

EESC backs Commissioner Ansip's outline of forthcoming Artificial Intelligence strategy

EESC rapporteur on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Catelijne Muller says the strategy, as outlined by Commissioner Ansip to the EESC's plenary on March 15, fully meets the Committee's call for the European Union to take global pole position in determining the framework for the responsible development and deployment of AI.

Ms Muller said the [announcement](#) made by Commissioners Ansip, Moedas and Gabriel on 9 March to set up an expert group on AI was warmly welcomed by the EESC, as it fully took on board the requests put forward by the EESC nine months before in its [own-initiative opinion](#), which called for:

- a pan-European ethical code for AI to make sure that the development of AI is in line with EU values and fundamental rights;
- a European AI infrastructure to foster the sustainable development of AI;
- checks on laws and regulations to see whether they are fit for purpose in an AI era;
- innovation in AI to be boosted, especially AI for the common good.

"I think Europe really took a global pole position at this point", said Ms Muller, "Yesterday Steven Hawking died. Hawking warned us that AI could be the best or the worst thing that humanity has ever invented. He also said: 'all of us should ask themselves what we can do now to reap the benefits of AI and avoid the risks. This is the most important conversation of our time.' I am convinced that Europe has decided not only to join this most important conversation of our time, but to lead it, and I am proud of that."

Commissioner Ansip described the state of play of the **digital single market** in Europe and reviewed the Commission's most important initiatives to make it a reality. Among them, the **abolition of roaming** surcharges, the forthcoming **portability of digital content** – enabling people to access their legally bought music, movies, TV series, e-books, audiobooks, etc. also when travelling to another EU Member State –, and the abolition of unjustified **geo-blocking** with regard to tangible goods and services bought online but consumed locally, like hotel accommodation, car rentals, tickets, etc. The **general data protection regulation**, which is to come into force in May, would also help harmonise rules for all players.

Others important building blocks were still to come in the areas of **telecoms**, the **e-privacy regulation** and **cybersecurity**.

However, Commissioner Ansip emphasised, **fragmentation** remains a major hurdle to the development of the digital single market and consequently AI, and the **cost of non-Europe in the digital single market** is huge. According to an

analysis prepared by the European Parliament, it could amount to EUR 415 billion a year.

“It is important for all players to have harmonised rules because while big global players can navigate these 28 different sets of rules, for our start-ups and SMEs, it is practically impossible to understand those 28 sets of rules, and if we continue with this fragmented digital Europe we will send a very simple message to our people, especially our start-ups: stay at home or go to the US if you want to scale up”, said the Commissioner.

Global service providers like Amazon, Google, Facebook, etc. have large parts of the market in Europe too, which enable them to collect huge quantities of data to teach their computers, commented Commissioner Ansip. “But what about our own European start-ups? They have no access to data”.

Speakers in the debate emphasised to the Commissioner the importance of ensuring a fair transition for workers. While the Commissioner was very optimistic on the outcome of the AI revolution for the labour market, arguing that progress always created more jobs than it destroyed, members insisted that the transition, when traditional jobs disappeared and new occupations had not yet emerged, needed to be managed appropriately.

All agreed that **lifelong learning** must become a reality now more than ever to help everyone find their place in tomorrow’s labour market though new skills for new jobs. “In preparing for Artificial Intelligence, do not forget to invest in human intelligence”, was President Dassis’ closing message to the Commissioner.