

Academy Lecture: Viktor Kaplan-Lecture

How geopolitics, deregulation, and the AI hype cycle threaten human rights protection

Sandra Wachter

Professor of Technology and Regulation, University of Oxford



16 June 2026
6:00 PM

Austrian Academy of Sciences
Festive Hall
Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2
1010 Vienna

Opening and Welcome

Christiane Wendehorst, President of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

Viktor Kaplan-Lecture

Abstract

It is impossible to open a newspaper and not see yet another story about AI and its promise to enable economic growth. Nowadays it would almost border on heresy to stand in the way of AI development. This can clearly be seen in the current political climate which makes one thing very clear: we have entered a new age of deregulation.

In recent months, Big Tech successfully lobbied for stopping and revising the EU AI Act, changing the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and shelving the promised AI Liability Directive. "Cutting the red tape" is the declared goal in order to unleash the full potential of AI and enable competitiveness.

Interestingly enough, the counterfactual is never assessed. In other words, what are the costs of deregulation? How many people will now see no legal recourse if AI harms them? How many people's health will be compromised by weakened environmental laws? How many people's lives are now in danger due to the lower non-discrimination standards?

This begs the question: who actually benefits from deregulation?

This talk will discuss who really benefits from lowering legal frameworks. We will discuss Big Tech's AI promises, explore their current lobbying efforts and the costs society has to bear because of it. However, I will show that profitability and protecting human rights do not have to be in conflict. I will close by proposing my new idea for tech governance that will incentivise industry to develop ethical products and help legislators to regulate those who do not.

CV

Prof. Dr. Sandra Wachter, MSc (Oxon) is Humboldt Professor of Technology and Regulation at the Hasso Plattner Institute and Professor of Technology and Regulation at the University of Oxford at the Oxford Internet Institute. Wachter and her interdisciplinary research group research the legal and ethical implications of AI, Big Data, and robotics as well as Internet and platform regulation. Professor Wachter also serves as a policy advisor for governments, companies, and NGOs around the world on regulatory and ethical questions concerning emerging technologies.

The Viktor Kaplan-Lectures are part of the Austrian Academy of Sciences' broader "Academy Lectures" event series. Named after the Austrian engineer Viktor Kaplan, this lecture series covers a broad spectrum of technology and related fields – from civil and construction disciplines to automation and robotics, as well as computer science and biomedical technology.

CONTACT

Andrea Windegger, OeAW
andrea.windegger@oeaw.ac.at

OEAW.AC.AT

REGISTRATION

Please register at:
oeaw.ac.at/anmeldung/akademievorlesungen

Photo: © Sandra Wachter