Call for European Action on Artificial Intelligence Gains Momentum

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A week after 600 leading experts in artificial intelligence released a letter calling on European and national leaders to drastically ramp up their support for research excellence and innovation in artificial intelligence (AI), their CLAIRE initiative has attracted 1600 supporters, spread to most of Europe, and established common ground with the ELLIS initiative, aimed at strengthening outstanding and free basic research in the area of machine learning.

A very long list of Europe's top researchers in artificial intelligence call for a Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial Intelligence Research In Europe (CLAIRE). Among them are Professor Michèle Sebag, member of the French Academy of Technologies and director of LRI at Université Paris-Sud, and Professor Marc Schoenauer, *Directeur de Recherche* at INRIA Saclay - Île-de-France and member of the recent Villani mission on French AI strategy:

–We welcome the advent of a unified community of European researchers under the broad banner of AI. It is an initiative that starts with, but is not limited to, machine learning, and that puts humane values upfront. We strongly support the establishment of CLAIRE.

Europe needs to step up

Artificial intelligence will fundamentally change the way we live and work in the future. The CLAIRE initiative is therefore calling for Europe to take control of a vital part of its future.

–Europe has always played a major role in AI, but now there is a danger that we will be left behind, says Professor Ramon Lopez de Mantaras, a Fellow of EurAI and director of the Artificial Intelligence Research Institute in Spain. –This initiative is therefore much needed. We need to boost AI in Europe by performing high quality human-centred AI research across all of AI and all of Europe.

Europe needs to put people in the centre

As one of its three key tenets, the CLAIRE initiative emphasises that the development and use of AI technology should put the human in the centre - a view shared by the European Commission. Frank van Harmelen, Member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands, explains: –AI techniques must be human-centred, and Europe can bring this to the current AI revolution. AI machines that collaborate with people instead of replacing them, AI programmes that can explain their conclusions, and that respect important values such as transparency and fairness are crucial to the beneficial use of this technology for society.

Europe needs all of AI

Europe has earlier seen a call for investment in machine learning research, known as the ELLIS initiative. CLAIRE strongly supports machine learning, but says AI is about much more.

–Our mission is to strengthen AI research in Europe, to retain and develop talent, says Holger Hoos, Professor of Machine Learning at the University of Leiden and one of the initiators of CLAIRE. –Machine learning is an area of key importance within AI, and a major focus within our broadly conceived CLAIRE initiative. So, naturally, we strongly support what ELLIS is calling for. In fact, we see their initiative as a fundamental part of an effort that involves the entire European AI community, he explains, –especially, since machine learning is typically most effective when combined with techniques from other areas of AI. Such combinations will enable the next leap forward in AI.

–We are very excited to have just agreed with key supporters of ELLIS to jointly push for the establishment of common infrastructure, including significant data, computing, and networking resources, says Professor Philipp Slusallek, Scientific Director of German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) and co-initiator of CLAIRE. –Infrastructure at Google-scale is needed to do top-notch research in all areas of AI, especially Machine Learning, and we would like the CLAIRE Hub - the CERN-like central facility we propose to create – to provide this.

Francesca Rossi, member of the EU High Level Expert Group on AI, IBM's Global Leader for AI Ethics and professor at the University of Padova, adds: –Machine learning is giving amazing perception capabilities to AI. But only a combination of data-driven and reasoning capabilities, together with a careful analysis of the ethical behaviour and implication of AI, performed in a multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder and multi-cultural environment, can significantly advance this powerful technology and make it beneficial to humanity.

–This is why it is so important for the CLAIRE and ELLIS initiatives to jointly pursue their common goal, says Hoos, –and it's amazing to have so many of Europe's top experts working together on this.

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