

The Future of the Liberal Professions in Europe

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I see the future of the liberal professions in Europe largely in the past.

Oh really? Seriously? What have the liberal professions achieved in the past that was so important?

A great deal — and very important things. We have provided our services personally for our patients, clients and customers, based on knowledge and experience, and based on independence from products and producers. Yes, and we have done so with very high ethical standards for ourselves, free from instructions by third parties at the moment of decision-making.

People have entrusted us with everything they have: their health, their assets, their rights, their families, their well-being, their future, their environment — and even their smiles. That is something! This past is something we can build on. It is a foundation for the future of the liberal professions in Europe. But we are also aware that we cannot, must not — and will not — rest on the past.

The future brings worries and fears to people, and also to us, the liberal professions: uncertainty about what is still to come, and challenges that we already sense or already know. Climate change, world politics and artificial intelligence. We are taking precautions and taking the future into our own hands. On this foundation of the past, we are building the future of civil society and making the liberal professions, which are inseparably connected with it, fit for the future.

We commit ourselves to lifelong learning. We engage intensively with digitalisation and artificial intelligence. We use AI for the benefit of our clients, patients and customers. We do not give away data. We are not corrupt.

In an increasingly automated and digital world, the liberal professions will become some of society's most important institutions of trust. While algorithms prepare decisions, members of the liberal professions take on the role of ethical reviewers, human mediators and responsible decision-makers. We guarantee that technical and legal possibilities remain connected with professional responsibility, personal liability and moral judgement.

We strive to explain to people in an understandable way what we do and how we do it — in such a way that people truly understand it. No one is left behind. We send members to the European institutions so that we can help shape future decisions.

For what is yet to emerge, I see visions for the future of the liberal professions in Europe. In one of these visions, I see the liberal professions as officially recognised “professions of trust

in the digital society”, with stronger legal anchoring of their ethical responsibility and new professional profiles at the interface of expertise, digitalisation and ethics.

I see the liberal professions developing into Europe’s counter-model to anonymous platform services. Instead of mass processing, dumping prices and automated advice, there will be personal responsibility, individual advice, liability and quality assurance. In this way, Europe establishes the liberal professions as a brand for responsible services — visibly protected and internationally recognised. This vision is supported by the creation of uniform minimum standards for education, lifelong learning, ethics and professional practice.

We will become more visible if we continue to develop the liberal professions as a European success model. This also includes increasing cooperation across professions in order to solve the complex challenges facing civil society and to do so together with civil society. These challenges include health, demography, climate change and natural hazards, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, education, legal certainty and building culture. The liberal professions will become systemic solution architects for complex problems.

Another vision is that the liberal professions will contribute to Europe’s ethical infrastructure and will play a major role in shaping it. In a world in which economic pressure, data power and artificial intelligence are increasing, the liberal professions safeguard data protection, human dignity, the rule of law, health protection and consumer protection. We are therefore not only service providers, but also guarantors of social stability.

The future of Europe will not be decided by technology and bureaucracy alone — but by people who work in the liberal professions and take responsibility there.

What we must achieve in the future is that we once again become attractive career paths for young people. Despite work-life balance expectations, we offer young people meaning, independence, social relevance, high professional quality and also flexible working-time models in their professional practice. We need the new generations in the liberal professions for our further development.

The generations to come have the potential to shape the future of the liberal professions: independently, digitally, sustainably, internationally and inclusively. For this, we need modern education and study models, a European mobility programme for the liberal professions and much stronger support for women, career changers and international professionals.

As President of CEPLIS, the voice of the liberal professions in Europe, I see the future of the liberal professions in Europe as guardians of ethics and the rule of law, as guarantors of health and safety, as bridge-builders between technology and humanity, as an anchor of quality in the European economic model and as bearers of social responsibility.

Yes, these are visions! But they are not a mirage! Because in our past, we have been able to prove what we stand for — and that is quality and trust. Yes, trust in particular! Because this concept, which is so important for civil society, does not appear at all in the European legal order.

