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MINISTER OF STATE FOR DIGITALISATION

Politics has been part of my life from an early age, since it played an important role in my parents' home. It was thus an obvious choice for me to become politically active myself. I was only 14 when I joined the "Junge Union" and set up a local branch in my home town. Even back then, I felt it was important to combine my political interests with tangible action, and to play a role in shaping politics and thereby life in my local area. I joined the CSU proper before I left school.

Since I was politically active and politics were my major interest, it was an equally obvious choice for me to study politics at university. In addition to working for the party, I also always wanted to hold elected office, so that I could put as many of my political ideas into practice and do as much as possible for the people who had put their faith in me.

And so in 2002, I was delighted when I successfully stood for election to the German Bundestag. From 2009 to 2013, I was the Deputy Secretary General of the CSU as well as the Spokesperson of the Parliamentary Group for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth at the Bundestag. From late in 2013 until March 2018, I served as State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure. The positions I held in the parliamentary group and in the Federal Government were pivotal in determining the focal areas of my work, which have remained among my priorities to this day. Since March 2018 I have been the first ever Federal Government Commissioner for Digital Affairs.

Gender equality is definitely an important issue for me in my work. My aim is to secure equal opportunities for men and women in pursuing their life goals. I am campaigning to ensure that at some time in the future, gender will no longer be a decisive factor – only personal performance and dedication will be relevant when it comes to realising one's own idea of a successful and fulfilled life. Here in Germany, we have come a good step closer to that objective, but we are sadly still a long way from realising it in full. As long as women are denied access to certain positions in the public and private sector, and in politics, or we women are under-represented in specific areas, there is still work to be done.

If, for example, we look at careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), we find that the proportion of women in these jobs is far lower than the proportion of women in the overall population. But the modern digital world not only needs technology, it also needs the many talented women out

there. We all know we have a shortage of skilled IT workers! In my opinion, the reason why so few women work in these fields is that we fail to teach young girls these subjects. I firmly believe that it would be good to teach children digital skills or even a programming language before they leave primary school. This would make these key skills for the future into a normal part of our children's education and as a result different career choices would be made later on, especially by young women entering STEM professions.

Regardless of that issue, it is high time that education in general were made more digital, and more fitted to the needs of today. The reason for this is being underscored almost daily during the corona pandemic by the problems relating to schooling under lockdown conditions.

In addition to the chance of improved labour market participation, digitisation offers other opportunities. Since we still have pretty traditional role models in society, and work within families is distributed relatively traditionally, digitisation offers women in particular the opportunity to better balance family and career. As a society, and as one of the leading economies in the world, we have a vital interest in ensuring that things improve dramatically as regards people's ability to combine work and family life.

And lastly, there is one more reason why we should go to greater lengths to ensure that more women play a role in the digital transformation. It is important that the digital world also sees things from the female perspective. Because it is mainly men who are active in this field, the digital future is being very strongly influenced by the male view of things. This has an impact on everything from search algorithms to the design of digital products and everything else.



As you can see, the digital transformation has the potential not only to improve our lives, but can also contribute to equal opportunities. Digital education is a key to improving gender equality.

However, there is another important issue that drives me on. This is far more fundamental, and thus even more difficult to successfully address. I am talking about the attitude people in our country have towards change. We have seen, during the COVID19 crisis, that in many areas we are not where we could and should have been if we had pushed ahead more forcibly with digitisation. There are of course many reasons for this, but one of them is that we have not yet taken the need for change seriously, we have not recognised the opportunities of the digital transformation but have focused on the risks.

But we are now seeing that those areas in which more progress has been made on digitisation are the areas that are coming through the crisis better, that are more resilient in these difficult times. And if we want to retain our economic position in the world and remain competitive, if we want to leave the impact of the pandemic behind us as quickly and lastingly as possible, we

must finally get on with implementing the many good ideas we have.

We must, after responsibly assessing the risks and benefits, shake off our misgivings and do our utmost to grasp the potential that lies in such change. We must be bolder and occasionally risk making mistakes. For as they say, those who dare, win! And if something goes wrong, then we should try to see the positive in having tried it at all, instead of focusing on failure. We need a culture where errors are permitted, a culture that rewards the bold.

The future will be digital. We can decide whether we want to be winners or losers in this digital world. We will only win if we courageously seize the opportunities and start to shape our future. And that brings me back to my first political steps and to my reason for entering politics: I want to shape the future, and in the process to help make life better for people in Germany.

Sincerely yours,
Dorothee Bär