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MOBILITY: A CORNERSTONE OF OUR AI STRATEGY

Stefan Koreneef sketches the road ahead for the Netherland's AI Coalition

In his coordinating role, Stefan Koreneef (Coordinator Digital Economy EU & Global policy, Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs & Climate Policy) will be instrumental in ensuring the Dutch AI Coalition can help deliver the massive economic, academic and societal benefits that the AI revolution promises. Here he explains how the Coalition, together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs & Climate Policy, plans to build on a very promising start.

Could you briefly sketch the current state of progress for the Dutch AI Coalition?

On 8 October 2019, we launched the AI Strategic Action Plan. The same day we launched the Dutch AI Coalition with 60 members from business, universities and government. Less than 3 months later, we had over 250 members, including all the ministries, nearly every university, many municipalities and provinces, and businesses from pretty well every sector of the Dutch economy.

The Strategic Action Plan brings together all the proposed AI initiatives of all ministries in one document. It also meets our requirement under the EU AI Strategy, as a member state, to develop an AI action plan.

Many countries already have AI coalitions, and we're actually relatively late in launching ours, but that's not necessarily a bad thing: we recently presented our AI Action Plan and Coalition to the various EU institutes in Brussels and got very positive feedback. People were really impressed with how the Netherlands has managed so quickly to get all parties on board and on the same page. It's a great example of the strength of the Dutch polder model: public-private partnerships where everyone is genuinely working together to the same ends.

So I think we've made a good start. The challenge now is to present the coalition globally, and show how effective Dutch companies and institutions are as partners, and how innovative we are in terms of technology. Which is why our Innovation Attachés play such a crucial role in the key AI countries, both in 'selling' Dutch companies and knowledge institutes, and in providing us with on-the-ground intelligence.

The strategy designates Mobility as a priority sector (along with Agriculture, Energy and Health). What does that mean in practice?

The Ministry of Infrastructure & Water Management identified mobility as a priority sector because of our country's huge opportunities in this field, and its importance to us as a densely-populated land with an economy highly dependent on good logistics and traffic management.

A good example is intelligent traffic lights. There are now a number of pilots running across the Netherlands, using some 450 intelligent traffic lights in collaboration with over 50 cities and companies. Intelligent traffic lights are a core element of connected and automated mobility. Intelligent vehicles receive traffic data via the traffic lights. In turn, the traffic lights gather data on each vehicle in order to manage traffic better, for example by clearing routes for emergency services or reducing rush-hour congestion.

“The challenge is to show the world just how effective and innovative Dutch companies are as technology partners”

What are the next key steps internationally in terms of AI and mobility?

The Netherlands obviously has a lot of world-class mobility-related companies. In that sense, we're already a world player. But in terms of the AI strategy, we first need to put good governance in place for the Coalition together with all Ministries and determine exactly what the ecosystem looks like.

During 2020, we'll start with some international activities, including positioning ourselves internationally. We want to explain what makes the Netherlands a leader in terms of AI, and why anyone involved with AI should consider working with and investing in Dutch AI companies and institutes.

We'll initially focus on Germany as a pilot project followed by France, the US, Singapore and Belgium. We'll then hopefully expand next year to countries like South Korea and Japan. And finally, to every country where we have an Innovation Attaché, each of whom we see as vital to maximising the impact the AI strategy and coalition will have around the world.

Listening to Stefan, it's clear that the respect Dutch companies enjoy across the global AI community isn't just because of the quality of those businesses themselves. It's also down to the Dutch approach: an ability to harness the talents and strengths of individuals, businesses and knowledge institutes to get everyone working together. It may seem like the obvious thing to do, but very few manage to do it as effectively as the Dutch.

