Reflections on AI
Q&A with
Dragoș Tudorache

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The TUM IEAI had the pleasure in December 2022 of speaking with Dragoș Tudorache, a Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the Renew Europe Group.

1. What is the biggest misconception about Artificial Intelligence?

"That it can take over the world." I think one of these urban legends that are circulating, and it is, in fact, one of the misconceptions, is the fear of the supremacy of the machine over humans beings and that at some point in time there will be a moment when we are going to be overrun and overruled by machines. That I would put it up there as the number one misconception. And why is it a misconception? Because (for one) at least I don't think that technically we are anywhere close to the moment yet.
Secondly, because it would mean that we would be slipping in our jobs in a way. I am not only referring to us as regulators, but overall it would be humankind allowing this to happen without us doing anything about it. In other words, not doing what we are actually doing right now, which is debating the ethics of this technology and how we will be writing rules about the using these technologies.

2. What is the most important question in AI ethics right now?

It is almost impossible to respond because there are so many important elements that have to do with ethics. In fact, the whole debate about regulating AI, the principles of AI, has started from ethical concerns. If I have to be egoistic about it, one of the biggest debates we have right now as part of our negations in

Parliament on the draft text, is about how do we measure bias, for example, and generally how do we write standards about the ethical aspects of AI.

Once these regulations are adopted, there will also be a need for standards: the next level of detail in coming up with precise rules for how AI can or cannot be developed. We have a big debate right now politically and ideologically as to how we actually care about ethics and who would be the one entity and the one group of professionals that would be best placed to actually determine what the standard on ethics of AI looks like.

3. How can regulation of AI support to the goal of creating trustworthy and responsible AI?

By adding that element of precision on top of what already exists right now, which is principles and self-regulation. So far, we have operated on the basis of some soft generic levels in various international, or in some cases national, forums, and also efforts self-regulate: to come themselves with some internal rules of what was ethical AI and what was not ethical AI. But that was creating and is creating a bit of a haphazard landscape in terms of what is, and what is not, a good use of AI. Some people talk about "bad AI", I don't like that because I do not think that the technology itself is intrinsically bad, it is supposed to be neutral, it is how you use that can bring about risks or not.

So generally I think that this is where regulation is timely and is important. That is why the effort we are making at the European Union level is an important one, because we are now coming with that necessary precision as to what are the uses of AI that are considered to

be, for example, so detrimental to the functioning of our societies and to our values that they are simply not to be at all accepted in our market. So we are going to talk about prohibited uses of AI, and then, what are those applications of AI, those use cases of AI, that are so, again risky, for our human rights and human interests, that they need to be accompanied by very strong rules like transparency, accountability, explain-ability, publicity so that it compensates the potential risks that it can bring about.

4. What is the role of academia when it comes to the governance of AI?

Very important, because AI is still an area that needs a lot of research. There are a lot of elements that we do not know. Even those that are working and coding AI often say that they can't explain fully how an algorithm is concluded. They know the data that they put in the algorithm, the instructions that they are providing the algorithm, the fundamentals of how they built that code, but they can't always explain all the way to the end why is it that the algorithm takes certain turns to arrive to certain outcomes.

I think that academia can help and work alongside the industry to provide as much clarity, and as many answers as the society needs when it comes to this technology to enforce that element of trustworthiness that I think is so fundamental for the updates in this technology. Because ultimately, we have an interest in encouraging to the uptake of AI.

Yes, it brings about risks, but ultimately it is the main driver for the economy of today and tomorrow, and therefore we need to embrace it. We need to learn how to use it, sell it and make it understandable as well as palatable to our society, so that society is encouraged to use those products and those services using AI.

For that to happen, society and, individuals need to understand, and they need to trust. I think this is where academia plays an important role. When it comes to governance,

you can't rely on this important role of academia just as you cannot rely on the important role of civil society to bring in the reality of the impact on the uses of AI without giving them a seat at the table of what decisions are made.

This is why at least, I personally am pushing very strongly for revised governance in the draft text of AI regulation, a governance where academia, civil society, trade unions, so all those that have an important say in the implementation of AI, that need to be right there represented at the governance level so that the decision makers make decisions that are as well informed as possible.

5. Will the AI Act have a major influence on how other countries deal with AI regulation?

Beauty is the eye of the beholder; we Europeans like to say that the "Brussels effect" is unstoppable. The moment we adopt these legislations that cater to the European market, that our market is so important for other companies on the global stage that they will have to somewhat adapt their market behavior, their product or their series to this legislation. And by doing so, it will also be a model for how they roll their products and their services out to other markets around the world.

I always say that when it comes to these other pieces of digital regulation that we have adopted or working on right now in the EU, we have to be less arrogant about the Brussels effect. Not because I do not think it can be a model for many other countries that are like-minded democracies around the world. I think it can be a model for others to follow, but I think that we should not simply count on that without engaging in AI diplomacy at the same time.

We need conscience and proactive efforts to reach out to all those other democracies around the world that understand the role of technology in the same way, that understand

how technology needs to be constantly driven by values that are underpinning our societies. We also have to respect and accept the fact that different jurisdictions will have different rules and different archetypes for adopting a similar type of legislation or not.

But again, as long as we would share the values and the principles around the use of AI, it should be an effort that we make together to then converge on the standards so that on the global stage when AI would be developed, that AI is being developed as much as possible with the same set of standards in mind.

6. We often say that AI is changing or transforming the world. To what extent is AI changing us as humans?

Apart from what I said in the beginning which is that I think AI will not be taking over the world, but AI will challenge the status quo. It is already challenging the status quo in a much deeper, more horizontal comprehensive way than any other piece of technology so far. It also affects us as humans and how we relate to ourselves, how we relate to the world, how to relate to a system of values and rules that have underpinned our societies so far.
I´ll give you some examples: How will we as humans be positioning ourselves to a piece of art that is produced by an algorithm or to a symphony produced by an algorithm? Would we give it a prize? Would we take an AI algorithm to the next Grammy awards and say that it has composed the best pop song of the year?

The same question goes for patents. We already have AI producing very important molecules of antibiotics for example, ones that classical R&D is unable to produce. Who are we going to give that patent to? Because we will have to rethink the whole system of IPR to cater to this new reality of creative AI. Whether in the artistic field, or in the scientific field or in any other walk of life, we are going to have AI that is going to produce things. And by

producing things again, the question of AI rights, obligations, and responsibilities also must be taken into consideration.

Ultimately it is still going to be that element of humanity and emotion that we are the only ones capable of inserting in a decision, in a choice, in an alternative that we produce that will remain fundamental in my view. But then again, inevitably, the presence of such powerful technology in our everyday routines, and interactions will also change us as humans and put questions before us that we will have to answer. We do not have to be afraid of them, but we just have to understand that it is going to change how we are going to live our lives and be prepared for that.

Meet the Expert

Dragoș Tudorache is a member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the Renew Europe Group. He is the Chair of the Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in the Digital Age (AIDA) and the LIBE rapporteur on the AI Act.

Dragoș began his career in 1997 as a judge in Romania. Between 2000 and 2005, he built and led the legal departments at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN missions in Kosovo. After working on justice and anticorruption at the European Commission Representation in Romania, supporting the country's EU accession, he joined the Commission as an official and, subsequently, qualified for leadership roles in EU institutions.

During the European migration crisis, Dragoș was entrusted with leading the coordination and strategy Unit in DG-Home, the European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. Between 2015 and 2017, he served as Head of the Prime Minister's Chancellery, Minister of Communications and for the Digital Society, and Minister of Interior. He was elected to the European Parliament in 2019.