

Trust me, I'm a Robot

We live in a time where every day seems to bring „The Next Big Thing“. Be it Industry 4.0, Big Data, Smart Appliances, the Internet of Things or Digital Fabrication, most of these trends are slowly but steadily creeping into our everyday lives. Just as digitalisation has changed to workplace in the last decades, automation will do so in the years to come. Most jobs carried out by humans today are going to be obsolete in either a few years or at least a few decades. The sale of robots is ever-increasing and annual patent filings for robotics technology have tripled over the last decade. While some industries will see an increase in such technology being used, others might have to rearrange themselves completely. One of the main areas affected is going to be transportation, where AI (artificial intelligence) is on the brink of going mainstream, posing new questions on liability.

Robots such as self-driving cars and all other forms of AI being put to practice will inevitably rely on massive amounts of data. Applications and appliances will communicate both with each other and with data centres, most probably while transferring big amounts of data laden with personal information about their users. It is doubtful that the current legal framework on data protection and ownership is sufficient enough to tackle these upcoming challenges.

While many basic questions of data protection have already become an issue in the era of internet and e-commerce, further aspects of data ownership and the protection of personal data and privacy are still uncertain. The European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs has issued a draft report on civil law rules on robotics to the Commission. The goal of my contribution shall be to shed some light on the European Union's venture into this largely uncharted territory while elaborating on selected key issues. Examples include the call for a new European Agency for Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, liability issues in the realm of self-driving vehicles and the re-definition of creativity, where the key phrase "own intellectual creation" might have to be re-defined in order to cover copyrightable works produced by computers.