## Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on 'Artificial Intelligence for Europe'

(2019/C 168/03)

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| **Rapporteur:** | Jan TREI (EE/EPP), Mayor of Viimsi Rural Municipality |
| **Reference document:** | Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Artificial Intelligence for Europe |
| | COM(2018) 237 final |

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

**General comments**

1.     welcomes the Artificial intelligence for Europe communication and fully supports the aim of working out a common approach in order to boost investment, prepare for socioeconomic changes, increase legal certainty for artificial intelligence (AI) operations and draft ethical guidelines; regrets, however, the very short time granted by the European Commission for the consultation on these draft guidelines ([1]);

2.     shares the Commission's view regarding the remarkable, unprecedented change brought about by the advent of artificial intelligence; stresses the key role that AI can play in making the European Union more competitive, more inclusive and more sustainable and thereby contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to enhancing Europeans' quality of life;

3.     encourages the EU to seize the opportunity to use machines and artificial intelligence (AI) to automate procedures and recurring tasks, which they can do on a far greater scale and far more quickly than humans would be able to. At the same time, warns against the dangers of unsupervised machine learning and automated decision-making, which undermine the human dimension and the added value people provide;

4.     stresses that AI is now triggering a major transformation in Europe's economy and society – a development that will continue – and shares the view that a clear European framework is needed for AI;

5.     agrees that political leaders must make sure an AI environment is put in place and ethical guidelines drafted for the AI ecosystem. Notes, however, that legislative proposals at European level are urgently needed;

6.     notes the joint efforts of public (European, national, regional and local) and private stakeholders to incrementally raise the total volume of investment up to 2020 and beyond;

7.     underscores the importance of better meshing the European Union's various policies and programmes (including the EFSI, European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and Erasmus) in order to advance artificial intelligence;

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([1])   https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/draft-ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai

8.      takes the view that local and regional authorities should contribute to setting the conditions and a favourable environment for an increase in investment in AI in the years ahead and that these measures should be coordinated at national and European level in order to empower Europeans to become both producers and consumers of innovations;

9.      notes that investment in artificial intelligence must go hand in hand with an adapted legal framework, a definition of its interaction with public services and a regulatory approach towards the use of data and its use in public space as well as training of the general public, workers, entrepreneurs, administrations and the young generations;

10.      draws attention to the commitments in the Tallinn declaration on eGovernment (²) and points out that the use of AI in eGovernment throughout the EU can improve the efficiency and transparency of public services and access to them;

11.      stresses the importance of increasing research investment in the automation of industry using AI and substantially raising productivity in all of Europe's regions;

12.      notes that artificial intelligence and related investments in breakthrough innovation must be taken seriously at the highest political echelons in order to help improve Europe's competitiveness and the well-being of its people;

13.      recognises the efforts to boost investment in AI both during the current period and in the proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, but voices concern that the amount proposed will not be enough to tackle the challenges ahead and to react to the policies of other countries in the world;

14.      regrets that the proposed strategy is not binding on the Member States, despite AI being very important for economic growth. If Europe is serious about getting to grips with artificial intelligence, there has to be a real political and financial commitment at various levels;

15.      stresses in particular that the EU's various policy measures and programmes (such as the EFSI, European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and Erasmus) must be better dovetailed in order to advance artificial intelligence, and calls for a clear vision to this effect;

16.      insists that more flexible mechanisms for the deployment of artificial intelligence and for funding relevant innovations must be devised, since the sector is growing rapidly and drawn-out funding mechanisms are not flexible enough to keep pace with these changes;

17.      agrees that interoperability and making the most of digital capacity – including AI – are of critical importance to the public sector and areas of public interest;

18.      notes that the communication focuses on joint efforts by the (national and European) public and private sectors to foster the EU's technological and industrial capacity and the use of artificial intelligence in all sectors;

19.      points out that the stated measures do not cover the public sector at local and regional level and believes that these two levels of governance and administration should not be overlooked, since they have an important role in investing in AI and in the promotion of investment and the AI ecosystem in their areas;

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(²)    The Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment was signed on 6 October 2017 at the ministerial meeting held during the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

20.     stresses in this connection the need to bolster interregional cooperation through smart specialisation strategies. This means intra- and interregional collaboration founded on cooperation and decision-making by stakeholders from industry, research and innovation that facilitates demand-led innovation and collective solutions that can, among other things, pave the way for artificial intelligence in both public and private sectors;

21.     believes in this respect that the creation of regional ecosystems and innovation hubs can make a significant contribution towards establishing effective territorial connections and boost the EU's competitiveness and cohesion;

22.     endorses the idea of setting up a broad multi-stakeholder platform – a European AI alliance – that addresses artificial intelligence in the round, and points out that regional and local stakeholders should be enlisted in this work;

23.     is in favour of encouraging collaboration between the European AI alliance and the European Parliament, the Member States, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions;

24.     welcomes the planned support for the establishment of testing and experimentation infrastructures that can be used by companies of all sizes across all regions;

25.     backs the proposed establishment of an AI-on-demand platform to which digital innovation hubs afford easier access;

26.     believes that digital innovation hubs can play a crucial part in education and digital skills development in both the private and public sectors;

27.     notes that the Digitising European Industry initiative aims to ensure that every region has a digital innovation hub by 2020. However, many regions are still under-represented in the existing network;

28.     calls for swift action to effect a needs-based improvement in the public's digital skills and knowledge in both the public and private sectors in order to avoid inequality between people, regions and sectors in the EU;

29.     stresses the need to reinforce public-sector pilot projects in the regions in order to promote the use of AI in the living environment of the future (including demand-led transport, social services and smart cities) and to empower people to accept AI and use it to their own advantage;

30.     points out that AI can support sustainable growth through economies of scale, but also that huge added value is created through the new goods, services and innovations it makes possible;

31.     stresses that local and regional authorities must be given retraining opportunities and financial resources so that retraining can be organised in relation to those jobs that will be transformed or cease to exist because of artificial intelligence;

32.     is adamant that substantial financial resources should be provided for the development of AI (including for the Digital Europe programme for the 2021-2027 period) in the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027);

33.     stresses that the interface between urban growth, technology, infrastructure and capital requirements presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges for cities and regions, generating demand for multi-level governance and investment in physical, digital and social infrastructure. Underlines the importance of working with the private sector in order to ensure that the legislation in this area is fit for purpose;

34.    emphasises that AI is not an end in itself and that in future AI must be adapted to eGovernment and to public services;

35.    considers it vitally important that privacy and the rights of the individual be guaranteed as AI develops;

36.    highlights the importance of artificial intelligence and the links to extended Reality (XR), VR, AR, 3D technologies and robotics, which will form a new basis for global business, the platform economy and learning platforms. This can help deliver equal access to a variety of educational and cultural content and create innovative knowledge transfer platforms for retraining workers;

37.    points out that developing capacity related to artificial intelligence is a driver for the digital transformation of industry and also of the public sector;

38.    stresses that, to successfully build a Digital Europe, the EU needs in particular labour markets, training and education systems fit for the digital age. Advanced digital technologies such as high performance computing, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence are now sufficiently mature to move beyond the research arena and be deployed, implemented and scaled-up at EU level.

Brussels, 6 February 2019.

*The President*
*of the European Committee of the Regions*
Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ