Press remarks by President von der Leyen on the Commission's new strategy: Shaping Europe's Digital Future

Brussels, 19 February 2020

Thank you so much. Indeed, today, the College adopted a whole package on our digital strategy: It is the White Book for Artificial Intelligence and the Data Strategy. We do have in Europe a long history of technological success and innovation. We have big businesses, we have a very strong industry. And in Europe, we are caring very much for individual rights and our values. And the digital strategy we put forward today is connecting all these dots and putting it into a concept. We want the digital transformation to power our economy and we want to find European solutions in the digital age.

So let me start with Artificial Intelligence. We all know that Artificial Intelligence can do amazing things. And I think we do not talk enough about what Artificial Intelligence is able to do to improve our daily lives. For example, if we look at the health care sector, we know that we use already now Artificial Intelligence for, for example, better diagnoses and earlier diagnoses. And better and earlier diagnoses are crucial when you treat for example cancer – or we use robots for precision surgery.

But Artificial Intelligence is also key for us when we want to reach our goal to be climate neutral in 2050. Just think of precision farming: Precision farming, AI-driven, enables us to reduce pesticides, enables us to reduce fertilisers, for example. Or if you think of smart heating: Smart heating, AI-driven again, is saving millions and millions of tonnes of oil for example and therefore reducing the CO_2 footprint.

AI will not only improve our daily lives, but Europe is already leading in AI. Europe has a pole position and we should also be aware of that: We produce 25% of all industrial robots, for example. And if you look at our manufacturers, every second of them is using, already today, at least one AI application. And if you look at the science field, the research field, you see when you look at the articles that are published: The most articles are published from the European science community. So we have a pole position in AI. But of course we are aware of the fact, things are moving on so fast, that we have to do more. And therefore, we want to boost European Artificial Intelligence by attracting more than EUR 20 billion per year, for the next decade.

Artificial Intelligence is about big data, data, data and again data. And we all know that the more data we have, the smarter our algorithms. This is a very simple equation. And therefore, it is so important to have access to data that are out there. This is why we want to give our businesses, but also our researchers, and the public services better access to data. We all know that we are generating, by the day, data and data again. Today, for example, the global amount of data that is produced, when you look five years ahead from now, this amount of data will be only produced by Europe. So we have a huge amount of data that is collected – often just by accident – and we want to give better access to Europeans to these data that are out there.

Europe has a good advantage in the quality of data we have, because we have a broad economic diversity with our small and medium enterprises – what we call 'Mittelstand' –, with our industry, it is a very diverse and rich landscape. And therefore, the data that are collected in Europe on a daily basis are very diverse and rich, too: Industry data, commercial data, data from factories, machines, cars, weather stations, you just name it. It is a fact that the majority of data we collect today are never ever used even once. And this is not at all sustainable. In these data we collect – that are out there – lies an enormous amount of precious ideas, potential innovation, untapped potential we have to unleash.

And therefore, we follow the principle that you have to offer, in Europe we have to offer, data spaces where you can not only store your data, but also share with others. And therefore, we want to create European data spaces where businesses, governments and researchers can not only store their data, but also have access to other data they need for their innovation.

Research is a classical thing: Of course you need to store your data, but it is of utmost importance and interest for researchers to access the data of other researchers to go into new fields and to push

forward innovation. To create these European Union data spaces and cloud infrastructure, we want to trigger investments of EUR 4 to 6 billion. The value of the data economy is enormous. In the European Union, it is EUR 300 billion right away, this is 2.4% of the Gross Domestic Product – this is today. In five years, it will be estimated three times as much. So you see the speed at which this is growing. And this also means creating jobs. Today, we have 5.7 million jobs, in five years, these will – estimated – be about 11 million jobs. Therefore, our focus in the data strategy and in the White Book for AI is also strongly on skills, because we need those skills to fill the jobs I was just talking about.

There is a good story to tell about AI in Europe, data in Europe. But of course, with every good part, there is also the part of the risks. And in his widely quoted book '21 lessons for the 21st century' Yuval Noah Harari said – and I want to quote that, because it is very nice – 'humans were always far better at inventing tools than using them wisely'. So these so-called 'new tools': We want citizens to trust the new technology. And technology is always neutral, it depends on what we make with it. And therefore, we want the application of these new technologies to deserve the trust of our citizens. This is why we are promoting a responsible, human-centric approach to Artificial Intelligence. We will be particularly careful with sectors where essential human interests and rights are at stake: This is for example recruitment; this is for example the healthcare sector. But it is also transport, it is police and law enforcement. And you can think about other fields, too.

Artificial Intelligence must serve people and therefore, Artificial Intelligence must always comply with people's rights. This is why a person must always be in control of critical decisions. And so-called 'high-risk AI', this is AI that potentially interferes with people's rights – have to be tested and certified before they reach our Single Market. This is a very simple question, because we do it just the same way with for example cars or chemicals, or cosmetics, or toys. They have to be tested and certified before they enter the Single Market.

And there is a second point in it: We have to make sure that the data used is free of any bias. So as I said initially, the algorithm is as smart as the data you feed it. So if you feed an algorithm with data, for example, that are mainly produced in a field where you have men – in the medical sector – an AI-driven therapeutic or diagnostic instrument will not be fit for purpose if you have a population where you have women that are treated with these applications. Therefore, to have non-biased data is of utmost importance and we have to be very vigilant in this field.

Overall, today's message is that Artificial Intelligence is a huge opportunity in Europe, for Europe. We do have a lot, but we have to unleash this potential that is out there. We want this innovation in Europe. We want to encourage our businesses, our researchers, the innovators, the entrepreneurs, to develop Artificial Intelligence. And we want to encourage our citizens to feel confident to use it. In Europe, basically we do have all what we need, but we have to unleash this potential. Thank you.

SPEECH/20/294

Related media

- Statement of Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, on the Commission's new strategy: Shaping Europe's Digital Future
- Press statement by EC President Ursula VON DER LEYEN on the Commission's new strategy: Shaping Europe's Digital Future