EUROPEAN UMBRELLA ORGANISATION FOR GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

EUROGI STATEMENT ON THE NEED FOR A PAUSE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LARGE ARTIFICAL INTELLIGENCE FACILITIES

BACKGROUND

(1) Recently over 1000 prominent persons within the AI and IT domains signed an open letter which calls for a 'pause' of six months in the development of AI systems larger than GPT-4. Their justification for such a pause is broadly that big powerful AI systems '*can pose profound risks to society and humanity'*. More specifically they mention that such systems may promote propaganda and untruths, automate away all (!) jobs, and might eventually '*outnumber, outsmart and make us humans obsolete, and even replace us.'*

(2) These are startling claims, which even if they were to turn out to be only partially true, would result in major global disruptions from societal to individual citizen levels, with many of the implications being of a very significant negative nature. As geospatial information is such a dominant part of everyday life across very many sectors of society and it forms a component of many large scale AI systems, it behooves all organisations in the geospatial sector which are in some way involved in the future of geospatial information and technologies[1] to take the claims seriously.

(3) During the suggested pause the signatories to the letter make a number of proposals: develop new safety protocols which are rigorously audited and are overseen by independent outside experts, and develop sound governance systems. More specifically the letter proposes:
'new and capable regulatory authorities dedicated to AI; oversight and tracking of highly capable AI systems and large pools of computational capability; provenance and watermarking systems to help distinguish real from synthetic and to track model leaks; a robust auditing and certification ecosystem; liability for AI-caused harm; robust public funding for technical AI safety research; and well-resourced institutions for coping with the dramatic economic and political disruptions (especially to democracy) that AI will cause.'

(4) It is noted that in addition to the issues raised in the Open Letter, there are an increasing number of experts who are calling for urgent measures to be introduced to control the development of new and increasingly powerful AIs. Examples include Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, the company which built GPT4, who in testimony before a US Congressional Committee called for regulation of AI due to its potential for causing harm; Prof Stuart Russell of the University of California, Berkeley who has described AI as a 'civilization-ending technology'; Paul Hindley, a key person in the development of the technology which has enabled the construction of large powerful neural network based AIs, who recently resigned from Google so that he had greater freedom to articulate his views on the threats posed by AI, including spreading misinformation, eliminating jobs and the threat to humanity.

(5) The European Union is currently considering a bill dealing with AI which is aimed at addressing safety and other concerns, but it does not address the scope of measures which would be required by a full or even substantial response to the issues raised in the open letter. It is relevant to note that at the recent US Congressional Committee hearing at which Sam Altman spoke there was bipartisan agreement regarding the need to regulate big powerful AIs. Although it is still early days

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[1] EUROGI's mission is *'to promote the widespread and effective use of geospatial information and technologies in Europe.'*

in this regard, it is noteworthy that much of the development of big powerful AIs takes place in the USA.

EUROGI POSITION

(6) It has been argued by some that the Open Letter is alarmist and that the signatories are naïve[2]. Others consider that rather than focusing on future AI systems the focus should be on rectifying the defects of current AIs. However, EUROGI considers that whether or not these criticisms are considered to be valid, the letter and the comments by experts highlight an issue of direct and profound relevance to the future of the geospatial sector.

(7) Those of us from the geospatial community who have been considering the issue of geospatial and AI[3] are of the view that although there may not as yet be any AI systems focused specifically on geospatial issues which are the equivalent of large language models (i.e. have billions of parameters, are trained on billions or even trillions of 'pieces' of geospatial information; master many geospatial technologies and types of geospatial analytics, etc.), the development of extremely powerful and versatile 'GeoAI' systems[4] is unlikely to be too far off in the future. It can be stated with confidence that the wider societal and environmental implications, both for good and for bad of such GeoAI systems, whether in standalone form or incorporated into networks of AI systems, cannot be predicted with sufficient level of confidence, but are however very likely to be substantial for society at large and the environment.

(8) EUROGI supports the call for urgent consideration to be given by the European Union, all pan-European and international bodies within the broadly defined geospatial sector (for example, the UN's Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, the Open Geospatial Consortium, and others), to support the need for urgent but thorough consideration to be given to the measures proposed in the open letter and mentioned specifically in section (3) above.
In order to go beyond just issuing a call of this nature, EUROGI will itself set out proposals which could address the measures mentioned in the open letter and highlighted in section (3) above. Urgent effective action is required before it becomes too late to realistically 'tame' the rapidly expanding power of large and networked AIs. Time is running out.

(9) In the Jurassic Park movie a spoken line to the owner of the Park on the editing of the dinosaur genome provides a pertinent reminder of the need for reflection on the development of powerful AIs …
"Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should".

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[2] Regarding nativity, it is interesting to note that other seemingly intractable, major global impact technologically based issues have been addressed (to greater and lesser levels of success) by global charters, protocols and agreements, such as nuclear non-proliferation, climate change, biodiversity loss, tampering with heritable features of the human genome, and others. Because an issue is seemingly impossible to address meaningfully is not considered by EUROGI to be a good enough reason not to make strenuous efforts to address issues when they have potentially large scale detrimental global societal and environmental impacts.
[3] EUROGI convenes a working group of European and international experts in the AI and geospatial field which is currently working towards producing a paper on the topic '*AI and Geospatial.*'
[4] Referred to as Large Multipurpose Geospatial AIs (LMGeoAIs) in the draft working group paper.