

Three words of advice for the new Commission on Artificial Intelligence

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DIGITALEUROPE's Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl explains how the EU can become a world leader in AI.



Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl, Director General of DIGITALEUROPE | Photo credit: DIGITALEUROPE

Incoming European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has pledged to present an EU approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) within her first 100 days of taking office.

However, the clock is already ticking and the EU needs to look at boosting the uptake and development of AI now while safeguarding citizens' rights, values and principles.

This is an opportunity to not only build a framework for 'Trustworthy AI', but also to take a leading role in AI to society's benefit.

To do this, there are three points to keep in mind: working with the tools that we have, applying agile and inclusive policymaking, and boosting investment.

To start, let's not fall into the trap of limiting or overregulating the market.

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While there are many concerns around AI, such as discrimination, bias, privacy and data protection, Europe is exemplary at setting standards and has already established some of the strongest and most robust rights to tackle such concerns.

Before adding further regulation, we must first ask: Is there anything which prevents us from reaching our goals?

We should explore whether our existing tools and legislation need to be reviewed with additional guidance, rather than tabling new additional rules.

Secondly, Europe has a great tradition of dialogue and collaborating with multiple stakeholders. We need to do more of this and with an element of speed and agility.

Advisory bodies, such as the AI High-Level Expert Group, were created to exchange views and collect feedback from civil society, industry, public sector, research, ethics and philosophy experts and representatives.

For example, AI relies on accurate and complete high-quality data sets.

It is therefore critical to encourage and incentivise data sharing by all involved parties to ensure that the integrity of these data sets is maintained.

This can be achieved through industry standardisation, common data spaces and sandboxing exercises. Working together within value chains is the way forward.

“In Europe, there is little private capital investment in AI, with the US seeing ten times the investment and China six times as much”

We must also develop our AI competencies across society, using bottom-up solutions rather than a single top-down approach.

It's vital that we boost both basic and advanced digital skills, across both science and engineering, as well as arts and culture, because Europe's population should be encouraged to innovate and be creative, empowered by technology.

We have a lot of talent here in Europe, but we need to nurture it.

Finally, we can't talk about high ambitions without addressing the crucial question of investment.

In Europe, there is little private capital investment in AI, with the US seeing ten times the investment and China six times as much.

We need to raise the bar to at least €20bn per year to catch up and reduce this gap in AI research, while fostering an innovative public-private funding and cooperation environment.

Investments in both deployment and excellence are needed to grow and innovate AI in the short and long-term.

Good initiatives for deployment are on the table, such as the DIGITALEUROPE programme, but its proposed €9bn pales in the grand scheme of things.

This should be increased ten-fold to achieve the substantial growth that Europe needs.

“We can steer the direction of AI and use it to help us reach our sustainability goals, improve the quality and accessibility of public administrations, drive economic growth and create a fairer and smarter society”

To sustain long-term excellence, Horizon Europe needs to be expanded as well.

Whether through grants, public procurement or loans, investment in AI should tailor funding rules for business relevance and to attract key industrial sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing and automotive, as well as the public sector.

If we move fast and get this right, then the EU can be more than an AI leader.

We can steer the direction of AI and use it to help us reach our sustainability goals, improve the quality and accessibility of public administrations, drive economic growth and create a fairer and smarter society.

These are our common objectives and we look forward to achieving them together.

About the author

Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl is Director General of DIGITALEUROPE, the leading digital technology industry association representing over 35,000 digital companies Europe. She is a member of the European Commission’s High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, a board member of the Commission’s Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, and a board member of the European Parliament-led European Internet Forum.

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