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Europe aiming for leadership in Artificial Intelligence

- European Commission presents its AI Strategy
- Bitkom welcomes ambitious objectives and calls for more determined measures

Berlin, 25. April 2018 - Germany's digital association Bitkom welcomes today's plans by the European Commission to support Artificial Intelligence in the EU, but calls for even more efforts to achieve global leadership in developing the technology. "AI's potential is evident. In only a few years, it will be found in almost all products and services. Subsequent changes for our daily lives and economies' can only be compared with the advent of electrification and the combustion engine," according to Bitkom's president Achim Berg. "When it comes to AI development, Europe - and Germany in particular - have been in the lead over the past decades. However, at the moment the US and China are racing ahead. It is only logical and to be welcomed that the European Commission reacts with its own strategy, but the announced measures need to be even more determined to achieve the proclaimed objectives. Global leadership requires the necessary funds and instruments – wishful thinking without adequate action will not work".

At the center of the announcements are annual investments of 500 million EUR for general research and innovation in AI until 2020. In addition, 500 million EUR shall come from the European Fund for Strategic Investments until 2020 for AI projects. For the period between 2021 and 2027, the plans indicate increasing investments without going into detail. "These sums can only be the beginning and will have to be further increased in the next EU budget. In comparison to other international players, Europe is not on equal footing. Compared to the general expenditure on research and innovation, the share allocated to AI is too low taking into account the outstanding role the technology will play in the development of our economies across all sectors," adds Berg. The budget for research and innovation under Horizon 2020 was around 10 billion EUR per year between 2014 and 2020. According to Berg, "Instead of distributing money too broadly, a focus on key technologies with the highest lever effect would be most useful and in this regard AI is most relevant".

Besides higher investments in research and innovation, the EU intends to establish a network of Digital Innovation Hubs with a particular focus on AI. These on-demand platforms are supposed to facilitate the access of SMEs to the technology as well as to encourage them to test and apply AI. "Whether the EU will achieve a successful coordination of existing and future AI initiatives without creating parallel structures will be another decisive factor," says Berg. "At the same time, we need a regulatory framework which facilitates not only AI research, but also its application. There is little use in spending billions on fundamental research without applying the technology in practice, for instance with regard to applications in the health sector and vis-à-vis data protection provisions. Without regulatory support, there is real danger that the investments will not yield their full potential".

The EU also wants to assess the consequences of AI on the labor market by establishing an expert group and developing ethical guidelines. "We need to engage actively with legal and ethical questions around AI. We need societal consensus, as wide acceptance of AI systems will be needed to improve people's lives as well as the competitiveness of our economies," concludes Berg.

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