

**Address of the Ambassador Gianluigi Benedetti
on the occasion of the Italian-Israeli Workshop on Artificial Intelligence
Tel Aviv University - March 4, 2019**

Prof. Ben Israel, Head of the Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Center,

Prof. Rita Cucchiara, Director of the Italian Lab on Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Systems,

Honorable members of the Italian and Israeli delegations,

Welcome to our bilateral workshop, initiated and supported by the Embassy of Italy and hosted by the Tel Aviv University.

Last Thursday I had the pleasure to take part in the Ambassadors' Summit, organized by the Blavatnik Center here at the Tel Aviv University. Prof. Ben Israel opened by presenting the National AI Plan and elaborated on this ambitious effort, to be finalized and submitted within the next two months.

Listening to him reminded me of a famous quotation of David Ben Gurion who said "in Israel, to be a REALIST, one has to believe in MIRACLES".

If you don't personally know Israel, and Prof. Ben-Israel, it might actually look like an insurmountable goal, but getting to know both quite well, I am convinced that we will have a National plan and that AI will stand at the forefront of Israel's economy, education, security, and foreign relations in the next decade, the same way it happened for Cyber security, another Israeli miracle, another achievement of Prof. Ben-Israel.

Today's meeting is his initiative as much as it is our Embassy's, as, together we share the strong notion that Israel and Italy collaboration is a win-win game. It is backed up not only by facts and numbers, but more than anything else by a genuine interest and goodwill of the scientific and industrial communities in both countries to join forces.

Having worked hard to organize this seminar, I am very proud to present you today an Italian "dream team", representing top research institutes, agencies, investors and companies working on various AI fields.

They don't need to be introduced since their work speaks for them. Allow me very briefly to portray the Italian AI ecosystem, and then to conclude with why I believe a solid, long-term collaboration should and could take place.

Italian AI ecosystem encompasses several fields, including machine learning, natural language, optimization, computer vision, robotics, speech processing, human-computer interaction, data management and knowledge-based systems, security, and education.

Italy has a long-standing tradition in scientific research on AI, going back to the end of the sixties with the Institute of Cybernetics guided by Prof. Edoardo Caianello, a pioneer of neural network.

The eighties saw the rise of scientific associations, the major one being the Italian Association for Artificial Intelligence, which was launched on 1988 and extended the research to many more fields of AI.

During the last decade a unification process strongly supported by our Government led to the institution in 2017 of the National Laboratory CINI on Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Systems. Strongly supported by the Government, the Lab operates under the direction of Prof. Rita Cucchiara, who sits among us today. At present it gathers around 900 scientists through a network of 50 research groups and around 200 startups all involved in AI.

Finally, Italy is a candidate to host the hub of the future Laboratory for Artificial Intelligence Claire (Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial intelligence Research in Europe), which Europe is envisioning on the CERN model. The new European laboratory will be a network of multiple centers and will have a multidisciplinary character. The “CERN of artificial intelligence” aims to unite efforts and networking especially small realities to make them more competitive globally.

With this picture in mind, I am sure that by bringing together experienced scholars and executives from the Italian and Israeli AI ecosystems, we can open another path of concrete future cooperation that could be very promising and very successful.

We can learn from our respective experiences and challenges. We can put together our common strengths and complement each other where we have distinctive capabilities. We can work together to be more effective, more far-reaching and, at the bottom line, to serve better our economies and our peoples.

We have at our disposal our strong academic and business communities, an extraordinary Government to Government Framework Agreement, which provides us with political support and financial assistance for academic and industrial projects.

We must put in sync our energies and our work especially in this field, a field that, as we all know very well, is going to change our life in not such a distant future.

Thank you.