

**Rede des
Bundesministers des Auswärtigen
Heiko Maas, MdB**

bei der virtuellen Konferenz

***„Human Rights in the Era of AI:
Europe as an international standard setter
for Artificial Intelligence“***

Berlin, 20. Januar 2021

Thank you, Melinda [*Dr. Melinda Crane, Moderatorin*], for your kind introduction!

Madam Commissioner [*Dunja Mijatović, EuR Menschenrechtskommissarin*],

Ladies and gentlemen,

A man with **two faces**. That's how the Romans depicted **Janus** – their god of duality. He symbolised the fact that most things in life come with a bright *and* a dark side.

Like Janus, our **digital age** has two faces: **new technologies** further human **progress**. But they also create **risks** for our values and democratic societies.

That is particularly true **for artificial intelligence**:

- AI boosts **economic growth**. But **military use of AI** could unleash **autonomous weapons systems** that kill without human control.
- AI is helping us fight the **pandemic**. It's speeding up the development of vaccines and potential treatments. But health monitoring tools are also used by **authoritarian states** to expand **mass surveillance** – in China and beyond.
- **Social networks** use AI to optimise our timelines and to connect us with friends. But such AI applications can also reinforce **online “bubbles”**, **increase polarisation** and **destabilise democracy**.

The **violence at the Capitol** in Washington shocked us all. However, it didn't come as a surprise.

For years, **social networks** gave **President Trump** a stage for spreading lies and hate. In fact, their business model is based on **polarisation**. Then, in a surprising move, they banned him from their platforms.

Both approaches raise **serious questions** – for our democracies, for human rights and for the way we want to debate and live together.

One thing is clear: **We cannot simply leave it to algorithms or CEOs in Silicon Valley** to define the line between **freedom of speech** and criminal **hate speech**.

Instead, it is for **democratic parliaments and governments** to decide – based on the rule of law and human rights.

Most leading digital platforms are finally acknowledging this **need for public regulation**.

That was not yet the case in 2018, when we created rules for social networks to fight hate crime and disinformation here in **Germany**.

But such national regulation is simply not enough. The internet is global – and so are the crimes and offences committed on it. We need **multilateral cooperation** to set **international standards**.

That is not an easy task. Great power rivalry has led to a new **geopolitics of bits and bytes**. From this competition for technological supremacy, we see **two poles of power** emerging:

On one side, the **Chinese** digital model, which harnesses technology for state surveillance and repression.

On the other, **Silicon Valley** with its excessive market orientation and big tech monopolies, which have recently come under scrutiny even in the US.

As Europeans, we have **no interest in digital bipolarity**.

We are open to working with partners around the world to **ensure that technology does not erode but reinforces democracy**.

And I'm hopeful that **US President Biden** will be a strong partner in this.

But we shouldn't wait for Washington. Our ambition must be to continue building our own **European digital model** that

- puts **humans** at the centre,
- remains **open** to the world and
- protects our **values and democracy**.

Applied to **AI**, this means:

First, Europe must develop its **own AI capabilities**. The new **EU budget** and the **Recovery Fund** have therefore earmarked 200 billion euro for digitalisation, including AI.

Second, we must set **standards** for human-centred AI. Such European standards can create benchmarks worldwide. With the ***European Convention on Human Rights*** and other legal instruments, we have a strong **legal framework** in place.

How to **apply this framework to AI** with **new and specific rules** is the question we are discussing today:

- AI is hugely complex. That is why we need to secure **human control** over algorithms – to ensure accountability and build users' trust.

- AI can have **biases**. Facial recognition technology is less reliable for people who have darker skin. We must make sure AI does not increase, but fights **discrimination**.
- AI and **tracking technology** used by companies and governments is a reality. But we need strict limits to **protect privacy**.
- **And, finally, AI use by social networks** can fuel polarisation by creating “echo chambers”. Therefore, we need joint rules **against extremism and hate speech** online.

On all these issues, the **Council of Europe** is a vital standard setter, in close cooperation with the **EU**.

During our **Presidency of the Committee of Ministers**, we want to further strengthen that role.

The **feasibility study** on international legal regulation of AI, adopted in December, was an important step. I'm sure that this **conference** will be another one.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With his two faces, **Janus** – the Roman god – could see both into the **past** and into the **future**. The Romans therefore worshiped him in times of **change** and **transition**. Times like the one we live in.

Unlike Janus, we cannot see into the future.
But we can ***shape the future*** – by **joining hands and keeping the digital revolution human.**

Thank you all for doing just that today!