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Robotics research in Europe to receive over €2 billion from European Commission and public and private partners

The European Commission is to join forces with 180 companies to develop what it has described as "the world's largest civilian research and innovation programme in robotics". 05 Jun 2014

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Commission funding of €700 million will be joined by €2.1 billion investment from euRobotics, an umbrella group comprising private businesses and academic organisations.

The SPARC initiative, as the project is to be known, is expected to create 240,000 jobs in Europe and increase Europe's share of the global civilian robotics market to 42% by 2020, said the Commission.

Launching the project at the Automatica 2014 conference in the German city of Munich, EU digital commissioner Neelie Kroes said: "Europe needs to be a producer and not merely a consumer of robots. Robots do much more than replace humans. They often do things humans can't or won't do and that improves everything from our quality of life to our safety. Integrating robots into European industry helps us create and keep jobs in Europe."

SPARC is the new name for the Public-Private Partnership in Robotics which was initiated by the Commission in 2012 as a joint project between the Commission, European industry and academic organisations. Its aim is to "facilitate the growth and empowerment of the robotics industry and value chain, from research through to production", said SPARC.

SPARC aims to make robots available in a number of settings which have economic and social impact, including health, agriculture, rescue services and activities underwater and in the air, the organisation said.

According to SPARC, worldwide revenues from robotics industries currently stand at €22bn annually. This is expected to increase to €62bn by 2020.

A recent study by McKinsey estimated that the value of the application of advanced robotics in healthcare, manufacturing and services could have an annual global economic impact of between \$1.7 trillion and \$4.5tn by 2025, said SPARC.

President of euRobotics Bernd Liepert said: "SPARC will ensure the competitiveness of European robotics industries. Robot-based automation solutions are essential to overcome today's most pressing societal challenges, from demographic change to mobility to sustainable production."

However Kroes told robot makers that they must do more to address public concerns that a new wave of automation could take away their jobs, according to a report in the Financial Times.

Kroes said that while the overall impact of robots would be positive, development of the sector has a variety of short and long-term implications. Different sectors will be affected to differing degrees, she said.

"[None of these worries mean we should turn our backs on innovation](#)," Kroes said according to the Financial Times. "But equally we cannot dismiss those concerns. We need to take them seriously, they are legitimate. We should tell the truth and be transparent. It's a different type of job that will be created (by advanced robotics), there is no doubt about that."

"We need a stronger evidence base to show the case and confront those issues, clear up uncertainty and mistrust (around robots)," said Kroes. "We can also raise awareness of the benefits (of robotics). If we don't, I can assure you it will make your lives a lot harder and our economic growth with it."

According to the Financial Times a 2012 survey conducted on behalf of the European Commission found that 70% of respondents agreed with the statement that robots "could steal people's jobs."

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