

AI, Machine Learning & Big Data 2024

Sixth Edition

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Austria

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Trends

With the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act passing the European Parliament on 13 March 2024, AI is making significant strides into the legal sphere of EU Member States. Austria is no exception to this rapid development. Recognising the complexity of the AI Act and the legal issues it entails, the Austrian legislature has established a public service centre that will provide information and guidance on the most pertinent issues arising from the new law. Austria is thus one of the first Member States to proactively address questions around the implementation of AI.

What exactly has been done?

New provisions were introduced into the Austrian media and telecommunications law that enabled *Rundfunk und Telekom Regulierungs GmbH* (RTR), the administrative body of the *Telekom Kontrol Kommission*, to establish a “service centre”. The purpose of this service centre is to foster knowledge about AI by providing a range of information and consulting services. It will also serve as a central service hub for AI projects and applications in the fields of media and telecommunications.

This will be achieved through an information portal that displays projects and initiatives around the deployment of AI, especially those that will receive public funding. Given that the service centre is housed within the Austrian media and telecommunications regulator, its services will naturally focus on the use of AI in the telecommunications and media sector. However, considering the broad nature of AI and its regulation, it is reasonable to anticipate that the advice and information provided by the service centre will have implications and significance beyond the telecommunications and media sector.

In particular, the service centre will engage in the following activities:

1. provision of information on AI, particularly through web-based guidelines on the use of AI;
2. giving advice to public and private entities on the use of AI and on the regulatory framework when developing and using AI;
3. conducting studies and analyses on the use of AI;
4. publications on AI;
5. organising and hosting events dealing with AI topics;
6. organising regular and targeted exchange with the market participants that are affected by AI;
7. providing information on the impact of AI on cybersecurity; and
8. giving advice on the use of AI that is already employed in high-risk areas.

To carry out these tasks, RTR has set up an AI Advisory Board. Besides engaging in the above-listed activities, it will also advise members of the Federal Government on current developments in the realm of AI. This includes technical as well as ethical and social aspects. On a cross-border level, the AI Advisory Board will monitor AI developments within and outside the EU, assisting the government and RTR with the implementation of strategies for AI, including the definition of goals and priorities.

The AI Advisory Board consists of 11 members that are appointed by the Federal Chancellor and by the Federal Minister of Finance. Their appointments are for four years, and each member possesses a strong reputation and expertise in the areas of ethics, research, economics, law or technology. In terms of budget, RTR receives EUR 700,000 annually, which includes the costs of the AI Advisory Board.

Framing

The service centre was established to reflect Austria's interdisciplinary strategy on AI¹ (the "AIM AT 2030" strategy). It is a non-binding concept that regards AI as a "human-focused" technology. AIM AT 2030 focuses on ensuring trustworthy AI, meaning that any dependencies from monopolists are best avoided, if possible. Furthermore, AI should be deployed only in a transparent, trustworthy and legally safe environment. The Austrian government has identified that AI has the potential to impact fundamental ethical, legal, social and technical principles, which is why AIM AT 2030 establishes that AI will only be deemed trustworthy if it (i) complies with applicable laws and regulations, (ii) respects ethical principles like equal treatment and fairness, and (iii) is technically and socially robust.

AIM AT 2030 identifies data as the feedstock and the basis for AI. However, during the identification of the targets and purpose of AIM AT 2030, a reluctance to share data was identified. To overcome this reluctance, Austria commits in AIM AT 2030 to establish an architecture that will enable the sharing and trading of big data. Another prominent focus of AIM AT 2030 is research and science. AI testing environments and testing centres will be established, and the government also aims to foster high-performance data infrastructure, such as stronger 5G infrastructure. Another core component of the "AI Ecosystem" is a focus on education. AI and its opportunities will be brought to schools, but it will also become part of adult education. Finally, AIM AT 2030 seeks to provide robust financial infrastructure, as this will be required to achieve the aforementioned aims.

At the time of writing, AIM AT 2030 is being substantially revised. To adequately reflect the newly approved AI Act, as well as the most recent AI developments in the technical sector and society, a relaunch of AIM AT 2030 with updated targets and goals should be expected soon. For now, the most substantial source of information regarding Austria's ambitions to foster and support AI is the service centre, which can be reached at <https://www.rtr.at/rtr/service/ki-servicestelle/ki-servicestelle.de.html>

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Endnote

1. The AIM AT 2030 paper is available for download at https://www.bmk.gv.at/dam/jcr:8acef058-7167-4335-880e-9fa341b723c8/aimat_ua.pdf (German-English).

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