

IFR statement on the proposed EU-wide rules on robotics

This statement of the IFR is available publicly.

The International Federation of Robotics (IFR) welcomes the Legal Affairs Committee's recognition of the importance of robotics to European competitiveness, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The report approved by the committee explicitly recognises the potential of robots to improve productivity and competitiveness and improve the quality of work. The report states that widespread use of robots might not automatically lead to job replacement. In fact, research shows that robot densification has increased annual growth of GDP and labour productivity in the EU to date, (accounting for 10% of total GDP growth across 17 EU countries between 1993 and 2007) and created opportunities for workers to move to new, safer, higher-skilled and higher-income jobs which in turn increase consumption and pension contributions. Over 11 million jobs were added in the EU 27 over 11 years due to automation, including the use of robots.

We therefore strongly advise against the introduction of a robot tax. Not only is this unwarranted, in the light of the proven positive impact of robotics on employment and wages, it would serve to deter badly-needed investment in robots and in turn in robotics research and development, undermining the competitiveness of European companies and states. Profits, not the means of making them, should be taxed. We also believe that a European registry for robots, which would support the levying of such a tax, would be expensive to administer with no real value.

We strongly support the committee's recommendation that education and training systems must adapt in order to enable current and future workers to reap the benefits of robotics. This task falls to both public and private sectors and requires greater collaboration between the two.

We believe that a European Agency for robotics and artificial intelligence would create bureaucratic overhead without delivering value, as the civil law issues relating to robotics are already covered by existing legislation. Product liability and safety are covered by existing global standards and EU directives and do not currently need further development or the establishment of a separate category for robotics. Legislation on driverless cars is the responsibility, and requires the expertise, of existing EU transport regulatory authorities.

We recognise the importance of a unified, European data protection regulation, but believe that data produced and shared by robots in industrial use should be addressed in the current 'Digitising European Industry' initiative, and that data privacy from the use of robots by private individuals should be covered under existing data privacy regulation.

Finally, while we support the value of an Ethical Code of Conduct, we strongly urge that this is developed in collaboration with representatives of robotics manufacturers, robot users and developers as well as researchers and ethicists.

Frankfurt, 15 February 2017