

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: Go robot!

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It's often difficult to make a press conference media-friendly. The challenge is always how to take information, no matter how interesting, and present it in a way that is eye candy for today's visually-led news audience. At a media briefing this month that ticked all the PR boxes for news and novelty - expressive female android, check, man with Jamiroquai-esque leopard print hat on his head, check - the island state of Malta has announced it would be considering citizenship for robots.



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It was perhaps inevitable that before the dust had even settled on this month's Blockchain Summit and before the global news contingent had left for home, the archipelago would already be positioning itself for the next 'next big thing', namely artificial intelligence.

Malta is mulling granting "certain citizenship conditions" to robots, Digital Economy and Innovation Parliamentary Secretary Silvio Schembri announced to members of the fourth estate when he unveiled a new vision for artificial intelligence.

"We still need to see how it will work as granting citizenship for robots in Malta will also grant them access to the European Union," noted head of the AI task force Wayne Gixti, who was seated on the panel next to Sophia, billed as the world's most expressive robot.

Citizenship test

Authorities will explore a pilot project to create a citizenship test for AI robots with SingularityNET, the company behind Sophia.

Grixti said the idea came after Sophia, who was present for the launch, was given citizenship in Saudi Arabia.

In a clarification sent the following day, the office of the Prime Minister said that the citizenship test would be a way for researchers to measure just how much a robot could "understand the way citizens work together and the civic rules respected by human beings in our day to day life".

This information, the OPM said, would be useful when drafting new regulation for artificial intelligence.

"A citizenship test is not a means for the granting of citizenship," the OPM spokesman added.

National AI strategy

Parliamentary secretary Schembri said that a National AI strategy would be launched in 2019.

The government's objective was to understand how AI could be applied to provide better services to citizens, he said. Malta was also very similar to a cosmopolitan city and could allow companies to test their products in a real-life scenario.

New technology could be used to develop AI applications that would make life easier, Mr Schembri said. For instance, the government was looking at how Artificial Intelligence could be used to improve traffic management and help with route optimisation.

AI could also help with improving traffic flow through cameras on the road and automated enforcement, Mr Schembri said adding that the government wanted to create a centre of research, development and application of AI.

[Read: Robots to start assisting Mater Dei doctors during surgery](#)

The plan was to introduce AI in a strategic manner conversant with other strategies being pursued, such as that of distributed ledger technology.

Big money

Traffic and medical applications aside, AI is big money. Schembri posits that AI is expected to underpin \$15,7tn of global economic growth by 2030 and that it is expected to impact every economic sector not least by transforming current jobs and creating new ones.

It is estimated that over 2,000 companies globally working in this sector raise over \$36,7bn.

Additionally, the market has the potential of growing compoundly at a rate of 75% until the year 2021.

Once you could see past the man with the silly hat, the message was simple. As the Parliamentary Secretary said - Malta is open for business.

ABOUT MARCUS 'THE MALTESE FALCON' BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger Level 1 BBBEE marketing/comms agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact marcus@marcusbrewster.com or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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