Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1055 (1987)[1]

Parliamentary assessment in Europe of scientific and technological choices

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its Recommendations 932 and 1028, on the 5th and 6th Parliamentary and Scientific Conferences (Helsinki 1981 and Tokyo 1985), and its Orders Nos. 400 and 427 on follow-up action thereto by its Committee on Science and Technology ;

2. Having regard to its recent debates on animal experiments, on radioactive waste management and on research involving the human embryo ;

3. Considering that scientific progress and technological choices are liable to cause deep rifts in public opinion - whether on subjects such as these or others such as genetic engineering, the neurosciences, industrial chemistry and disposal of wastes, or nuclear electricity ;

4. Noting that these rifts in opinion - which arise from divergent views on matters such as medical ethics, freedom and responsibility of the researcher, the therapeutic aspects of research, public health, safety of workers, technological competitiveness, economic growth, the creation of jobs and the protection of the environment - give rise to major public discussions on the nature of society, to which parliamentarians are expected to contribute ;

5. Observing that these rifts in opinion cut across the major currents of political and social thought and sensibility, which are expressed through the political parties in systems of representative pluralist democracy ;

6. Considering therefore that parliamentary institutions should provide the framework within which elected representatives should have the means and opportunities for becoming informed on, for questioning, and for stating their views on the orientations of science and on technological choices at national and European levels ;

7. Welcoming some recent national experiences and initiatives (French parliamentary office, German Bundestag inquiry commission, motion tabled in the British Parliament, etc.) and, in particular, the initiative of the European Parliament in launching - for a trial period, for the benefit of its committees - a project for the assessment of scientific and technological options (STOA) ;

8. Noting that these initiatives, in each country and at European level :

   8.1. are complementary to others taken by governments to strengthen, within the executive, scientific and technological assessment capabilities ;

   8.2. are therefore indispensable to sustaining the independence and credibility of parliamentary judgments of executive proposals and declarations ;

1. Assembly debate on 5 May 1987 (2nd Sitting) (see Doc. 5717, report of the Committee on Science and Technology). Text adopted by the Assembly on 5 May 1987 (2nd Sitting).

8.3. could only succeed through the setting up and the activation of networks of high-level consultation in scientific and technological circles, and through the readiness of members thereof to guarantee the quality of the information and interpretations of data (including uncertainties therein) made available to the parliamentarians who would bear responsibility for decisions ;

9. Having regard to the work of the Amsterdam Congress on Technology Assessment, organised by the Netherlands authorities and the Commission of the European Communities (2-4 February 1987), which brought to light the many initiatives currently under way in Europe both in the public and private sectors ;

10. Believing that the Council of Europe, in the context of these many initiatives, and as much in its intergovernmental as in its parliamentary work, should develop a stronger and more specific role according to the values of its Statute - protection of the integrity of the human personality and of all aspects of the quality of the environment ;

11. Believing that the progress of human knowledge and technological innovation, which share today a common source in scientific research, contribute to the realisation of these values, provided that decisions as to their use and diffusion in society are taken realistically and carefully ;

12. Having regard :

12.1. to the orientations of the Council of Europe's third medium-term plan (1987-91), and in particular to the work of the specialist committees on the biomedical sciences and on the media ;

12.2. to the work of the Scientific and Technological Policy Committee of OECD, and to its coming meeting at ministerial level ;

12.3. to the work of the Scientific and Technological Policy Committee of OECD, and to its coming meeting at ministerial level ;

12.4. to the work of the European Science Foundation, and to the significance for the assessment of certain scientific and technological options of its activities in human embryology, in toxicology, in forest ecosystems and in the social sciences ;

12.5. to the role of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), indispensable for the gathering and analysis of data at global level, as shown by its active collaboration in the first meeting, on the subject of radioactivity (post-Chernobyl), of the Parliamentary and Scientific Contact Group of the Assembly (Berne, 16 September 1986) ;

12.6. to the work of the contact group's second meeting (Strasbourg, 19 November 1986) on parliamentary assessment of scientific and technological options and the new initiative in this field of the European Parliament ;

12.7. to the forthcoming start of preparatory work for the Council of Europe's 7th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference, and to the timeliness of making arrangements for ensuring its concordance with the medium-term orientations of the Council of Europe as well as with those of OECD and the European Science Foundation, so as to exploit the conference's work more fruitfully than has been possible under the present system for the two preceding conferences ;

13. Wishing to offer the European Parliament its support, throughout the trial period, for the project for the assessment of scientific and technological options ;

14. Declaring its readiness, through the intermediary of its Committee on Science and Tech,nology, to develop the role of its Parliamentary and Scientific Contact Group in order :

a. to strengthen working relations with the European Parliament ;

b. to provide for continuity in the series of parliamentary and scientific conferences ; and

c. to make available to all interested committees the means of access to a genuine assessment capability for the scientific and technological aspects of their subjects ;

15. Proposing to re-examine, in the light of the preceding paragraph and of paragraph 17, the means put at the disposal of the contact group and of the parliamentary and scientific conferences ;

16. Calling on the governments of member states :

a. to recognise the important role with regard to public opinion which parliamentary institutions directly or indirectly need to fulfil in respect of major scientific orientations and technological choices and their foreseeable or possible short- or long-term consequences, in particular financial, environmental, international, social and ethical ;

b. to take or facilitate the measures required to establish or strengthen, in parliamentary institutions, independent capabilities for examining, commenting on and assessing these orientations and choices,

17. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers, in seeing that the orientations of the medium-term plan are respected, provide for continuing exchanges of views on the specific role of the Council of Europe in the medium-term assessment of the direct and indirect effects in European society of its scientific orientations and technological choices, and establish for this specific purpose a unit for liaison with the Assembly.