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Press release: Panel debate and robot exhibitions – is the European robotics industry fit for the future?

On Wednesday 28th September 2022, EUUnited - the European Engineering Industries Association, hosted a unique event in Brussels where we discussed, together with renowned experts from industry and the European institutions, the future of the robotics industry in Europe.

The event allowed to better understand the developments of the European robotics industry in the larger global context and provided a balanced overview of the current discussions about the state of the European robotics industry from the perspective of the European institutions, trade unions, and robotics manufacturers. In addition, participants were able to interact with live examples of robot displays, demonstrating first-hand human-robot collaboration and the innovation behind current robot designs.

Presentations from China and the USA

The event kicked off with pre-recorded video presentations from speakers from China and the USA. Firstly, Xiaogang Song, the Secretary General of China Robotics Industry Alliance (CRIA), spoke about the current state of play of robotics and the 5-year plan for robotics development in Asia. This was then followed by a presentation from Jeff Burnstein, President, A3 - Association for Advancing Automation, on the current state of play of robotics development in the USA.

Both speakers presented the current production figures of robots in China and the USA (compared with overall European robot production figures), and the expected developments of the industry in both these regions. The presented information provided food for thought and sparked a lively and fruitful discussion during the in-person panel debate which followed.

Panel debate

Moderated by Patrick Schwarzkopf, Director of EUnited Robotics, this in-person panel included the following speakers:

- Marc Dassler, CEO & Co-Founder, Energy Robotics
- Florian Schnös, Head of Open Technology Innovation & Platform Manager iiQKA, KUKA
- Gwenole Cozigou, Director for Construction, Machinery & Standardisation in DG GROW, European Commission
- Isabelle Barthès, Deputy General Secretary, industriAll Europe

The panel members discussed their views on artificial intelligence (AI), regulations, robots, and the future of work. Some key questions which arose from these discussions included:

- How is the European robotics industry equipped to tackle issues related to robotics, AI, regulations, and the future of work?
- How we can push innovation to safeguard prosperity for Europe?
- What regulation do we need?
- Does standardization work on AI and robotics?
- How can we create human-centric work of the future?
- Do we need to create a “robot culture” in order to have more social acceptance of robots in Europe?

After a lively debate, the panel speakers took the overall view that, in order for the European robotics industry to be truly fit for the future, there needs to be consensus amongst European policy regulators, robot manufacturers, and employers alike in order to ensure a future in which robot development in Europe can be competitive with its Asian and American counterparts whilst simultaneously ensuring that the needs and rights of the human citizen and worker remains at the forefront of all discussions, decisions, and innovations.

Live robot exhibitions

The panel debate was then followed by the live robot exhibitions with three robots provided by KUKA, Energy Robotics, and TruPhysics. The following expert representatives from each of these three companies accompanied the robot exhibits:



SPOT, the autonomous inspection robot was exhibited by Marc Dassler of Energy Robotics



The KUKA iiQKA Education Kits were exhibited by Julian Stocksclaeder and Simon Hellwig, both of KUKA



The Beer-serving robot was exhibited by Albert Groz of TruPhysics

Besides interacting hands-on with the robots, participants also had the added bonus of learning about the purpose behind the robots' design and functions.

Where we go from here

Understanding the overall context of robotics development and production globally is important for European robotics manufacturers, employers, and policy makers alike in shaping the future direction of European robotics development. Europe's place as a potential hub for innovative and competitive robotics development can only be assured through strong communication and collaboration between these different actors to ensure that our robotics industry is fit for the future and an asset to European citizens and their prosperity. EUnited is proud to have facilitated this significant event with the help of all contributors from industry and European institutions. Above all, dialogue, openness, and cooperation are keys to ensuring that the European robotics industry will go from strength to strength.

Comments

“Robotics should be seen as a problem solver to safeguard prosperity and sustainability, to address a shrinking labour force and to strengthen resilience. Europe needs smart regulation that is conducive to innovation.” **Wilfried Eberhardt, Chairman of EUnited Robotics and CMO KUKA AG.**

“The demographic change will affect Europe hard in the next 7 years, when the baby boomers will retire and due to low birth rates of the last decades, we simply have not enough humans around to compensate for the loss of workforce. To ensure our prosperity, we urgently need to innovate in the field of AI and Robotics to automate and digitalize the tasks and the knowledge of the people leaving the workforce. If we stop innovation due to overregulation crippling the competitive development of AI and Robotics industry in Europe, we will soon face a dependency on AIs and robots developed and trained by USA and China with their moral compass, just as we are dependent on US based data technology such as Google, Facebook and Amazon. Do we really want to repeat this mistake?” **Marc Dassler, CEO and Co-Founder of Energy Robotics.**

“Robotics is key to deliver on the green and digital ambitions set by the European Union. However, the human in command principle must be guaranteed everywhere and at the workplace in particular. This is a matter of ethics and social acceptance.” **Isabelle Barthès, Deputy General Secretary, industriAll Europe.**