Article 17 dialogue seminar
'The ethical and social impact of artificial intelligence'

8 June 2026
Berlaymont Building (room S9), Brussels

Summaries of presentations

1st session – 'Quo vadis society?' Current social and ethical challenges

Professor Markus Krienke: *'Quo vadis society?' Current social and ethical challenges*

AI has become essential for addressing the complexity of modern societies, from healthcare and education to justice and public administration. Yet it also risks undermining human autonomy through surveillance, data-driven control, and market-driven forms of governance. Through these tendencies, the rise of "dataism" challenges the modern understanding of the person as a rational and moral subject. Therefore, law and social institutions must be renewed to protect work, education and democratic participation in the age of AI.

Professor Jörg Kopecz: *Mastering the Wave — or Being Shaped by It*

Every technology is a transitional technology. How we adopt one — and whether we adopt it well — depends less on the technology itself than on the cultural, ethical and human conditions that are easy to overlook while we marvel at the speed. Artificial intelligence is accelerating exponentially, and Europe rightly insists that it remain human-centric. But "human-centric" presupposes an answer to a prior question we rarely make explicit: what, exactly, is the human at the centre?

This contribution argues -from a machine learning view- that AI systems already encode an implicit answer — the human as a function, an input, a point of control or correction within a process — and that this functional image is being built into our workplaces, our classrooms and our public sphere faster than we are deciding whether we accept it. A second, quieter constraint compounds this: our cognitive grasp of a new technology runs ahead of our emotional capacity to integrate it — the "head–heart gap" documented in the neuroscience of adaptation. Together these shape the concrete questions of work (what "human oversight" really delivers), education (what AI literacy must actually build) and democracy (why disinformation targets the slower, affective system). Crucially, Europe must answer this

question as an adopter more than an originator: the dominant systems are currently built elsewhere, and the prosperity that underwrites Europe's values depends on not losing economic ground.

In this context the author invites the group to treat the image of the human not as a philosophical afterthought to AI governance, but as its first — and most practical — decision, esp. as the perceived man-machine distinction may erode in the future.

Dr. Dorothea Winter: ***Quo vadis, AI? A Humanist Approach for Europe***

The European challenge of AI is, at bottom, one of ownership: a small number of non-European corporations command the models, compute and data from which European citizens form their judgement - what I call epistemic AI-neocolonialism. Speaking from the humanist tradition, I argue that Europe's distinctive answer is not to outspend Silicon Valley but to build AI differently, on the principle that information is a public good and that judgement, not consumption, is what such infrastructure must protect.

Recent cases such as the AI-generated audio targeting the 2023 Slovak election and the Romanian Constitutional Court's annulment of the first round of a presidential election in December 2024 show what a non-ethical infrastructure produces. Europe's response cannot be limited to regulating third-country providers operating in the single market: it must include building a European AI of our own. I propose one on the post-1945 public-service broadcasting model (publicly funded, owned in Europe, bound to European fundamental rights). The task before the Commission, in Kant's sense, is to make maturity buildable: an information infrastructure on which European citizens can think rather than be thought for.

2nd session – How to live with AI ? Legal and regulatory tools

Hedi Blili-Gouyou: ***Ethics as Infrastructure: Three Operational Levers for Turning the AI Act into a Democratic Advantage***

Following the morning's session which mapped the ethical and social fault lines opened by artificial intelligence — the risks to fundamental rights, democratic processes, and social equality. This intervention takes the next step: what concrete legal and regulatory tools can actually close the gap between principles and enforceable protection?

The central argument inverts the dominant narrative. Europe's regulatory architecture — the AI Act, the GDPR, the emerging Democracy Shield — is not a handicap in the global AI race. It is an infrastructure of trust that functions as a durable competitive asset through three operational levers: the 'Brussels Effect', which transforms European standards into de facto global norms; compliance as a structural barrier to entry, converting certification into market access and public procurement advantage; and the right to actionable explanation, which moves transparency from a rhetorical commitment to an individually enforceable fundamental right. Together, these levers demonstrate that ethics and innovation are not antagonistic — they are mutually constitutive. The question is no longer whether to regulate, but how to regulate strategically.

Professor Thomas Ploug: ***Empowering the Individual: Actionable Rights and Human Dignity in the AI Era***

As Artificial Intelligence rapidly transforms every sector and institution of society, current top-down regulatory approaches often inadvertently disempower the individuals they aim to protect. This talk argues for a critical paradigm shift whereby the role of citizens in regulating the AI future is strengthened. We must move beyond abstract guidelines and introduce AI-specific, "actionable" rights that give individuals the practical means to understand and challenge automated systems. By equipping citizens with these concrete safeguards, we ensure that technological advancement fundamentally respects and honours human dignity.

Professor Florin Pop: ***Can we learn with AI? The education of Artificial Intelligence tools***

Humans, as unique beings and persons, have the right to a life lived with dignity and freedom on their path to fulfillment. Respect and protection of dignity, as an inviolable right and the basis of fundamental rights, are inscribed in the social, cultural, political-administrative, familial, but especially spiritual context in which human lives. Nowadays, all these dimensions of life are penetrated and determined by the technological system, especially artificial intelligence, which, through its construction, irreversibly shapes society's evolution and transformation. In the history of mankind, no other technology has penetrated so quickly and has demanded so much from human persons as the system of information technology, computing systems, communication channels, artificial intelligence, and virtual environments, all guided by a society strongly determined by consumerism and globalization, in which human happiness is related more to its measure than to its living.

The design and development of current systems are guided and dictated by the adoption of artificial intelligence models as technologies for processing information and assisting decision-making. The current presentation addresses aspects of IA adoption in our society, interactions between people, and, especially, its impact on the educational system. The new paradigm makes technology adopted with unimaginable ease, changing the relationships between people, our way of perceiving the world and the life we live, the pace of our professional and personal activities, but also the social position we have, the structure of our intellectual development, transforming even our relationship with the space and time we live in. Moreover, to date, no other technology has had such a significant impact on our spiritual life. Artificial intelligence is already being used for language learning and for performing differentiated tasks in personalized teaching and learning. The immediate implications of AI in education, such as adaptive learning, instant feedback, teacher support, and more, come with challenges and ethical considerations, including technological dependency, the risk of bias and misinformation, data security, and, perhaps most importantly, the limitation or even destruction of creativity / learning.

Concluding remarks

Prof. Philip McDonagh: ***AI: issues for the future***

The Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations of the Dublin City University has produced a report on the ethics of AI, which summarizes a number of issues to be looked at when looking at the future of AI (available online at: https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/20678_ethics_of_ai_report_a4.pdf).

This report is the product of a multi-stakeholder project, initiated under the European Future Talks, which addresses different AI-related issues (the information environment, health and mental health, education, the future of work, military implications). The report also looks at the wider governance issues (core sciences; the "AI governance pyramid") and finally at the role of faith groups in helping to define shared values around AI and to understand the historical context.