

Keynote Speech – Supervising AI to Support Business, Innovation and Trust

Start Keynote om 13:30 (spreekijd ca. 10 min, 5 min uitloop / vragen).

CEO VNO-NCW & MKB-Nederland

Excellencies, distinguished supervisors and policymakers, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about supervision on AI: **the way we design AI supervision will shape our economies and societies for years to come**. It deserves careful, open dialogue between supervisors, policymakers and the businesses that will operate under this framework.

As CEO of VNO-NCW and MKB-Nederland, I speak on behalf of the broad spectrum of Dutch business – from multinationals to the small and medium-sized enterprises that form the backbone of our economy.

All of them will, in one way or another, be touched by artificial intelligence.

AI is not just another IT tool. It is a system technology that will ultimately permeate almost every sector: health care, education, agriculture, security, transport and logistics, retail, energy, finance, food and media. Used well, AI can help us keep healthcare affordable, improve mobility, accelerate the energy transition, and make agriculture more sustainable.

But this potential will only be realised if people and companies **trust** the technology and the way it is governed. And that is where supervisors play a crucial role.

How we view supervision and innovation

Let me start with a basic question: **how do we, as VNO-NCW and MKB-Nederland, look at supervision and the balance with innovation?**

For us, it is not “supervision versus innovation”. Good supervision is a precondition for innovation.

Businesses – especially SMEs – need three things:

1. **Clarity:** clear rules and clear expectations from supervisors.
2. **Predictability:** a stable framework so they can invest with confidence.
3. **Proportionality:** supervision that recognises differences in risk and in capacity between large firms and small entrepreneurs.

If supervision becomes fragmented, unpredictable or purely punitive, companies will become risk-averse. They will choose not to innovate with AI, especially if they are small and do not have a legal department.

But if supervision is well organised, risk-based and focused on learning – if supervisors help companies understand what is expected and how to comply – then it becomes a powerful enabler of responsible AI innovation.

That is the balance we are looking for: **strict on fundamental rights and safety, smart and supportive on how we get there in practice.**

The reality for businesses – especially SMEs

For large companies, the interplay of the **AI Act**, the **GDPR**, the **Data Act** and sector-specific rules is already a major challenge. For a SME, it can be almost impossible to oversee.

Entrepreneurs are asking questions like:

- Is my AI system covered by the AI Act, and is it high-risk?
- What does that mean in concrete obligations?
- How do AI rules relate to existing data protection duties under the GDPR?
- What do the new data-sharing and access rules under the Data Act mean for us?
- And who is actually my supervisor: my sectoral inspectorate, a digital authority, the data protection authority – or several at the same time?

If the answer is unclear, or if different authorities give different messages, many SMEs will simply stay away from AI. That is bad for competitiveness and bad for Europe's digital transition.

So from our perspective, supervisors are not only guardians of rights and safety. You are also crucial **guides** for companies navigating this new landscape:

- we need supervisors to actively help companies, and particularly SMEs, to understand the **interplay between the AI Act, the GDPR, the Data Act and sectoral rules**,
- develop **joint guidance** that explains, in practical terms, how these frameworks fit together in typical use cases;
- and coordinating among yourselves so that companies do not receive multiple, unaligned requests from different authorities.

In other words: for companies, there should be “no wrong door”. Whichever supervisor they talk to, they should be helped to see the full picture, not just one regulatory silo.

The Dutch debate as a case study

The Dutch discussion on our supervisory structure for the AI Act is a good example of the choices we now face.

The current proposals rightly stress the importance of **sectoral supervisors** and of cooperation between authorities. We strongly support that. AI in healthcare, education, finance or transport should be supervised by authorities that know those sectors, their risks and their legal frameworks.

At the same time, we have underlined to our government that institutional design matters:

- Which authority does what?
- How do supervisors cooperate and share information?

- How do we combine independence with democratic accountability?
- And how do we ensure that the overall system supports innovation and competitiveness?

These questions are not uniquely Dutch. They are relevant for every Member State and for the EU as a whole.

Be innovation- and competitiveness-conscious

Supervision must explicitly take into account **economic and technological developments** and Europe's competitiveness.

The AI Act is about safeguarding fundamental rights and public values – and we fully support that. But the way we implement supervision will also strongly shape Europe's position in global AI competition.

We therefore welcome the emphasis, both in UNESCO's work and in Dutch debates, on:

- a **learning approach** to supervision – supervisors staying agile, updating their knowledge and continuously engaging in dialogue with organisations that develop and use AI;
- **regulatory sandboxes as tool for good cooperation**, coordinated across authorities, where innovative AI systems can be tested under real-world conditions while managing risks and providing legal certainty;
- and international cooperation, such as UNESCO's project and the emerging global networks of AI supervisory authorities, which help align practices and **avoid fragmentation**.

From our side, we are ready to contribute to this learning process: by sharing cases; by involving SMEs as well as large companies; and by working with supervisors to make sure that rules and guidance are workable in practice.

How do we move forward after this conference?

That brings me to the question: **how do we proceed after today?**

As supervisors and policymakers, you hold a key part of that future in your hands. As business, we do as well.

So I would like to invite you:

- to see yourselves not only as enforcers, but also as **partners and guides** for responsible innovation;
- to continue building a **learning, cooperative culture** of AI supervision, as UNESCO's project rightly promotes;
- and to keep the perspective of businesses, specifically **SMEs and Europe's competitiveness** firmly in view when you design your structures, your guidance and your day-to-day practices.

If we succeed, we will build a supervisory system that protects people and fundamental rights, gives businesses the clarity and confidence they need, and allows Europe to lead in trustworthy and innovative AI.

The role we see for VNO-NCW and MKB-Nederland

Finally, what role do we see for ourselves?

We see VNO-NCW and MKB-Nederland as:

- a **bridge** between supervisors and the business community, gathering experiences from our members and bringing them to the table;
- a **partner** in co-creating practical guidance, checklists and tools that work for companies in different sectors and of different sizes;
- a **voice for business, large and small**;
- and a **connector** between national and European debates, feeding national experiences into EU discussions and vice versa.

We are asking for **smart supervision** that protects people and values, while enabling companies – especially SMEs – to innovate with responsible AI.

Conclusion

Let me close with this.

Supervising AI by competent authorities and developing AI by responsible companies are two sides of the same coin. Neither of us can succeed without the other.

You, as supervisors and policymakers, hold a key part of the future of AI in your hands. We, as the business community, hold another part. If we work together – in a structured, continuous and international way – we can build a system that:

- protects citizens and their rights,
- gives companies clarity and confidence to invest,
- and strengthens Europe's position in the global AI landscape.

Supervising AI by competent authorities must go hand in hand with **developing AI by responsible companies**. If we can leave this conference not only with good discussions, but also with a clear roadmap for cooperation, that would be a major step forward.

On behalf of VNO-NCW and MKB-Nederland, I can say: **we are ready to play our part**.

Thank you.