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## CLAIRE: We Need to Take Bold Steps to Keep Europe Competitive in Artificial Intelligence

*European Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at a crossroads, given the huge investments in the technology in the US and China. "Bold and disruptive steps must be taken very quickly to maintain Europe's strong position in artificial intelligence" is the clear message sent by over 100 key representatives of the European AI community at a meeting last Friday in Brussels. The meeting was organized by CLAIRE (Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial Intelligence Research in Europe), a quickly growing grassroots initiative of top European researchers and stakeholders in artificial intelligence, with already over 2100 supporters from 29 countries. CLAIRE aims for "AI made in Europe, for Europe and the world."*

Instead of the usual funding for many individual research activities, the group agreed that Europe needs a bold and focussed push for excellence in AI research and innovation, with the goal of achieving impact and brand recognition similar to CERN, Europe's world-leading laboratory for particle physics. Specifically, they call for establishing a well-coordinated network of centres of excellence, strategically located throughout Europe, and a new, central facility with state-of-the-art, "Google-scale" infrastructure that will provide a focal point for exchange and interaction of researchers at all stages of their careers, across all areas of artificial intelligence.

There was broad consensus between the AI experts from academia and industry present at the meeting that the AI community cannot wait until suitable funding from the European Commission and the member states will be realized. Instead, the group discussed taking concrete first steps as quickly as possible, combining existing resources, working towards identifying large-scale research challenges and ambitious European research programmes to address these. The CLAIRE initiative has also begun to reach out to industry and other sources of funding to drive these initial activities forward together — with initial offers coming in during the event.

Even more importantly, the group agreed to jointly work with the European Commission as well as the national and regional governments to secure large-scale, coordinated funding for the initiative without which their common goals cannot be reached. The goals of CLAIRE and of the Commission are perfectly aligned, aiming at increasing *excellence in AI* and the need to keep and increase the AI talent pool, targeting *human-centred artificial intelligence* that supports, but does not replace human intelligence, and the need to support *all of AI across all of Europe*.

At the event, Juha Heikkilä (Head of Unit, Robotics & Artificial Intelligence, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, European Commission), welcomed community initiatives, such as CLAIRE, and discussed the strategy of the Commission on artificial intelligence. It became clear that the bottom-up grassroots activities by CLAIRE nicely complement the top-down activities of the Commission. François Sillion, the new national coordinator for AI research in France, presented the French strategy for artificial intelligence, which clearly identifies the "absolute need" for tight coordination and cooperation at the European level, as exemplified by CLAIRE, in order to have global impact. According to Sillion, "It is very timely and welcome that the relevant scientific communities work together, with governments and with the European Commission, to ensure that all efforts are well coordinated towards the best chances for European excellence in artificial intelligence". The CLAIRE initiative was also strongly endorsed by the European Association for

Artificial Intelligence (EurAI), which supports CLAIRE together with most of the national AI associations throughout Europe. Addressing the meeting, EurAI president, Barry O'Sullivan, stressed the importance and timeliness of the initiative and its ambitious goals for European excellence in artificial intelligence: "Friday's CLAIRE symposium set an excellent example of how the European AI community can begin to work together towards a large strategic concept. The broad AI ecosystem in Europe needs to be far more integrated, and CLAIRE is very much a step in the right direction."

## The CLAIRE Symposium

The day-long symposium was held at Norway House in Brussels, on 7 September. It brought together 100 participants from academia, industry and public administration, including 35 world-leading AI researchers. It was opened by Oda Helen Sletnes, the Norwegian Ambassador to the European Union; Juha Heikkilä, who is leading the European Commission's work on artificial intelligence; and François Sillion, France's new national coordinator on AI. The goal of the symposium was to elaborate a common European strategy for excellence in artificial intelligence, and to provide guidance to European and national decision makers on the major investments in AI needed to ensure a leadership role for Europe in AI research and innovation.

Read more about CLAIRE at [claire-ai.org](https://claire-ai.org) and the CLAIRE symposium at [claire-ai.org/symposium](https://claire-ai.org/symposium). The symposium was organized by the initiators of CLAIRE: Holger Hoos from Leiden University (The Netherlands), Morten Irgens from Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway), and Philipp Slusallek from the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI, Germany). Please address questions and requests to [contact@claire-ai.org](mailto:contact@claire-ai.org).

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## Background

Artificial Intelligence Technology will to a large extent influence the future well-being of Europe. Our ability to develop the science, innovations, products and services of the future, will not only decide whether we will be able to continue to maintain a comparatively high level of wealth, welfare, public services and security, but also whether Europe will be able to create a future based on European experiences and values. In addition, a strong technological position is necessary to meet the many challenges we are facing in the future.

Knowledge is power, or, to be even more clear: Science is power. This understanding becomes even clearer when we talk about artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence is a global "game changer". It is not only a major driver of innovation, growth and competitiveness: It will fundamentally change the way we live and work.

It is sometimes said that the best way to meet the future is to create it. Europe, with its existing strengths across all areas of AI and its strong universities, research institutions and companies, is in an excellent position to do that. As of today, however, Europe risks falling behind in AI research, as

indicated by the statistics from the AI conference in Stockholm. The truth is harsh, but undeniable: If Europe does not shape its own future, somebody else will do it for us.

China, Japan and the USA are all investing substantially in artificial intelligence research. The stated goal of China is to establish world dominance in all areas of artificial intelligence. Last year alone the US invested somewhere between 12 and 19 billion EUR in commercial artificial intelligence. Both the China and the US are establishing impressive research centers and institutes.

CLAIRE represents a concrete proposal for how to counter these developments in Europe. Given the existing excellence across all areas of AI in Europe with some of the world's best AI researchers and a strong industry in many sectors that can benefit from AI, Europe is in a very strong position to play a leadership role in human-centred AI.