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# EU and UK map out robotics plans as big market looms

By [Mark Hawver](#), Tech Times | July 1, 5:01 PM

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The robotics market is growing by leaps and bounds, and represents a significant factor in helping national economies compete with countries that offer low-cost labor. The European Union and the UK are taking steps to encourage robotics development. (Photo : Europa.eu)

The use of robots in industry is on the rise, and the European Union strongly believes that member countries need to keep pace with the growth of robotics in other world markets.

Robotics bring automation to manufacturing, and the EU sees automation as a cost-effective means of competing with low-wage labor in other parts of the world. The EU recently cited figures predicting that the robotics market will increase globally from \$30 billion to \$83 billion by 2020.

To help Europe become a leading developer of new robotics technology and innovation, the EU, through the European Commission, has launched the Partnership for Robotics in Europe (named SPARC). The EU is partnering with over 180 industries and research organizations in this \$3.9 billion investment that will span a six-year period. The ambitious plan seeks to overcome the U.S. and Asian countries in robotic development. The objective is to create over 240,000 new jobs in Europe while increasing share of the global market to 42 percent.

The potential impact of SPARC was delineated by European Commission Vice President Neelie Kroes, who said "Europe needs to be a producer and not merely a consumer of robots. Robots do much more than replace humans -- they often do things humans can't or won't do and that improves everything from our quality of life to our safety. Integrating robots into European industry helps us create and keep jobs in Europe."

The SPARC program will reach into areas other than industrial use. Medicine, surgical methods, self-driving vehicles, entertainment, security and agriculture are other specific targets for robotic development research. Funding will be prioritized toward joint efforts that combine participants from industry, academia and research centers.

In the non-EU United Kingdom, a new robotics strategy is under way. RAS 2020 (Robotics and Autonomous Systems) has been initiated to spur the development and testing of robots for both indoor and outdoor applications. It will encourage testing and development of robotic products in public places, in plain sight.

The plan is to take advantage of laws in many countries that allow public testing of robotic products. This includes the UK, which is on track to permit self-driving cars on British roads in an effort to encourage UK companies to develop their own pilotless vehicles.

Some of the other areas that RAS 2020 will open up to robotics testing include airports, hospitals, farms, production lines, refineries and power plants.

Part of the new protocol will involve competitive testing and public participation in testing programs, intended to familiarize people with new technology and provide input in its development.

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