow, introducing innovative business models, and empowering enterprises to embrace digital transformation. They are not just players in the market—they are architects of Europe's digital future.

Today's discussion aims to spotlight these champions. Who are they? What underpins their success? How is the current regulatory framework supporting—or obstructing—their impact? And most importantly, how can their achievements be properly reflected in the EU's future strategic and legislative agenda?

We are honoured to be joined by a distinguished panel of policy-makers, regulators and business leaders to explore these questions. Together, let us examine how we can better support these telecom challengers, unleash their full potential, and ensure that the sector becomes a true engine of European innovation and competitiveness.

Thank you for joining us—we look forward to an engaging and forward-looking discussion.

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