

**Conference on Human Rights in the Era of AI –
Europe as international Standard Setter for Artificial Intelligence
20 January 2021**

**Video message by Mr Rik Daems, President of the Parliamentary
Assembly of the Council of Europe**

Honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome the thematic focus of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers on Artificial intelligence and human rights, and congratulate the Presidency for organising this conference.

I would like to highlight the importance of standard setting to mitigate the risks relating to the use of artificial intelligence. Due to technological advancements, our lives are rapidly changing. Artificial intelligence is part of our everyday reality. AI is not about the “future”; it is about the “present”.

Indeed, AI brings enormous advantages and transforms our societies in a variety of ways. To give but one example, the use of AI technology has allowed leading research institutes to accelerate their work on COVID-19 vaccines and to deliver results in a record time.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the risks of using AI. For example, AI can be used to control and filter information flows or to exercise automated censorship of content published on social media. And we know the result of that. Lack of transparency in data collection and its use by algorithms reduces the ability of human users to take fully informed decisions. In the criminal justice field, predictive policing and algorithms may increase discrimination and bias.

If we do not address and mitigate these risks, artificial intelligence could soon become a formidable « foe » instead of being a « friendly »

technology which expands opportunities, strengthens our democracies, and improves the daily life of our citizens.

PACE has been working in the area of AI for quite some time. Already in 2017, it adopted a report on Technological convergence, artificial intelligence and human rights, which inter alia asked the Committee of Ministers to consider how technology challenges the different dimensions of human rights. Last year, during its enlarged Standing Committee meeting on 22 October 2020, 7 reports - with resolutions and recommendations - were adopted following a thematic joint debate on different areas relating to AI and underlining both opportunities and challenges. This was because the German Presidency took it also as their priority.

These reports call for a Pan-European cross-cutting legal framework for artificial intelligence, with specific principles based on the protection of human rights, democracy and rule of law.

We strongly believe that self-regulation is neither sufficient, nor appropriate. The increasing use of artificial intelligence brings with it a new generation of human rights which must be addressed and put into a legal framework. A common Pan-European legal framework is needed to address this new generation of rights.

Now what is the way forward? Well, it is to move towards a legal framework on human rights and AI. And who else than the Council of Europe could lead on developing such a framework?

The Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI) has conducted an impressive research, mapping the rights that could be affected by the use of AI and the existing regulations that are applicable to AI.

Indeed, we are not in a legal vacuum. Many international legal instruments, including CoE treaties such as the European Convention on Human Rights, the CoE Convention on Data Protection – the famous Convention 108, or the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, are already applicable to AI systems.

But this is not enough - a consolidated and coherent legal framework is needed. As a politician and a member of Parliament, I am acutely aware of this, because the job of parliamentarians is to translate international conventions into laws, giving effect to international standards within their own domestic legal frameworks.

The feasibility study proposes elaborating a comprehensive legal framework combining binding and non-binding legal instruments, both complementing each other. We do believe that this is right way forward.

We, as the Parliamentary Assembly, are ready and willing to support this process and to make our input. Parliamentary input at all stages is particularly important, because when the international legal framework is finally in place, Parliaments will have to ratify it and adapt the relevant legislation.

To conclude, the Council of Europe has the duty to stay the world's leading standard setting organisation, in terms of human rights, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and democracy. So, it has to address artificial intelligence.

I wish you all the success in this conference, and again I thank the German Presidency for taking this very important initiative.