

CLAIRE, the world's largest network for artificial intelligence research, welcomes new EU plan

Yesterday, the European Commission unveiled its ambitious plan for "A Europe fit for the digital age", consisting of a strategy for data and a white paper on artificial intelligence. The Commission's plan adopts all key parts of the vision for excellence in AI unveiled by CLAIRE, the Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial Intelligence Research in Europe, in June 2018.

CLAIRE welcomes the move by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to take decisive action for driving key technological areas forward. Von der Leyen has made action on artificial intelligence (AI) a top priority, which is much needed in light of the societal and economic impact of AI technology and the massive investments elsewhere, notably in China and the United States.

Only 20 months ago, hundreds of experts in artificial intelligence across all of Europe set up CLAIRE to harness ideas and insights on how Europe can take a leading role in research and innovation in artificial intelligence. Considering how AI technologies increasingly define how we work, live and solve problems as individuals and societies, this is of crucial importance to citizens across Europe. Since then CLAIRE has grown to represent more than 350 AI research labs and organizations, representing more than 21,000 researchers and staff from across all of Europe.

- We are delighted to see that the plan outlined in the Commission's white paper is in strong agreement with the vision for European excellence in AI pursued by CLAIRE from the beginning, says Holger Hoos, Professor of Machine Learning at Leiden University, The Netherlands and one of CLAIRE's founders.

- In its new plan, the Commission argues for investment into all areas of AI, across all of Europe, while ensuring a human-centred focus of AI technology, continues Prof. Hoos.

- This is precisely what CLAIRE has been advocating since its inception in June 2018. The Commission also embraces *AI for Good* (including the use of AI towards meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals) and *AI for All* - both of which are prominent focus areas for CLAIRE.

CLAIRE applauds the von der Leyen Commission for its focus on human-centred, trustworthy AI and ethical boundaries, and on mobilising AI competence across all of Europe. The white paper recognises the need for a broad network of AI research centres, and for larger-scale facilities, focussed on strategic application sectors, ranging from agriculture to energy and financial services.

Even more importantly, it calls for the creation of a European AI hub - "a lighthouse centre of AI research and innovation" that will attract talent from all over the world.

- This concept of a hub, inspired by the widely recognised success of CERN, has been one of the key elements of the CLAIRE vision since we unveiled it in June 2018, says Prof. Philipp Slusallek, scientific director at the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) and co-initiator of CLAIRE.

- This "lighthouse" will bring together top researchers from across Europe and around the world, continues professor Slusallek. It will become a focal point for large-scale research initiatives (e.g., in

robotics or autonomous transportation), and a widely visible symbol for European excellence and ambition in artificial intelligence.

The Commission strongly argues that “the EU must act as one”. This is not only true for its member states, but also applies to the European AI research community. Instead of highlighting differences in methodology and techniques, it becomes important to focus on “excellence across all of AI” by bringing communities together and combining their expertise for jointly realising the many promises of AI for Europe. This part of the CLAIRE vision is now strongly supported by the white paper.

The Commission's approach also addresses the need for a regulatory framework for AI in Europe.

– We very much agree with the risk-based approach to regulation adopted in the white paper, especially for the highly sensitive applications of AI discussed by the Commission, says Prof. Jeroen van den Hoven from Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands, one of CLAIRE's leading experts on ethical, legal and social aspects of AI.

– It's also very good to see a clear acknowledgement that, given how fast AI is evolving, the regulatory framework needs to leave room to account for future developments. Overall, this looks like a measured and well-reflected approach to the tricky issue of regulation.

– It's encouraging to see concrete, short-term action in the Commission's plan, in addition to a consultative approach on how to move forward, says Dr. Morten Irgens from Oslo Metropolitan University, co-founder of CLAIRE, – but more short-term action is needed to stay competitive with other major players.

– CLAIRE has put together concrete ideas and proposals on what to do in this regard. We are also committed to providing the Commission with detailed input and feedback on its white paper from our broad community of AI experts over the coming weeks.

– As the world's largest network for scientists, laboratories and institutes in AI, CLAIRE is a great resource with substantial combined competence. Its bottom-up, community-driven approach nicely complements the top-down process put into place by the European Commission, adds Prof. Hoos.

– Europe is home to many of the world's best AI researchers. A bold and ambitious push, a Europe-wide initiative, will bring together those experts, connect them better with each other and with those who want to use artificial intelligence to address important problems, such as climate change. It's very good to see not only the Commission's ambitions in this regard, but also the close alignment between its plan and the direction advocated by AI experts across Europe. Let's now work closely together to realise this ambition.

About CLAIRE

CLAIRE (Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial Intelligence Research in Europe, claire-ai.org) is an organisation created by the European AI community that seeks to strengthen European excellence in AI research and innovation, with a strong focus on human-centred AI. CLAIRE aims to establish a world-wide brand recognition for "AI made in Europe" (at the level of CERN), and to position Europe in control of its own future.

CLAIRE was launched in June 2018 and now has the support of more than 3,300 people, most of them scientists, technologists, and researchers in Artificial Intelligence. The supporters represent the vast majority of Europe's AI community, spanning academia and industry, research and innovation. Among the supporters are more than 140 fellows from various key scientific associations. CLAIRE has opened administrative offices in The Hague, Saarbrücken, Prague and Rome, with additional offices to be opened this year in Brussels, Oslo, Paris and Zürich. Furthermore, nine advisory groups with 48 members from 18 countries have been established, covering all areas of AI, along with the topics of ethical, legal and social implications of AI.

CLAIRE's membership network consists of over 350 research groups and research institutions, covering jointly more than 21,000 employees in 34 countries. In addition, CLAIRE is in the process of setting up an industry network, in order to foster close links between non-profit research and impactful industrial applications.

The CLAIRE vision for excellence in European AI has received official letters of support from the governments of nine European countries, from 28 scientific associations across all of Europe, from the European Association for Artificial Intelligence (EurAI, which is the key European association for AI researchers), from the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI, the key international association for AI), and from the European Space Agency (ESA).

CLAIRE is also actively liaising, on an ongoing basis, with other important organisations, including ELLIS, the HumanE AI consortium, the Big Data Value Association, euRobotics and AI4EU, as well as ESA.

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Holger Hoos (CLAIRE leadership), Professor of Machine Learning, Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands

Tel. +31 71 527 5777

E-Mail: hh@liacs.nl

Alexa Kodde, MSc, Project Coordinator CLAIRE

Tel. +31 72 527 4799

E-Mail: contact@claire-ai.org



Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (right), in conversation with Hans De Canck, manager of the AI Experience Centre and CLAIRE office in Brussels (left).

<https://claire-ai.org/hansursula/> (permission to use is granted)