



## **High level Conference: Artificial intelligence**

**Remarks by Thorbjørn Jagland,  
Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

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*Check against delivery*

Foreign Minister, ladies and gentlemen,

I begin by thanking the Finnish Presidency for co-organising and hosting this Conference.

The range of experts and interested parties here today reflects a pressing reality:

That the Artificial Intelligence revolution long forecast is no longer something for the future:

Rather, we are living with it in the here and now.

Modern technologies, most of which based on algorithms and machine learning, already influence the information we consume, the opinions we form, and the everyday choices we make, including what we are encouraged to watch on television.

And they already have the potential to do much more.

-For example, to determine who should – and who should not – be entitled to health care, and to administer what treatment is prescribed;

-To assist in the identification of likely criminals, monitor their activities, and play a key role in determining their guilt.

-And to recruit employees and determine the conditions in which they work.

All of these things have the potential to benefit our societies:

Healthier citizens, lower crime rates, economic growth.

But progress in these areas – and so many others – must not be made at the expense of our core values.

People are right to ask whether a society driven by statistical models and machine learning might remain human but stop being humane –

Whether innovation might undermine the human rights, democracy and rule of law which have been so hard won in Europe, and which the Council of Europe was established to protect.

So the goal of this Conference must be to separate fact from fiction –

To distinguish clearly what are the real advantages that AI offers, what are the risks that accompany them, and how best can we prevent and mitigate those dangers.

We are fortunate to bring together at this event such a wide range of organisations, practitioners and experts.

You are among those who know this field best, and I have every faith that, together, you will bring new ideas and proposals to the table.

For our part at the Council of Europe, we have already taken a leading role in helping our member states to harvest the opportunities that come with technological innovation while safeguarding the standards that stem from the European Convention on Human Rights and other legal benchmarks.

Ours was the first international organisation to ensure data protection laws in Europe that respect individuals' rights through our Convention 108, recently updated as Convention 108+.

The Council of Europe constructed the first binding legal instrument on biomedicine and banned human cloning by means of our Oviedo Convention and its protocols.

And the fight against cybercrime in Europe today is co-ordinated by means of our Budapest Convention.

We have already taken proactive steps to address some of the challenges associated with AI too.

Our European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice – CEPEJ – adopted last December a European Ethical Charter on the use of artificial intelligence in judicial systems – the first international charter of its kind.

Our Committee of Ministers adopted just this month a Declaration on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes.

And our Steering Committee on Media and the Information Society is finalising a draft Recommendation on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems, with specific guidance to member states on action that should be taken, including in the areas of public communication and opinion forming.

We are also looking at ways to help equality bodies to prevent discrimination.

But important as these measures are, it is clear to us that more must be done.

As technology advances, new AI-related challenges are emerging.

For example, in the field of biomedicine;

In terms of electoral interference as we witnessed in the role of Cambridge Analytica during the Brexit referendum and in recent attempts apparently foiled by Facebook;

And in the area of counter-terrorism, where we might ask ourselves what role AI should play in predicting and counteracting activities perpetrated by criminals who will in turn be looking to hack technology and deploy AI against innocent people.

So I am clear that the Council of Europe must move forward with new thinking: a strategic, transversal approach with the binding and non-binding frameworks that will protect the 830 million Europeans that we represent.

This includes the possibility of a binding Framework Convention to ensure that AI is designed, developed and applied in line with European standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

So I ask you not to hold back.

Use this event to contribute your thoughts – thoughts that will in turn inform our approach.

Because, together, we can find a way forward that harnesses AI for the good of all Europeans, upholding the rights to which each and every individual is entitled.

I wish you a successful Conference.