(English version)

Subject: iBorderCtrl project

On 24 October, the Commission published an article on its website under the section 'Success stories' on the EU-funded iBorderCtrl project ([1]).

This project, which costs EUR 4.5 million, sets up a 'smart lie-detection system', which profiles travellers on the basis of a computer-automated interview taken by the traveller's webcam before the trip, and an artificial-intelligence-based analysis of 38 microgestures. It sets out to detect illegal immigrants and to prevent crime and terrorism ([2]). The project gave rise to a lot of criticism from civil society and experts ([3]).

1.   Why does the Commission consider this system to be a 'success story'?

2.   Has the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence given recommendations regarding ethical guidelines for this system and on its impact on applying the Charter? If not, why not?

3.   Why does the Commission consider a trial of the automated lie-detection system on 34 people, with an accuracy rate of only 76%, to be a sufficient basis to start 'trials' of this system in Greece, Hungary and Latvia, where the fundamental rights of many border-crossing travellers will be violated?

Answer given by Mr Avramopoulos on behalf of the European Commission
(8 February 2019)

Research and innovation in the field of security are one element of a more comprehensive approach to protecting Europeans. As the EU works to improve its border management, the Commission is also investing in research about how to make border controls quicker and more efficient.

iBorderCtrl is an ongoing research project under the EU Horizon 2020 research programme. The project aims to test technologies in controlled border management scenarios that could potentially increase the efficiency of the EU's external border management, ensuring faster processing for bona fide travellers and quicker detection of illegal activities. From a scientific perspective the project is presented as a success story since it has demonstrated a great potential to lead to innovative output.

The Commission gives the highest priority to ethics and respect of fundamental rights in EU funded research. It must comply with the established ethical principles and the applicable law. The ethical aspects of the project were evaluated in 2015 by independent experts, and their recommendations were fully implemented. The project has appointed an external ethics advisor and a detailed ethical plan has been integrated in the project activities. The High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence was established in 2018 with a specific mandate and after the start of the project.

The project proposal was scientifically evaluated by independent experts and underwent technical reviews, which validated the scientific assumptions, including the statistical significance of the Automatic Deception Detection System, based on the scientific and technological research conducted to date. The prototype system will be tested at three external border crossing points in Hungary, Greece and Latvia to have realistic conditions. It will not be used for border checks and all travellers have to cross the borders using currently established systems and procedures. The trial will be entirely on a voluntary basis.

——————

([1])   http://ec.europa.eu/research/infocentre/article_en.cfm?_sp=d158dd70-ebdb-43a9-8195-4bf5674700ba.1541436662050&artid=49726
([2])   https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/202703_en.html
([3])   https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/eu-set-to-test-ai-guards-to-protect-external-borders/