

The Economist  
Mr John Micklethwait, Editor-in-chief  
25 St James's Street  
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United Kingdom

Brussels, 10 April 2014

**A letter commenting on the Article “Rise of the Robots” (29 March 2014)**

Dear Editor,

Insights in the growing robotics market are always welcome, especially from such a widely respected publication as The Economist. In euRobotics AISBL, the European robotics association with more than 175 member organisations ([www.eu-robotics.net](http://www.eu-robotics.net)), we agree that this is a significant current and future market which will have a pervasive impact during the next decade. However, we also feel that it is very important that the perception of robotics gained by policy makers and the general public is an accurate one that reflects the realistic potential of the technology and its broad impact on both the economy and our lives.

To this end, we would like to point out where we believe your recent special report “Rise of the Robots” is not as balanced as it may have been in informing the public about the current state of robotics in the world. In particular, we are surprised that there is no mention of the almost €1Bn European Commission funded programme within the Horizon 2020 framework that is currently the biggest single robotics civilian robotics research programme on the planet.

The narrow US military focus of the report compounded by its concentration on humanoid robotics, a narrow sub-discipline with little current commercial value beyond advertising, does not communicate even the US viewpoint as expounded through the recent McKinsey report (1), which you also fail to mention.

Few of the US robots you mention are commercially available, yet European companies sell significant numbers of useful and professional robots. This ranges from industrial robots that cooperate with human workers (such as KUKA's iiwa), agricultural robots allowing “precision farming”, undersea inspection robots (for example [www.subsea7.com](http://www.subsea7.com)), through to automatic parking and driver support systems offered by all major European car and truck makers.

Robotics is a strong competence across Europe both in terms of technology and commercial activity. In fact the most recent *World Robotics Report* (2) shows that Europe shares 32% of the global industrial robotics market and some 63% of the global non-military professional service robotics market. We

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suggest reading the European Strategic Research Agenda (3) to gain an insight into what robotics is now, and where robotics technology is going in the coming decade.

It is also of note that Europe is committed not only to developing the necessary technology but also to ensuring that ethical, legal and socio-economic issues are addressed in parallel. We recognise that robotics reaches beyond the technical and will increasingly have significant social and economic impact.

Also of note is that Bot and Dolly (acquired by Google last year) depends on the precision and reliability of European robots for which there are no US equivalents, and the film Gravity was achieved through technical innovations pioneered in Europe.

By talking to European robotics business leaders and technology experts you would have gained a far more interesting and more comprehensive account of the robotics opportunities – especially in Europe. We are keen to help you in contacting the relevant stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'U. Haass', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Uwe Haass  
Secretary-General

Links:

- (1) [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/business\\_technology/disruptive\\_technologies](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/business_technology/disruptive_technologies)
- (2) [www.worldrobotics.org](http://www.worldrobotics.org)
- (3) [http://www.eu-robotics.net/cms/upload/PDF/SRA2020\\_0v42b\\_Printable\\_.pdf](http://www.eu-robotics.net/cms/upload/PDF/SRA2020_0v42b_Printable_.pdf)