POLICY CHALLENGE 7: BROADER IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON SOCIETIES

- Digitalization has immense transformative possibilities for the economic and social life of Europe. Yet myriad issues must be managed to ensure ethical development, widespread digital literacy, proper regulation, and privacy of citizens.

- Addressing issues in this increasingly digital world will require continual conversation on a wide range of disputed issues, issues that touch the everyday lives of European constituencies.

Digital change, technological innovation and globalization are having implications on citizens' lives, their privacy and for society as a whole. While those developments carry dangers, they also hold promises.

Safeguard ethics in artificial intelligence

MPs discussed the ethical dimension of automated decision-making, raising the question of how to deal with discriminating behavior of algorithms. "If you see the need to regulate, it does not matter if it is a machine or a human. - "There are no machine biases, they are always human biases." However, procedures to challenge biased decision-making are extremely difficult to design. Not only is the technical detection of actual bias difficult but unintentional programming can lead to hidden biases as humans are not always aware of their own predispositions.

Promote digital literacy and intelligibility

Since algorithmic decision making are increasingly affecting citizens' daily lives, MPs agreed that digital literacy should be one of the core competences for citizens to acquire in the 21st century. However, citizens should not need to be IT specialists to understand digitalization and its implications. Automated Decision Making has to be intelligible, as complexity must not mean incomprehensibility.

Regulate fearlessly and based on evidence

Automated decision-making needs to be made subject to democratic control. However, MPs agreed that politicians should not be driven by fear but embrace efforts in understanding the matter in order to create more evidence-based policies. "Many policies in the digital sphere are badly designed and managed, killing innovation."

Privacy a fake debate?

In debating the relevance of a term such as privacy in a connected world certain MPs defined the term itself as obsolete whilst others stuck to the "We choose privacy!" mantra, only to soon qualify in their remarks that social beings necessarily and throughout history give up a degree of privacy as they interact with each other in a public space. If one cannot impede the collection of data completely, a central question therefore is, what to do with the data?

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Don't ask a machine to be more ethical than you.

It is not about how much data we can collect, but how it is being used and what is allowed – and how little we need to collect in order to connect and innovate, not the other way around

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 EXPERT SPOTLIGHT

Matthias Spielkamp is founder and ED of AlgorithmWatch. He is co-founder and publisher of iRights.info, which in 2006 received the Grimme Online Award, Germany's premier award for online journalism. Matthias testified before several committees of the German Bundestag and is a member of the board of Reporters Without Borders Germany. He contributed to publications like MIT Technology Review and Die Zeit and was quoted by Engadget, Süddeutsche Zeitung, The Christian Science Monitor and many others. In 2017, Matthias was named one of 15 architects building the data-driven future by Silicon Republic.