THEMATIC FOCUS:
Artificial Intelligence and Law

OPENING SPEECH TO THE WORKSHOP "AI AND LAW"

held at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences
of Pázmány Péter Catholic University
as delivered by the Dean of this Faculty,
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on 26 January 2024

Madam President, Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to welcome all the participants of our workshop on "AI and Law" at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University.

Since the launch of the ChatGPT, practically every single day breaks news about AI. The topic is extremely popular and attracts a lot of attention. Hosts of experts have been presenting prospects of the revolutionary potential AI can be useful in; fields ranging wide, from medicine to finance or the military, whereas other groups of scientists warn us of the potential dangers. It is but natural that each science have been taking efforts to reflect on the new AI technologies from an own perspective.

I have to admit that I am also fascinated by the capabilities of AI sometimes, mostly so when I encounter them in practice. In general, the range and scale of technological developments I have witnessed over the past decades have been breathtaking.

I have flashbacks to my childhood from time to time, when I used to encounter video telephony in science fiction movies only. Meanwhile it has become a natural part of my life. Or, I can remember the computer HAL, the one that talked intelligently to the astronauts and then tried to kill them in "2001: A Space Odyssey"[1]. Today I would confidently talk to the ChatGPT, and it has not tried to kill me yet. Nevertheless, there is definitely something adventurous about it.

For using AI in the legal profession, especially language models in the practice of law, I got my first serious impetus at our Faculty of Information Technology and Bionics. It happened at a workshop somewhat a year ago, and it came partly from

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[1]   Directed by Stanley KUBRICK, 1968.

colleagues presenting at this conference today. They outlined what AI applications based on language models are currently capable of, from text extraction over legal advice chatbots to contract drafting.

Before last Christmas, I consulted a friend of mine, a lawyer working for a large international law firm. He predicted a revolutionary change, saying that a significant proportion of lawyers' work would be taken over soon by AI applications, which would have a substantial impact on the market for law firms. The big ones will stay, the small ones will go bust, he says.

I have two general comments on the subject of this workshop. The first regards the extent and depths to which we can make timeless statements about the relationship between AI and law. What we conclude today will that be valid in six months or a year? How about five to ten years from now? Scientific research and reflection should not provide a snapshot of the real time situation; it is important to think about the issue viewing the widest possible horizon.

A story comes to mind, a hearsay; I wonder if it is true.

In 1989, an international conference of historians celebrated the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. Chinese historians were invited to attend the conference, to which they politely replied that 200 years was not enough time for them to make sufficiently informed claims about the impact of the great French Revolution.

We will certainly not wait 200 years before making meaningful claims about the relationship between AI and law. Today, in an age of leaps and bounds, perhaps we should be humble enough to admit our limitations. However, we cannot give up the ambition to think far ahead as possible.

My second observation connects here and concerns the place and role of man in the rapid development we experience. On the one hand, we are tempted to make our work easier by the features offered by the AI applications. Who would refuse timesaving in reading and learning the details of a new piece of proliferating European or national legislation if the AI could extract the gist, even highlight what is new or answer the specific questions? Who would not opt to use the AI to compile legal documents they would otherwise spend hours on writing? Who would not wish a chatbot be able to answer the client's boring questions properly?

On the other hand, there is a danger that something will be lost; something essential, something deeply human, which has been part of our work and has served our personal development. Therefore, our discourse on the AI must be conducted about people as much as it is about AI.

Let me conclude by wishing you all a successful workshop. Looking forward to your valuable contributions, I am grateful to the organiser, Professor Harsági and to the National Media and Infocommunications Authority for supporting this workshop and research project.