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Speech by

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Need for democratic governance of artificial intelligence

on the occasion of the OECD Global Parliamentary Network

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Citation from Yuval Noah Harari – 21 Lessons for the 21st Century: The emergence of liberal democracies is associated with ideals of liberty and equality that may seem self-evident and irreversible. But these ideals are far more fragile than we believe.

The crisis in liberal democracies. Confrontation between supposed elites and the masses. Democracies find it difficult to come up with solutions for increasingly complex problems.

This is due to the most rapid technological development ever seen in human history, the advent of the digital age. Whilst the initial promise of new technologies as extraordinary tools for democratic action, participation and pluralism cannot be denied, in recent years these technologies have also revealed a darker side: their ability to distort meaning, to erode reality and to manipulate personal data.

Looking at AI or machine learning, we see that these now pervade every aspect of our lives; however, it is impossible for us to know how much and how our lives – and our conception of ourselves as human beings – will be affected by these technologies. Governments and democratic institutions are finding it difficult to understand the effects that AI will have on politics. And yet the Cambridge Analytica case is clear. It is our task as policymakers to ask ourselves which ethical or even ontological questions we need to address. And how we should address them.

Example 1: is there or is there not a de-responsabilisation of people and social structures underway? We delegate many of our decisions to AI algorithms, which know us in detail through our personal data. We even allow these algorithms to pre-empt our decisions. Consider Google Maps. Or the vehicles driven by computers that will soon be available on the market. We delegate to them the choice over whether or not it is better to crash into a wall in order to avoid hitting a pedestrian. But can a machine designed by humans take decisions that are better than human decisions? And what about free will, the core prerequisite for our rights? Where does this end up? What about my responsibility in all this? Decisions can only be made with a particular goal in mind: but what goal can a machine have, and who decides what it is? AI is already capable of deciding how best to make financial investments, assessing the educational achievements of our children, deciding whom to marry or predicting whether a person will commit crime. And perhaps it is even capable of deciding whom I'll vote for at the next elections.

Example 2: what are the constraints on the high-tech companies that write these programs? Often they are bound only by some self-regulatory codes, which they have in actual fact written themselves. Is this right, or should they be regulated in a more structured manner? And a further question: is it right for private algorithms to carry out public functions?

In order to answer these questions, an inclusive, critical and open discussion has to take place not only within individual governments but also and above all within supranational institutions. The purpose is to maximise benefits and reduce the risks to society of these technological advances.

For example, **Italy** has developed a national strategy as part of the European Digital Agenda involving a three-year information technology plan. It has also issued a white paper in order to analyse the impact of AI on society, and in particular on the civil service, with a view to promoting digital transformation. This is an important first step.

However, there are institutions such as the Council of Europe which in my view could really make a difference. These are bodies that have for some time been working on ways to enable close co-operation between and among member states. They have created a single, shared, pan-European legal space, which means that their pro-human rights initiatives can really have a global impact.

In this respect the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE – which I am representing today – has played a very active role. In 2017 it adopted a resolution on technological convergence, AI and human rights. It then went on to set up the Sub-Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights within the Committee on Legal Affairs. Finally, last April the Political Affairs Committee appointed me as

rapporteur for a motion on the need for democratic governance of artificial intelligence. The purpose of this report is to analyse the impact of AI on democratic processes and above all to respond to the need to create a national and international regulatory framework in order to ensure that AI is not used in a manner that interferes with democratic processes.

The report will also seek to cast light on the particular ways in which digital technology could jeopardise or destabilise democracy. These include:

- co-ordinated wide-scale disinformation;
- micro-targeting of voters;
- polarisation of political debate;
- the erosion of civil rights through algorithmic biases.

How far can AI influence the operation of democratic processes? How is it capable of interfering with electoral processes, by influencing choices and political opinions? Will the wide-scale use by states of AI-based technologies in order to control citizens lead to the erosion of political freedoms and the emergence of digital authoritarianism?

With this report, I hope that the Parliamentary Assembly will adopt an approach that is as holistic as possible and arrive at a consolidated position – speaking in a single voice if possible – and put forward broad proposals.

This is not an easy task. As institutions we are only beginning to appreciate the implications of this extraordinary revolution. However, we will need to pursue dialogue and a proactive approach if we are to build up a relationship of trust with AI at global level. We are already late. We run the risk of continuing not to address the question in a co-ordinated and open manner. As a result, we are letting AI co-opt our everyday decision-making mechanisms – often unseen – at both individual and collective levels. And we are not even aware that this is happening.

The fourth industrial revolution – a cognitive revolution – calls for an entirely new approach to democratic governance. This is essential if we are to capitalise on this unique opportunity we have to shape a fair and value-based development of humanity through technology. Otherwise, technology will hollow out the very essence of humanity, and there will be nothing fair and no values left any more. There will be nothing left to shape.