

Artificial Intelligence: Commission discusses ethical and social impact with philosophical and non-confessional organisations

Today, the European Commission hosted a high-level meeting with 12 representatives from philosophical and non-confessional organisations from across Europe, as part of the regular dialogue with churches, religions, philosophical and non-confessional organisations foreseen by Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty. This ninth annual high-level meeting discussed the topic **“Artificial Intelligence: addressing ethical and social challenges”**. Today’s meeting was chaired by Vice-President Andrus Ansip.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans**, responsible for the Article 17 Dialogue said: *“Our societies are in the midst of an unprecedented digital revolution which will impact every person living on the planet. This revolution brings new promises, and new risks of disruption. We have seen recently that the digital world moved faster than the ethical discussion about what could and should be allowed online. We cannot risk the same thing happening with Artificial Intelligence and automatization. We need to be in control of this transformation, and make sure that it is used to foster our values and defend our social model”*.

Andrus **Ansip**, Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, said: *“From better healthcare to safer transport, the benefits of artificial intelligence are many and Europe should grab them. Along with increased investments, we are developing ethical guidelines for the development of AI for good and for all. This requires an open discussion on key issues such as the importance of diversity and gender balance in AI to avoid biased decisions. Today’s meeting and the recent set up of the European AI Alliance contribute to this broad debate.”*

Today’s high-level meeting provided an occasion to address two important issues related to artificial intelligence (AI). First, the meeting looked at the potential impact of AI on fundamental rights, in particular when it comes to privacy, dignity, consumer protection and non-discrimination. Second, the social dimension of AI was addressed looking in particular at the impact of AI on social inclusion and on the future of work.

Vice-President **Ansip** encouraged the participants to continue their engagement on this topic by contributing to the ongoing initiatives of the Commission on AI, in particular through the [European AI Alliance](#) that was launched last week. The AI Alliance is a community of stakeholders brought together through an online forum to engage in a broad and open discussion of all aspects of artificial intelligence development and its impacts.

Facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue on how to advance AI innovation to

increase trust and adoption, and to inform future policy discussions, is a commitment made as part of the recent [G7's Charlevoix Common Vision for the Future of Artificial Intelligence](#). It is also a key element of the [European approach on AI](#) and the [Declaration of Cooperation on AI](#) signed by 28 European countries.

Background

Today's high level meeting with representatives of philosophical and non-confessional organisation is the ninth in the series of meetings launched by the Commission in 2009 when the dialogue with churches, religions, philosophical and non-confessional organisations was enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (Art 17 TFEU). The dialogue is under the responsibility of First Vice-President Timmermans. Each year, these meetings are dedicated to different topical matters. In previous years, First Vice-President Timmermans has invited participants for valuable discussions on ['Living together and disagreeing well'](#) in 2015, ['Migration, integration and European values'](#) in 2016, and ['The Future of Europe'](#) in 2017.

On 25 April 2018, the European Commission launched a European initiative on artificial intelligence (AI). The Commission is proposing a three-pronged approach to increase public and private investment in AI, prepare for socio-economic changes, and ensure an appropriate ethical and legal framework. The Commission is in particular concerned that no one is left behind in the digital transformation and that these new technologies are based on values. As with any transformative technology, some AI applications may raise new ethical and legal questions.

As part of this initiative, ethical guidelines on AI will be developed by the end of 2018, based on the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, taking into account principles such as data protection and transparency, and building on the work of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies.

To help develop these guidelines and provide recommendations, the Commission has appointed an expert group on AI.

More information

The Communication "Artificial Intelligence for Europe" can be found at: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/factsheet-artificial-intelligence-europe>

To join the European AI Alliance:
<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-ai-alliance>

European Commission' dialogue with churches, religious communities and philosophical and non-confessional organisations on DG Justice home page on fundamental rights:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/dialogue/index_en.htm

List of Meeting Participants

- Mr Henri BARTHOLOMEEUSEN, President of the Centre d'Action Laïque (CAL)
- Mr Michael BAUER, Vice-President of the European Humanist Federation, Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands Bayern (CEO)
- Mr Max BOJARSKI, Grand Orient of Poland, Vice-President of the Congress of Laicity
- Ms Martine CERF, Secretary General of Egalité Laïcité Europe (EGALE)
- Ms Raluca CIOCIAN-ARDELEANU, Vice-President, Romanian Secular-Humanist Association
- Jean DE BRUEKER, President of the Contribution des Obédiences Maçonniques Adogmatiques et Libérales à la Construction Européenne (COMALACE)
- Mr Giulio ERCOLESSI, President of the European Humanist Federation (EHF)
- Ms Marie-Claude KERVILLA-BOUX, President Institut Maçonnique Européen, Grand Master of the Women's Grand Lodge of France
- Mr Marc MENSCHAERT, President of the European Masonic Alliance (Alliance Maçonnique Européenne – AME)
- Pr. Laszlo NEMES, Hungarian Humanist Association, Professor at Eszterházy Károly University, Eger (Hungary)
- Mr Keith Porteous WOOD, Executive Director of the (UK) National Secular Society
- Mr Claude WACHTELAER, President of the European Association for Free Thought (AEPL)

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[Aarhus Convention: Council decision to strengthen access to justice in environmental matters](#)

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The Council today asked the Commission to submit a study on the Aarhus Convention. The aim of the Aarhus Convention is to guarantee access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. The EU and its member states are fully committed to the Convention and its objectives.

The study requested today is a result of the outcome of findings of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee following an alleged failure by the EU to comply with the Convention's provisions on access to justice. It will set out options for improving access to justice for the public and NGOs in environmental matters, including a possible review of the relevant EU legislation.

The Aarhus Convention is an emblematic instrument for environmental democracy. The convention and its protocol on pollutant release and transfer registers are the only legally binding international instruments that put principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in practice. The EU implemented the Aarhus Convention through regulation (EC) No 1367/2006. This regulation allows non-governmental organizations to institute proceedings before the European Courts against EC institutions and bodies' decisions.

On 1 December 2008, the NGO ClientEarth contacted the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee alleging a failure by the EU to comply with its obligations under the Aarhus Convention. The NGO claimed that the EU legislation and the jurisprudence of the European Courts had hindered access to justice for individuals and NGOs in environmental matters.

The Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee reached the conclusion that the EU failed to comply with the Convention, because neither the Aarhus Regulation

nor the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the EU implements or complies with the access to justice provisions of the Convention. Therefore, the Committee recommended that all relevant EU institutions take steps to overcome these shortcomings in order to ensure full compliance by the EU with its obligations under the Convention.

Today's Council decision is based on Article 241 TFEU. It shall enter into force on the day of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union, which is expected on 19 June 2018. In line with the 2016 inter-institutional agreement on better law making, the Commission must reply to the Council within three months.

The Council asks the Commission to complete the study by 30 September 2019 and, if changes to regulation (EC) No 1367/2006 are considered appropriate in view of the outcomes of the study, to prepare a proposal for an amendment of the regulation by 30 September 2020.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)

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