



European Council of the Liberal Professions

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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# AI Era: A New Digital Agenda for Europe's Liberal Professions

Hosted by:



**ANPL**

ASSOCIAÇÃO NACIONAL  
DOS PROFISSIONAIS LIBERAIS

**ELSA VELOSO**

# A historic moment

*For the first time, CEPLIS holds its General Assembly in Portugal*



## Hosted by ANPL

With the generous support and hospitality of the Câmara Municipal da Maia.



## Institutional presence

A reflection that the future of the liberal professions is a strategic European issue.



## Why now

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping every profession represented here, often faster than our institutions can respond.

# AI is already in every profession in this room

*Not an emerging technology. Already part of everyday practice.*



## Lawyers

*legal research and drafting*



## Architects

*AI-assisted design solutions*



## Engineers

*optimising complex calculations*



## Accountants

*automating analysis & reporting*



## Healthcare

*imaging, diagnosis support, patient communication*

# THE REAL QUESTION

**It is not the tools. It is the judgement.**



*What distinguishes the liberal professions has never been the tools we use.  
It is the judgement we exercise.*



A patient does not ask an AI system for reassurance after a difficult diagnosis.



A client does not hold an algorithm accountable for legal advice.



Responsibility remains fundamentally human.

## WHY LITERACY MATTERS ?

### The same principle, across every profession:



A lawyer who cannot explain how AI contributed to legal advice is not fully exercising professional judgement.



A doctor who cannot understand the limitations of an AI-assisted diagnosis cannot explain the decision to a patient.



An engineer who blindly accepts AI-generated calculations is not exercising independent responsibility.

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***If we cannot understand the tool, we cannot fully control the outcome and we risk losing the foundation our professions are built on: Ethics, Deontology and Trust.***

# THE EUROPEAN DEBATE

## A false choice we should resist : Fewest Rules

*The AI Act and the broader regulatory raised real questions - but not this one*



Not the real choice

Innovation versus regulation.  
Fewer rules as the path to  
competitiveness.



The real foundation

Our competitive advantage has never been the fewest rules. It has been delivering services that citizens and institutions trust.

*Quality · Responsibility ·  
Ethics · Transparency*

## TODAY'S DISCUSSION

# Two ideas that will determine whether we thrive in the age of AI

01



## AI Literacy

Not just learning to use AI tools, the knowledge, judgement and critical thinking to use them responsibly.

02



## Resilience by Design

Intellectual Property Protection, Cybersecurity, data protection and AI governance as fundamental components of practice, embedded from the start.

# 01

## AI Literacy

*The foundation of trustworthy professional practice*

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**Not training...Mastery**

# What AI literacy is not - and what it is



It is not

A one-hour webinar

Learning to write better prompts

Turning every professional into a data scientist



It is

Knowing what AI can do exceptionally well

Knowing where it is likely to fail

Knowing where bias or hallucination may occur

Understanding why human oversight remains indispensable



# Familiarity should never be confused with understanding



People already use AI extensively to write, research and solve problems. Yet very few understand how these systems actually generate their outputs.

## Why this matters:



Systems we don't understand are systems whose limits we fail to recognise



Mistakes become much harder to detect



Errors acquire an undeserved appearance of authority simply for being technological



## Three pillars of AI literacy

*Literacy alone is not enough — it needs a framework, and it needs funding*

1



### Literacy

Genuine conceptual mastery for every professional whose judgement increasingly relies on AI.

2



### Framework

Frameworks built around independence, responsibility and the primacy of the client's interest.

3



### Funding

Recognising the need and having the resources are different things. Without investment, literacy stays an aspiration.

# Should AI literacy become a recognised profession competency?



## The EU AI Act

Already introduces AI literacy as a legal obligation for organisations deploying AI systems, an important step, but compliance is the floor, not the ceiling.

*As fundamental as ethics or technical expertise?*



## The Working Group consensus

When sectors as different as law, medicine, engineering and surveying were asked for one priority, the answer, time and again, was the same.

## Literacy

*Before AI can transform our professions responsibly, our professions must first understand AI.*

02

# Built-in, not Bolted-on

*Cyber resilience and AI governance by design*

# Built-in, not Bolted-on

## How Can CEPLIS Contribute ?

Intellectual Property Protection by Design..?

Cybersecurity by Design..?

Data Protection and Privacy by Design ...?

AI governance as fundamental components embedded from the start ?



# Europe has done this before

*The same evolution GDPR brought to privacy, now extending to AI*



## Data Protection by Design

GDPR changed the conversation: privacy is no longer considered only after a system is built. It becomes part of the design itself alongside functionality, performance and cost.



## AI Governance by Design

The AI Act's greatest contribution is not its list of obligations. It encourages organisations to ask the right questions before deployment, not after.

## QUESTIONS THAT COME FIRST

# These questions should not appear at the end of a project

*They should be the starting point*



Who is accountable for the use of this system?



What risks could it create?



How will professional judgement be preserved?



How do we ensure meaningful human oversight?



How do we explain AI-assisted decisions to a client or patient?

## HOW TO KNOW

# The answer is found in the timing of your decisions

*Not in policies or procedures on paper*



## Did you...

- Assess the risks before choosing the technology?
- Decide who is accountable before deployment?
- Train professionals before they rely on AI?

*...or did all those conversations only begin once the technology was already in place?*

# Resilience by design, in a small practice



## Clear ownership

Decide, before introducing AI, who is responsible for approving new tools.



## Know what not to share

Everyone understands what information should never enter a public AI system.



## Review before delivery

AI-generated outputs are always reviewed by a qualified professional before reaching a client.



## A plan before the incident

Basic procedures exist so the organisation responds calmly, not by improvising under pressure.

*None of this is expensive. None depends on sophisticated technology. It depends on leadership.*

## A QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE

# Will we own our tools and data or merely rent them?



As AI becomes embedded in practice, will liberal professions continue to own the tools and the data that underpin their work or become dependent on technologies developed and controlled by others?

**This is not primarily a technological question but a question of professional independence.**

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***Independent judgement, clear ethics, personal responsibility, those principles should not become weaker in the digital age. They should become stronger.***

# Action at three levels



## Professional bodies

Build sector-specific AI frameworks now ! No one understands a profession's ethics better than the profession itself. Engage funding instruments while priorities are still being defined.



## Our own practices

Ask before adopting any AI tool: do we understand its limitations? Who is accountable? Can we explain the decision in plain language if a client asks?



## CEPLIS, collectively

Use established credibility with EU institutions to keep two messages alive: quality drives competitiveness, and well-designed regulation protects rather than obstructs.

*Our first duty must always remain the same:  
to act in the best interests of our clients and patients  
With Ethics, Deontology and Responsibility .*

That is something no algorithm can replace.

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## **Built-in, not Bolted-on**

*The future of the liberal professions should not be decided by AI.  
It will be decided by the choices we make about how we tackle this Risk.*



Thank you.

Elsa Veloso

