

PRESS RELEASE

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European scientists, leaders, high-level experts, and the general public discussed the present and future of artificial intelligence in Europe

On Thursday 22 April 2021, an important discussion on the present and future development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Europe, which involved key European scientists, leaders, high-level experts and the general public, took place during the “European Vision for AI 2021” event, just a day after the European Commission published its European Approach to Artificial Intelligence. The event, organised by the VISION project consortium partners in cooperation with four networks of centres of excellence on AI (AI4Media, ELISE, TAILOR, HumanE-AI-Net), was motivated by the need to discuss with the general public how the European scientific community is currently planning to move European AI forward, to future success in a competitive environment increasingly dominated by the US and China.

At the event, European citizens with an interest in AI had the chance to gain an overview of Europe's position in the field of AI and to learn about its impact on Europe's economy and society. Thus, “European Vision for AI 2021” represented the first opportunity for a public discussion on the world's first legal framework on AI and the new Coordinated Plan with Member States, announced by the European Commission the day before, following up on its vision for a European eco-system of excellence and trust in AI.

Holger Hoos (Leiden University, Netherlands), coordinator of the VISION Project, introduced the event, observing how the reactions to the announcement by the European Commission were quite understandably more focused on the legal framework than the Coordinated Plan and the ecosystem of excellence: *“We look forward to discussing both: the ecosystem of trust and the proposed legal framework as well as the ecosystem of excellence, highlighting the ecosystem of excellence and its importance for the future of Europe in order to avoid being dominated by products and services made elsewhere”.*

Lucilla Sioli, Director for Artificial Intelligence & Digital Industry within the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT) at the European Commission, gave an overview of the Commission's plans, stressing that: *“... at the European Commission, we believe that AI is going to be extremely important for our economies and societies, and its positive impact has already been experienced during this pandemic.”* Ms Sioli named examples when AI helped in search for treatments and vaccines in the first wave of the pandemic.

VISION – Value and Impact through Synergy,
Interaction and coOperation of Networks of AI
Excellence Centres



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“AI is beneficial because it is also very versatile, it applies to all sectors of the economy, so it can be a very important source of growth especially in this time when Europe really needs an economic recovery”, highlighted Sioli. On the other hand, AI also creates some risks especially in the area of safety and of fundamental rights.

She emphasised the importance of the regulatory framework, the first of its kind in the world, whose goal is to harmonise regulation in Europe, and whose risk-based approach was chosen to achieve a good balance between protection and innovation.

Most of the market is not risky at all, but there are high-risk AI systems that must be either prohibited or regulated. *“The regulatory package is going to ensure trust as trust is needed because we need to increase the use of AI. We also want to become a hub in terms of being leaders in the development of trustworthy AI and for that we join forces with member states and publish a Coordinated Plan on AI 2021.”* The discussions will now start with the Council and the European Parliament. The plan also takes into account new funding opportunities are offered by the multiannual financial framework (i.e. Horizon Europe and Digital Europe Programme) as well as the Recovery and Resilience Fund which has a budget of more than 600 billion EUR of which 20% will be invested in the digital transformation.

The round-table discussion provided a chance to react to the proposed regulation and action plan with **Dita Charanzová**, Vice-President of the European Parliament; **Kristian Kersting**, TU Darmstadt, Germany; **Ieva Martinkenaite**, VP AI, Telenor, Norway; and **Gabriele Mazzini**, DG CNECT, European Commission. According to **Ms Charanzová** the rules *“are a good and positive step. We are now all digesting the proposal [...], I welcome it very much but as I always say 'the devil is in detail'. So we have to look at every detail of these regulations ”*. Ms Charanzová pointed out that there already is legislation in place so the new regulation is about filling the gaps. The need to coordinate efforts between research, industry and society was also stressed by **Ieva Martinkenaite**: *“We need to create best practices, positive examples for industry, involving policy makers, involving academia, so that we learn how to apply these practices of trustworthy AI in business. It is not about creating compliance and regulations and directives. It’s about helping us to implement it”*. **Kristian Kersting** also stressed the importance of maintaining excellence in research through coordinated actions and the creation of large-scale infrastructure, through the creation of a “CERN for AI”.



The general public was able to follow the event online and was able to interact via chat and a number of polls. Participants also had the opportunity to choose from three parallel sessions focussing on **society, industry and skills & training**, depending on their particular interests. A diverse set of panelists, covering a broad range of stakeholders in AI, discussed how the new EU plans affect these areas of high public interest.

All videos from the event are available at: <https://www.vision4ai.eu/vision-for-ai-2021/>

For more information please contact: info@vision4ai.eu.

About organisers

This event was organised by the consortium of partners of the European VISION Project (www.vision4ai.eu), the coordination and support action (CSA) awarded under the H2020-ICT-48-2020 call. The mandate of VISION is to reinforce, interconnect and mobilise Europe's AI community. The European Commission has been investing in the European model of AI, with a new set of four European networks of AI excellence centres. Launched in September 2020, these four networks of excellence centres - AI4Media, ELISE, HumanE-AI-Net and TAILOR - are now working on various aspects of trustworthy, human-centric AI. In parallel to these efforts, the VISION project aims to create connections, synergy and joint initiatives between these networks as well as with key stakeholders across Europe. The networks of AI excellence centres and the VISION coordination mandate are key components of the European Commission's AI strategy.

