It's time for the EU to address the multiple challenges of IoT

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As widely reported by the press, the Internet of Things took center stage at this year's CES event in Las Vegas. But it wasn't just a matter of health trackers, connected cars or "smart" home appliances being showcased to the usual crowd of tech enthusiast. There was also a lot of talk about the implications of a coming world in which most everyday objects will be connected.

In fact, for all its touted benefits, the rise of IoT is expected to raise a number of legal questions and regulatory issues. This was the core message of a speech delivered by US Federal Trade Commission chairwoman Edith Ramirez during the event itself.

While recognizing that the boom in connected devices has the potential to foster global economic growth and improve people's lives, Ramirez voiced particular concern about security and privacy risks posed by the Internet of Things. Her words highlight FTC efforts in developing

a fresh and more tailored response to the challenge.

So, how the European Union is faring in this respect? Well, let's say that it's time to do more.

The European Commission held a public consultation on IoT between April and July 2012 in view of presenting an ambitious "recommendation" (i.e. a non.binding by Spring 2013. At the same time, the conclusions of an EU Expert Group signalled that policy initiatives were required in as many areas as privacy, safety and security, ethics, interoperability, governance and standard.

Yet the recommendation has never come into being, and ever since IoT has all but disappeared from the EU institutions' radar. To a certain extent some IoT issues have been addressed through a proposed "data protection" regulation and a cyber security directive.

However, a far more comprehensive approach is clearly needed and the new European Commission should start working on it as soon as possible. Even if it may be still considered in its infancy, IoT is growing at a rapid pace. According to Cisco, some 25 billion devices will be connected by 2015, and 50 billion by 2020. A stronger regulatory framework at EU level will not only ensure that consumers' rights be kept safe, but will also enable the industry to evolve in a stable manner as legal uncertainty is bad for innovation too.