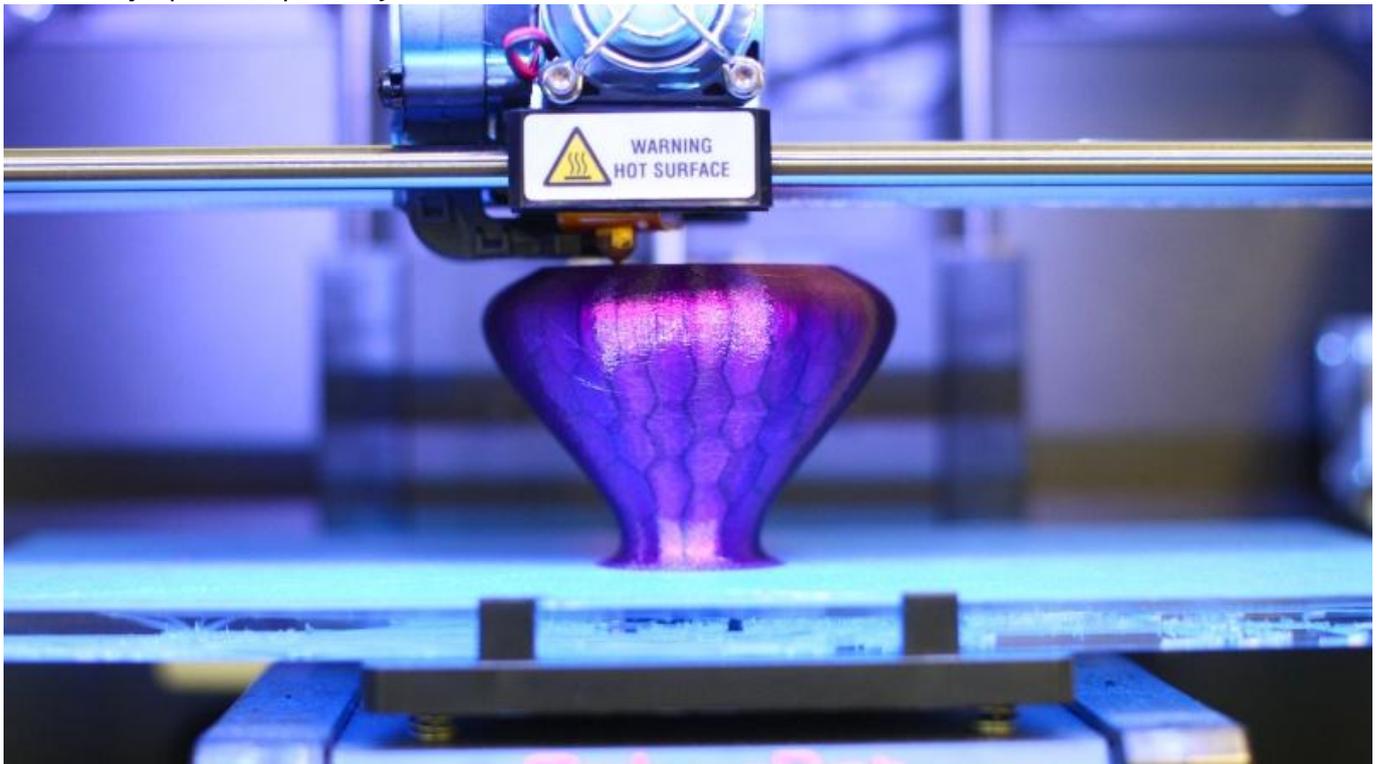


## 3D printing revolution set to challenge EU policymakers

Written by Spiro Dhapi on 2 June 2015



As technology evolves, even more industrial and consumer applications are being made available to the general public - very often taking regulators by surprise.

One of the most recent examples of these new technologies is 3D printing, a process that produces digital 'blueprints' to produce three-dimensional products and parts. It is also referred to as 'additive manufacturing' (AM).

It is believed that 3D printing - or AM - will bring a new industrial revolution on a global scale, with a great number of applications for manufacturing, healthcare, transport, defense, education or entertainment.

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An integral part of the process is the use of materials such as bioplastics, gypsum, gold and other, which certainly creates the issue of availability of these natural resources and minerals.

This topic was addressed by parliament during its last plenary session, with MEPs adopting a mandatory system of reporting on all levels of the supply chain in the production of minerals.

Transparency and availability of materials are extremely important, yet the trilogues - between the commission, council and parliament - have a lot of legislative work and compromising ahead of them.

One of the most important issues when it comes to the use of AM technologies is the legal implications, especially concerning the protection of intellectual property rights (IPR).

3D technology is a low cost means of easily reproducing objects that could potentially be protected by IPR, sparking a discussion on the balance between innovation, fair use and piracy.

The rules may be considered to be somewhat clear for the manufacturing sector. However, consumers' private use poses new challenges for the industry and for legislators in identifying the rules and legal framework that will combine growth and innovation, without suffocating development within society, increase in standards of living and respect for citizens' individual freedoms.

Another great challenge for European regulators will be the standardisation process within the AM industry.

In order to produce high quality parts, every stage of the additive manufacturing technology must be qualified and certified. The lack of such a qualification and certification system could result in low quality products, which are often dangerous in terms of consumers' health and safety.

And, standardisation would facilitate the creation of faster and more cost-effective certification of materials, processes and final products.

Most analysts agree that 3D printing could be a highly disruptive technology, potentially overhauling a large number of high impact industries. European regulators should prepare society accordingly to respond to these changes. Investing in cultural, educational and training programmes is crucial.

The EU must claim its global leadership position in additive manufacturing, however in order to do so it needs to invest heavily in the ICT sector, which will give EU industries and citizens a competitive advantage in the field.

The European digital agenda - including data protection, telecoms reform the protection of intellectual property - cannot be delayed any longer. Instead, it must be put on a fast track that will spearhead Europe's ambitions for growth.

## **About the author**

Spiro Dhapi is a technology legal and policy expert and secretary general of the young entrepreneurs

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