

Study Summary

July 7th 2021

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Digital education and technology largely ignored by European heads of state and government

- Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, digital future technologies such as quantum computing and robotics were largely ignored in Europe
- Digital education and entrepreneurship were also not a priority for European heads of state and government
- As in the previous year, European leaders' commitment to digitalisation varied widely: Estonia, Germany, France, Greece and Croatia were the most engaged, while Slovenia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania and Hungary were the least so
- In terms of digitalisation, infrastructure topics such as 5G and industry 4.0 remained the main priorities in Europe

While they largely ignored digital future technologies during 2020, the year of the Covid-19 pandemic, European heads of state and government primarily focused on infrastructure in terms of digitalisation. The topics entrepreneurship and digital education, which are crucial to digitisation, were also largely neglected. This is the result of the Digital Engagement Report 2021, published by the European Center for Digital Competitiveness at ESCP Business School in Berlin. The report summarises the digital engagements of all 27 European heads of state and government for 2020 and includes all interactions around the topic of digitalisation based on publicly accessible information from governments, press releases and personal accounts on the social media platform Twitter.

The year 2020 was characterised by the Covid-19 crisis, but the digital priorities of European heads of state and government shifted only slightly in reaction to it. Despite digital acceleration brought about by the pandemic, topics such as e-government and digital education, which were crucial to solving the crisis, gained little attention in 2020 compared to our 2019 analysis. Most emphasis was placed on digital infrastructure topics such as industry 4.0 and 5G. At the same time, future technologies, such as quantum computing and robotics, were largely disregarded by most European leaders. Moreover, they approached digitisation very differently. The most digitally engaged politicians in Europe were Jüri Ratas, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel

Macron, Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Andrej Plenković, while the least so were Janez Janša, Boyko Boriso, Igor Matovič, Ingrida Šimonytė and Viktor Orbán (Graph 1).

Digitisation in Europe was mainly about infrastructure, while important future technologies received little attention

Even more telling is the analysis of the focus areas set by the European heads of state and government in their digital activities. Infrastructure topics such as 5G and industry 4.0 dominated the public discussion on digitalisation last year. This focus is reflected in the overall digital engagement of European leaders, with 103 (23%) activities for 5G and 64 (14%) activities for industry 4.0. However, our analysis also shows that important future technologies such as quantum computing, with nine activities (2%), and robotics, with four activities, (1%) received little attention (Graph 2).

Digital future technologies need to become a priority throughout Europe

“Although the Covid-19 pandemic has strongly accelerated digital transformation in the last year, important future technologies are still not a priority in Europe,” says Professor Philip Meissner of the European Center for Digital Competitiveness by ESCP Business School. “This has to change,” Prof. Meissner adds. “Europe’s future wealth will be determined by its competitiveness in the technologies of the future. When it comes to chip technologies, for example, we already see today what significant negative effects a lack of such capabilities can have. We finally need large-scale investments in digital future technologies such as quantum computing and robotics.”

European heads of state and government approached digitisation very differently

Comparing the digital activities of the European leaders across sectors paints a sobering picture: digital future technologies were completely absent among the five most important sectors (graphs 3-7). Moreover, there was still no harmonised approach across Europe. The exception was industry 4.0, which was a priority for many of the heads of state and government (graph 3). Other areas were prioritised by one very active politician, while others were less active in the respective area. 5G was a priority for Angela Merkel (graph 4), while cybersecurity and e-government were particularly important for Jüri Ratas (graphs 5 and 6). Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, was crucial for Andrej Plenković (graph 7). In short, this shows that digitalisation seems to mean different things to different politicians, while digital future technologies hardly received any attention across Europe.

This notion is reflected in digital engagements by the leaders of Europe's two biggest economies: 25% of Angela Merkel's activities related to the topic of 5G. Digital technologies of the future, such as quantum computing (8%), cloud computing (4%) and robotics (no activities), on the other hand, received hardly any of her attention from her (graph 8). Emmanuel Macron put industry 4.0 in the spotlight, with 29% of his activities on digitalisation relating to this topic. And while he addressed the topic of cloud computing (13%) more strongly, quantum computing (8%) and robotics (no activities) had little priority for him (graph 9).

Besides future technologies, leaders also largely neglected entrepreneurship and digital education

When looking at the digital activities of all heads of state and government, it also becomes clear that the key topics entrepreneurship (9% of all activities) and digital education (8%) were also given comparatively little importance in Europe. This is surprising, since, according to Dr. Christian Poensgen of the European Center for Digital Competitiveness by ESCP Business School, "The last year has shown that digital future technologies are key factors in solving our most pressing problems, such as dealing with pandemics, preserving our digital sovereignty and tackling climate change."

The Digital Engagement Report is based on a digital engagement index, which tracks all interactions of heads of state and government around the topic of digitalisation in 2020. The index is compiled from a variety of publicly accessible information provided by governments, press releases and personal accounts on the social media platform Twitter. These digital engagements are then classified according to the type of interaction (conferences, private sector meetings, political meetings and press conferences) and the topic discussed (industry 4.0, 5G, cybersecurity, e-government, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence, digital education, mobility, cloud computing, quantum computing and robotics).

A summary of the Digital Engagement Report, as well as detailed engagement profiles for each European head of state or government, is available at

www.digital-competitiveness.eu/digitalengagement

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About the European Center for Digital Competitiveness by ESCP Business School

The European Center for Digital Competitiveness was founded at ESCP Business School in Berlin with the goal of bringing digital competitiveness to the political and public debate, where it currently only plays a minor role. Given the digital revolution that our economy and society currently face, digital competitiveness must take center stage in debates to secure our prosperity for the future. Similarly, in this increasingly dynamic environment, we want to support the initiative to position Europe as a global leader for the responsible application of technology for the benefit of society.

About ESCP Business School

ESCP Business School was founded in 1819. The School has chosen to teach responsible leadership, open to the world and based on European multiculturalism. Six campuses in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Turin and Warsaw are the stepping stones that allow students to experience this European approach to management.

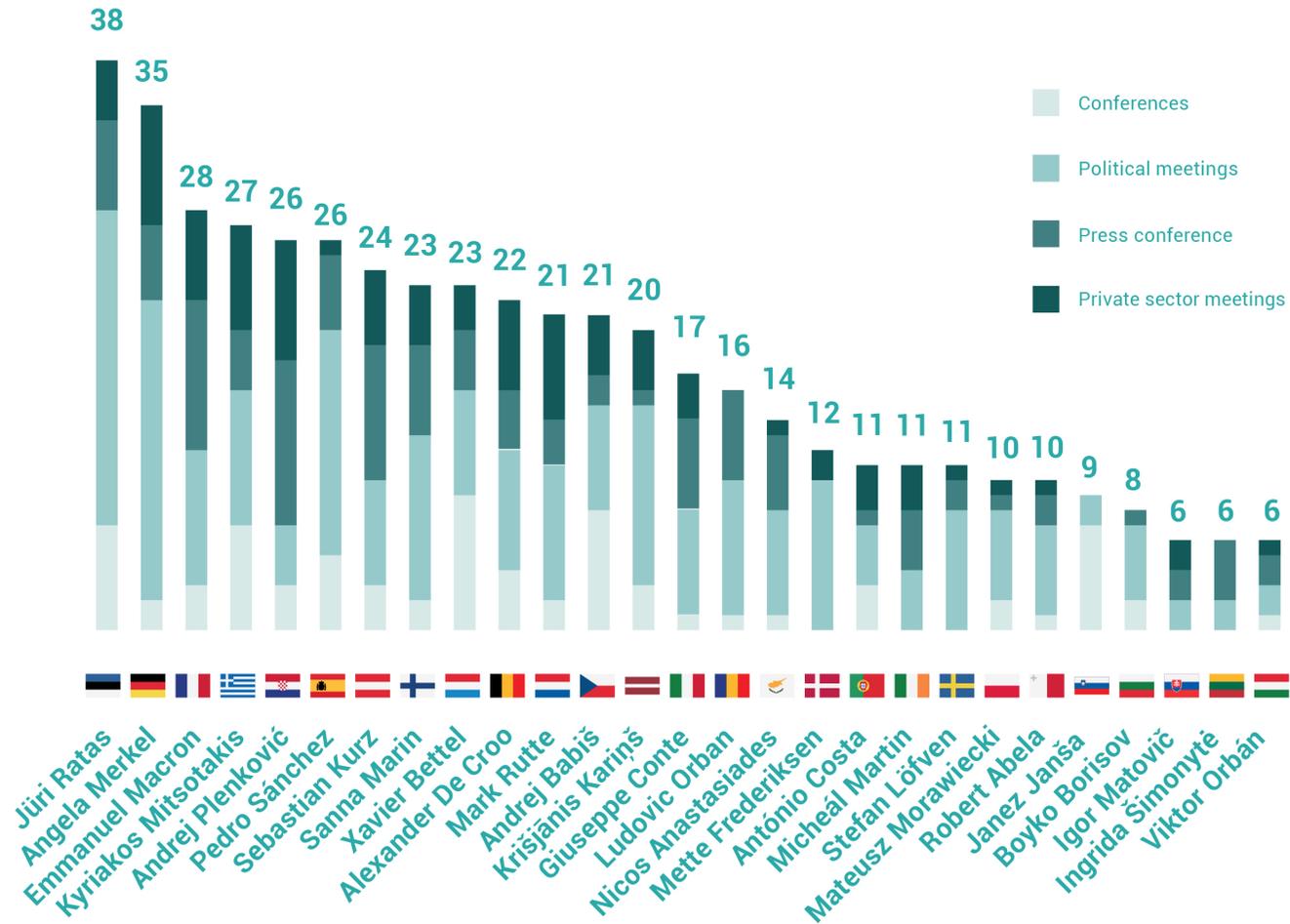
Several generations of entrepreneurs and managers were thus trained in the firm belief that the business world may feed society in a positive way.

This conviction and ESCP's values - excellence, singularity, creativity and plurality - daily guide our mission and build its pedagogical vision.

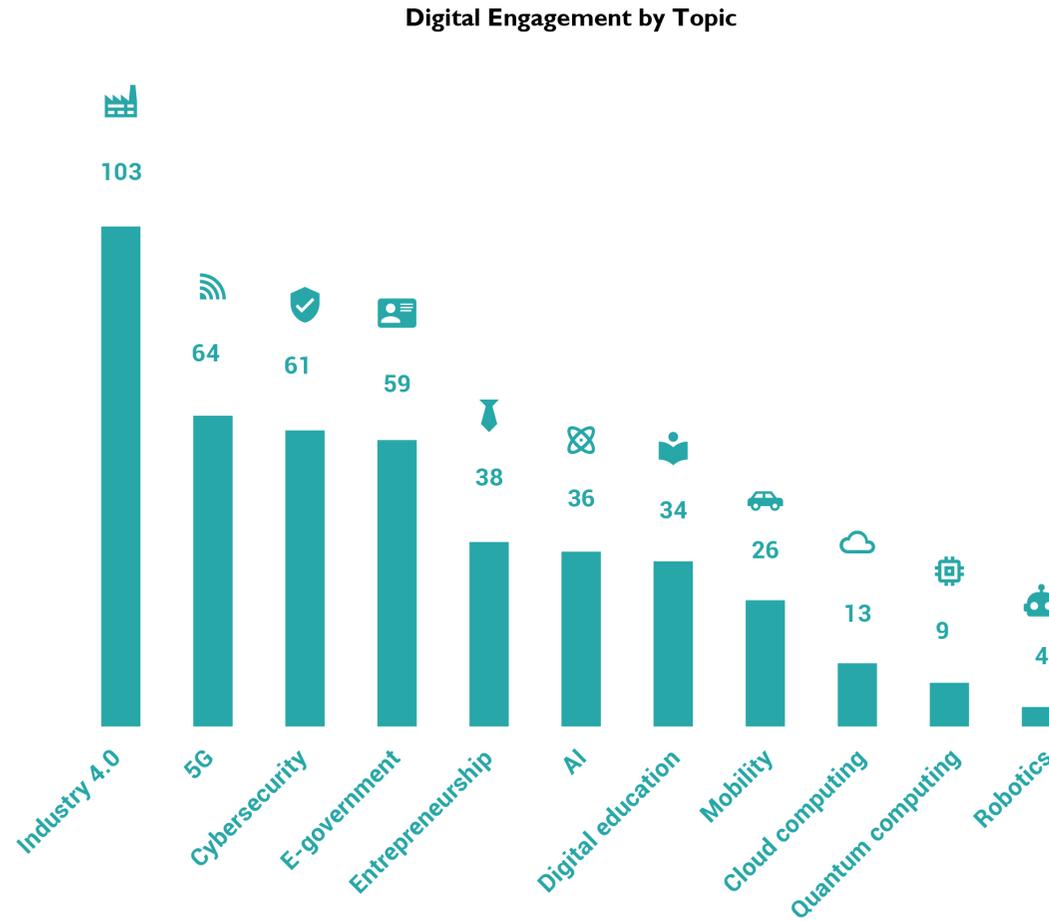
Every year, ESCP welcomes 7100 students and 5000 managers from 120 different nationalities. Its strength lies in its many business training programmes, both general and specialised (Bachelor, Master, MBA, Executive MBA, PhD and Executive Education), all of which include a multi-campus experience.

Graph I:

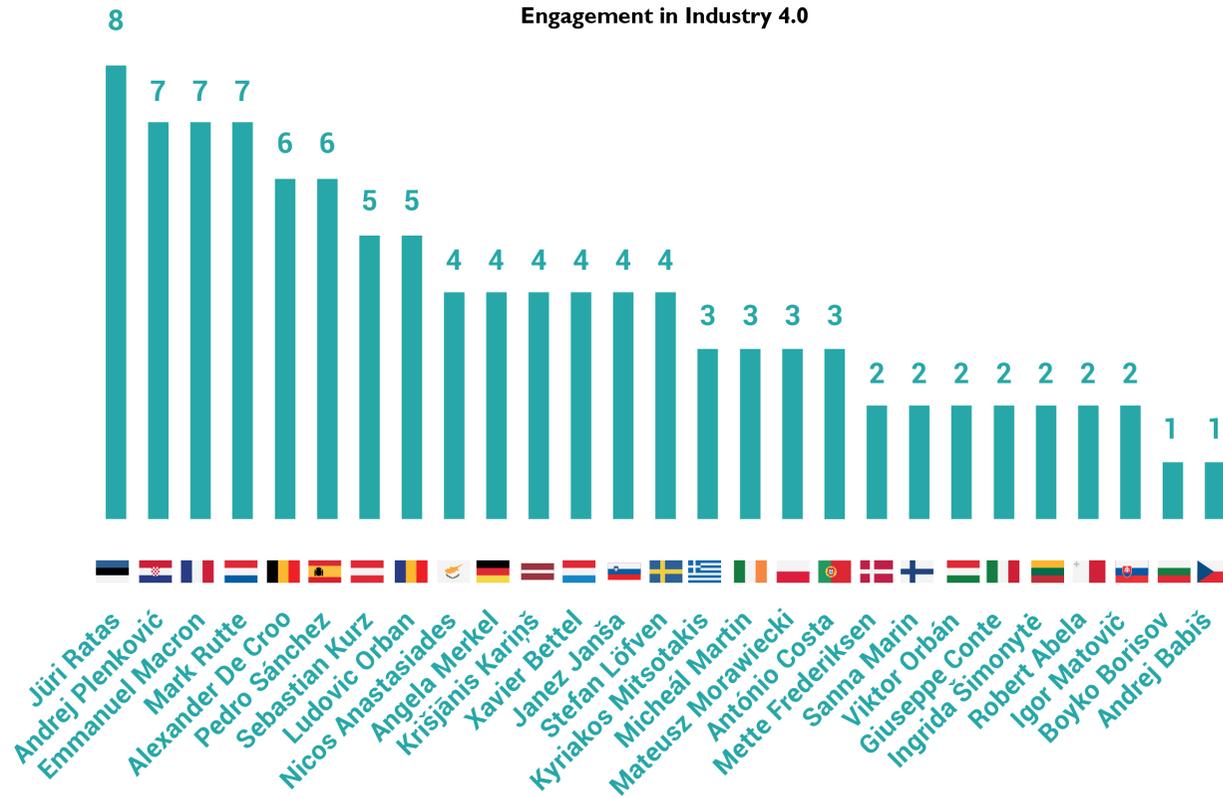
Total Digital Engagements by Heads of State and Government



Graph 2:

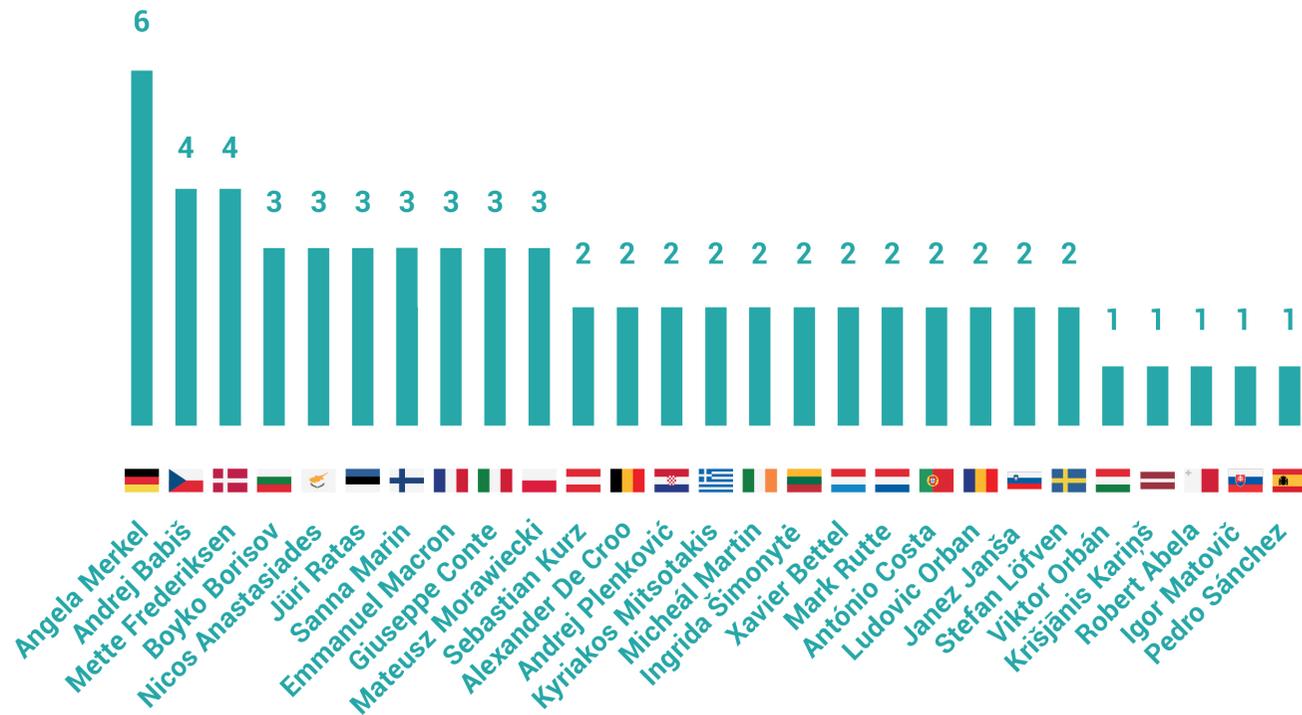


Graph 3:

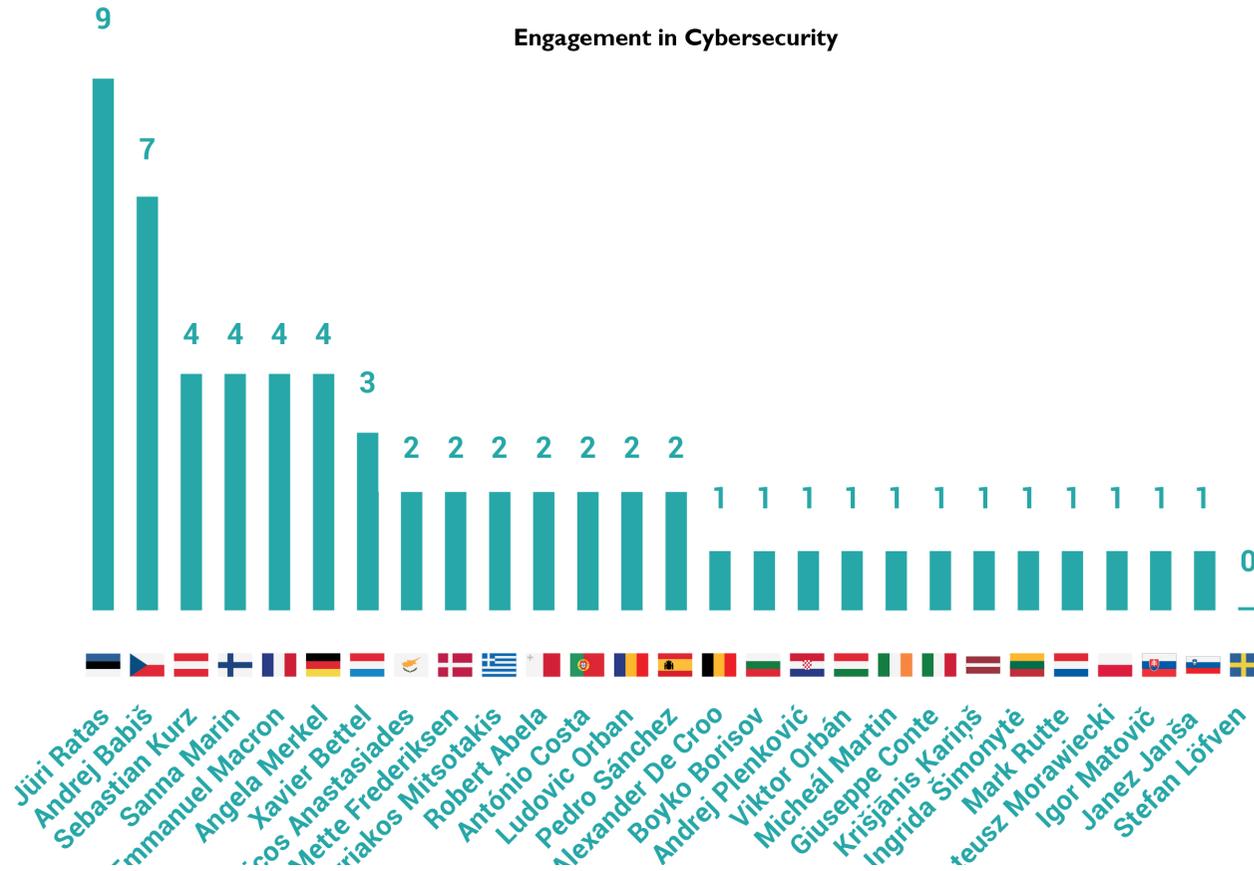


Graph 4:

Engagement in 5G

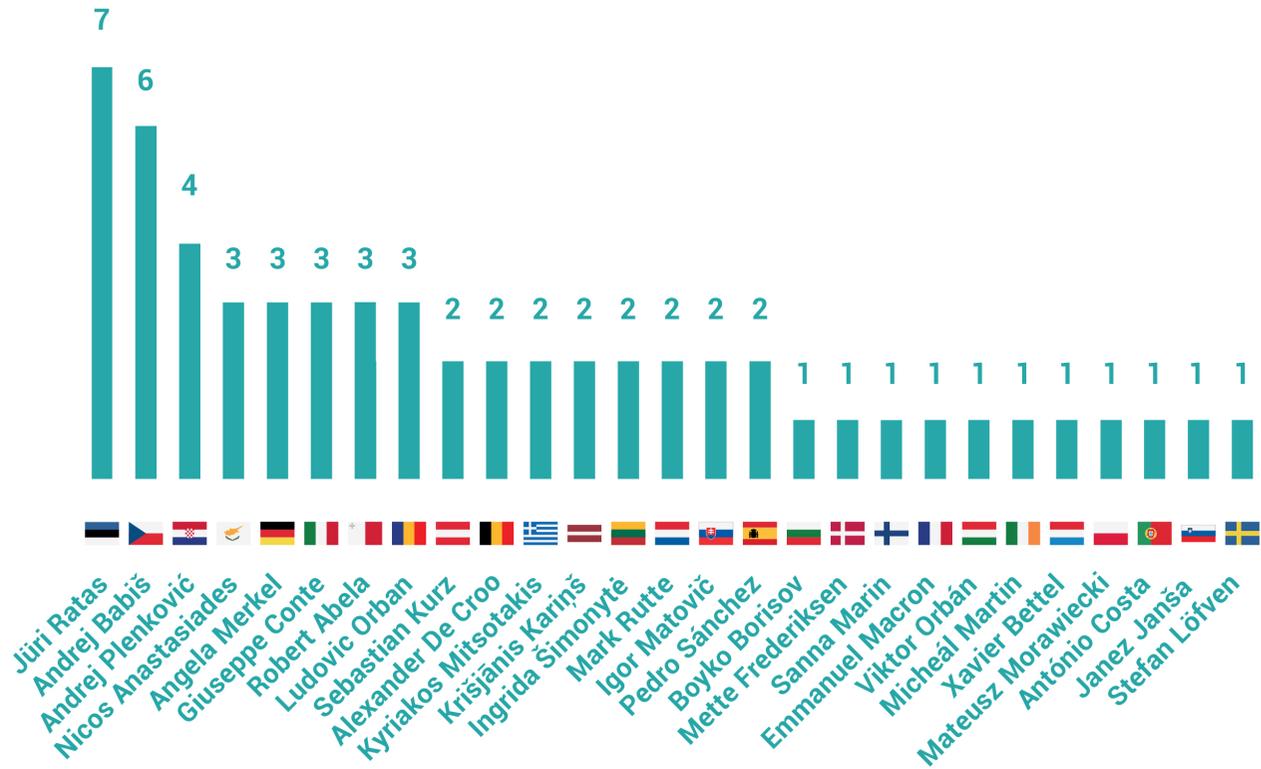


Graph 5:



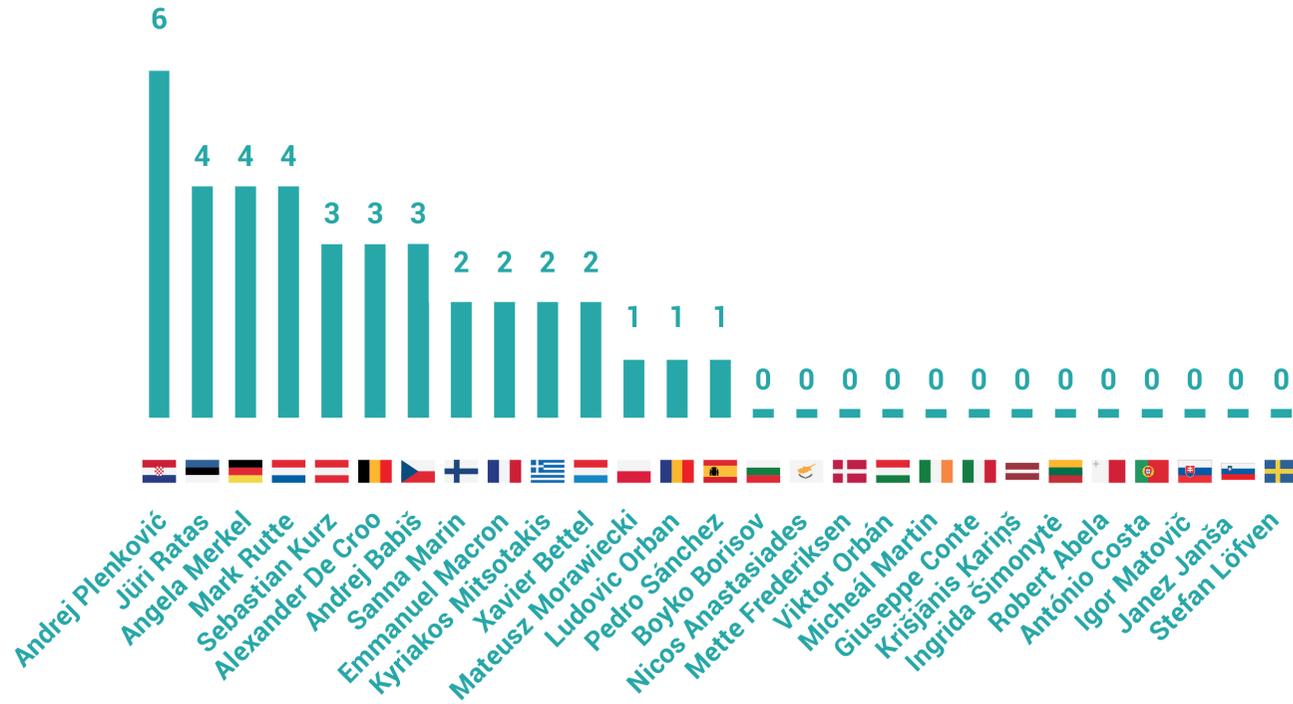
Graph 6:

Engagement in E-Government



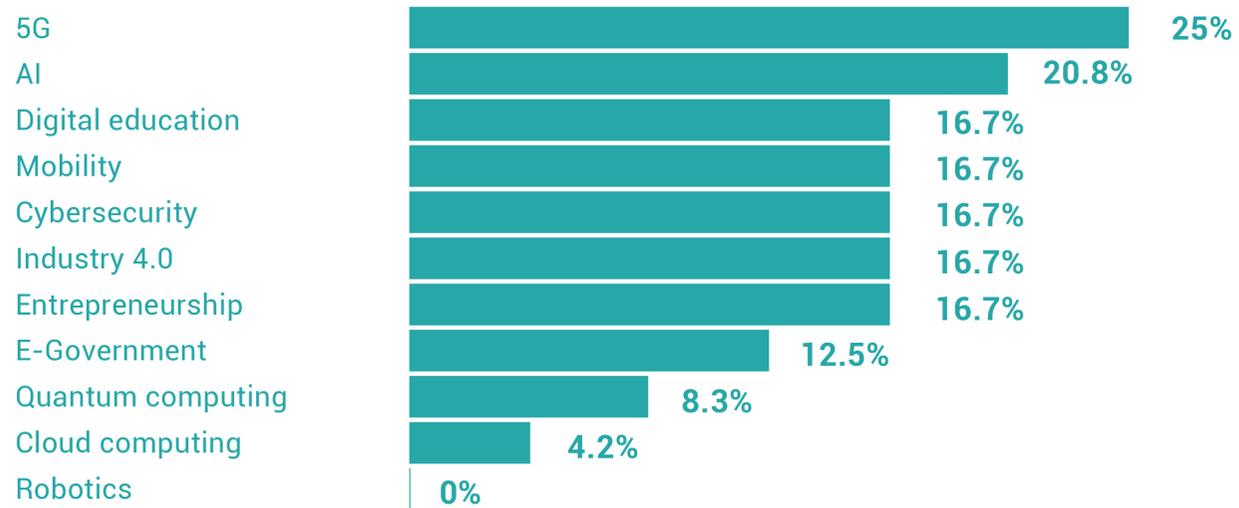
Graph 7:

Engagement in Entrepreneurship



Graph 8:

Digital Engagement Profile: Angela Merkel, Germany



Graph 9:

Digital Engagement Profile: Emmanuel Macron, France

