

**Closing speech by State Secretary
Prof. Dr. Christian Kastrop
for the virtual high-level conference
“Human Rights in the Era of AI –
Europe as International Standard Setter for
Artificial Intelligence”
hosted by the BMJV and AA within the
framework of the
German Presidency of the Council of
Europe
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Check against delivery!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's event addressed one of the most important questions of our time.

Can we create and how should an international legal framework for artificial intelligence look like in order to safeguard human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the digital age?

It's been an inspiring exchange. I'd like to thank all the participants and everyone who helped – both behind the scenes and in front of the cameras. I'd also like to thank Minister of State Michael Roth and all our colleagues at the Federal Foreign Office, our co-host for this conference. And in particular I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to the Council of Europe for the valuable work already done by its Committee on Artificial Intelligence – the CAHAI – on our joint path to an international legal framework for AI. The CAHAI feasibility study presented today is a pioneering paper and we should make the most out of it

What we've heard today has reminded us once again that artificial intelligence has been shaping our daily lives and our societies for some time now. But it's only the beginning – it's going to profoundly change our entire world, our entire world of behaviour and thinking

AI has indeed tremendous potential. It can help us humans to solve our global problems. It will help us tackle climate change, achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and overcome the current pandemic – you only need to think of AI-assisted vaccine development.

However, humanity has reached a crucial turning point. Right now, we still have the ability to determine our future direction: Do we harness the above mentioned potential of AI in order to significantly improve the well-being of each individual and of humanity in general?

Or do we accept that our rights to autonomy and non-discrimination – to name just two examples of AI inherent challenges – gradually lose their validity?

Many of the specific risks that set AI apart from other previous technologies have been discussed at length today and were clearly illustrated by the video sequences.

The fact that we often don't even notice when AI is being used and that we can no longer fully reconstruct how its decisions are reached – the “black box” phenomenon – is one of the most pressing challenges when dealing with artificial intelligence. And with the increasing use of neural networks, the output of AI systems will become even harder for humans to unravel in future – quantum computing also on top of all of this This will be further reinforced by the increasing ability of deep learning systems to learn on their own.

So unless we ensure **transparency**, unless people are made aware of when and how their rights are being influenced by AI decisions, they won't grow to trust this technology. Only trust leads to acceptance.

Only if we guarantee sufficient transparency will we be able to effectively address the other challenges posed by

AI. Here I'd simply like to mention the issue discussed today about the potential for social inequality and discrimination through the use of algorithms, or the threat to our personal freedoms and our democracies from individuals being monitored and manipulated by intelligent surveillance systems.

The implications of AI-generated "DeepFakes" which among other things can falsify the statements of politicians in a deceptively realistic manner are also obvious: we are no longer able to distinguish between true and false. Added to this is the fact that intransparent algorithms of a small handful of gate-keepers – could be commercials, state institutions or QAnons – can decide what information people are shown in their social media bubbles. The result of all these developments is that public discourse is already at risk, our access to balanced information is in danger and our democracy as a whole is under threat. Again: Current events in the US show what happens when the truth gets lost.

This is something we must vehemently resist with all our combined efforts, in Europe and beyond. We must act

now to ensure that we don't let artificial intelligence simply develop on its own and that we don't leave it in the hands of repressive dictatorships or a handful of profit-driven companies or ill-minded criminal organisations.

Certainly it should be welcomed and encouraged when companies subscribe to ethical guidelines and voluntary commitments. But these measures on their own can never replace the effectiveness of good regulation. And we shouldn't let ourselves be fooled by the frequently heard argument that binding regulation in the field of artificial intelligence stifles innovation, it's the exact opposite! Most companies now agree: clear, sensible and risk-appropriate regulations provide legal certainty. And legal certainty provides a clear competitive advantage.

The CAHAI feasibility study presented today is a pioneering step towards creating an international legal framework for AI. It provides a detailed account of why an international legal framework for artificial intelligence is not just feasible – it's urgently required.

The proposed recommendation for a horizontal convention or framework convention for AI is something we expressly welcome. We'll gladly support this objective not only in the context of our current Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, but also via our direct participation in the CAHAI. And as we've heard today, the journey ahead remains fascinating: the plan in the coming months is to develop concrete elements of a future legal framework. Many of these elements and measures were talked about today in productive exchanges. As I've already emphasised, transparency rules are crucial here. But in order to address the unique challenges of AI, we also need to develop specific requirements that ensure the quality of training data, while safeguarding human autonomy, providing sufficient complaint options and guaranteeing effective enforcement mechanisms.

As we work towards creating an international legal framework for AI, I consider it crucial that the various institutions and bodies cooperate closely at the international level and that the different instruments

complement one another in a meaningful way. I'm therefore especially pleased that we had the EU Commission on our panel today and that we can all look forward to the Commission's forthcoming legislative proposal on AI. And in our last panel, it was extremely valuable to gain an insight into the work being done by UNESCO.

Last but not least, I'd like to draw your attention to the "Conclusions" of today's event which will be published later this evening on the respective websites of the event, our two ministries and the Council of Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

After today's event, I'm a bit more confident that we'll succeed in creating a world where AI not only complies with human rights, democracy and the rule of law, but where AI actively enables humankind and our human nature to flourish like no other technology before – for the sake of the civil society and each individual. Let's all work together in achieving that goal. It will be worth it.

Thank you for your attention and, depending on which time zone you are in, have a nice day or evening!

Thanks to all and goodbye!