

Question for written answer E-005297/2021
to the Commission
Rule 138
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Subject: Speech recognition for smaller languages: a threat or an opportunity for Europe

Speech recognition interfaces are rapidly growing in importance. Automatic personal assistants, voice-controlled functions used with different systems and machine translation are examples of the continually expanding fields of application for speech recognition. Alongside market-based growth, legislation, such as the European Accessibility Act, is also creating a need for automatic solutions for the recognition of spoken language.

The speech recognition market is dominated by the big technology giants from outside Europe, such as Amazon, Google and Huawei. The market now has much to offer the larger languages, but there are very few solutions available for the smaller languages, the various dialects of the larger languages or specific areas.

European solutions for spoken language recognition are an important element in ensuring Europe's digital sovereignty. Instead of European users once again releasing their data to the technology giants, it is important to have European solutions on the market to ensure that the systems are transparent and accountable, protect privacy, and are ethical and viable, even for smaller languages. More than 200 languages are spoken in Europe. From an equality perspective, it is important for speech interfaces to be introduced for smaller languages, too.

Technological development has opened up opportunities to improve speech recognition systems and make them cost effective for different groups. There is a high level of competence in this field in Europe. By investing in the development and commercialisation of such solutions, Europe will be able to play a strong role as a speech recognition system provider. At a global level, the thousands of different languages that exist offer huge market opportunities in this regard.

What steps is the Commission taking to strengthen European expertise in the area of speech recognition, to promote the development of speech recognition systems for smaller languages, and to ensure the digital sovereignty of Europe and its citizens?