

# Plans to Regulate AI Technology Enabling Biometric Mass Surveillance under Fire

## News

**Thomas Wahl**

Over 50 civil society organisations called on the European Commission to take a clear stance against biometric mass surveillance. In an [open letter of 1 April 2021](#), the organisations request that any upcoming Commission legislative proposal on AI “must take the necessary step of prohibiting applications of AI that irremediably violate fundamental rights, such as remote biometric identification technologies that enable inherently undemocratic mass surveillance.” More concretely, the letter calls on the Commission to take into account the following issues:

- The legislative proposal on AI must include an explicit ban - on fundamental rights grounds - on the indiscriminate or arbitrarily targeted use of biometrics in public or publicly accessible spaces, which can lead to mass surveillance;
- The EU must provide for legal restrictions or legislative red lines on all AI uses that contravene fundamental rights;
- Marginalised and affected communities must be included in the development of EU AI legislation and policy.

The letter underlines that the EU should be the forerunner for a truly human-centric approach towards AI and make clear that a democratic society does not allow certain uses of AI. The open letter follows a European Citizens’ initiative seeking a ban on biometric surveillance practices (→ [related link](#)) and a similar [call from civil society organisations issued in January 2021](#). On 8 March 2021, 116 MEPs across all parties supported these calls. In an [open letter to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen](#), they stressed that the upcoming proposal on AI must respect the EU’s fundamental rights. This may include “the possibility to ban or prohibit applications of AI that are incompatible with fundamental rights...” The Commission’s expected legislative proposals follow the outcome of its White Paper on Artificial Intelligence launched in February 2020 (→ [related link](#)), which laid the basis for subsequent public consultations and statements.

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