



## Resolution 1083 (1996)<sup>1</sup>

# Parliaments and the assessment of scientific and technological choices

### Parliamentary Assembly

1. The phenomenal increase in the pace of scientific and technical progress indicates clearly that, in future, economies will be knowledge-based. The technological choices that will be made in the coming years will have a critical impact on national economies' competitiveness and thus on people's well-being.
2. Scientific and technological changes are having an increasingly direct effect on society, overturning traditional ways of life and challenging existing value systems. Their political, economic, ethical, moral and environmental implications have become so wide-ranging that those responsible for exercising political choice may be unaware of what is involved.
3. Controlling these changes, anticipating their social consequences and guiding them has become not only a duty for political leaders but also a challenge of power. The applications of science and technology therefore depend on political decision-makers' capacity to assess these complex subjects.
4. Whilst scientific and technological innovation has led to radical changes in legislation over the last ten years, the majority of parliamentarians are, through lack of specific training and professional experience, unable to choose between the options put forward by the specialists.
5. The democratic system is in danger of becoming unbalanced as parliaments gradually lose whole areas of decision-making to the government bodies and experts who hold the relevant knowledge.
6. On the one hand, politicians must not be allowed to use scientific and technological discoveries for their own purposes, with no account being taken of democratic principles; on the other hand, scientists must be prevented from influencing political decisions in order to undertake research that is not subject to democratic supervision.
7. In order to meet this challenge, scientific choices must be made in a spirit of openness and public debate. Parliaments have a duty to inform themselves and take account of all aspects of technological innovations, with priority going to those that are most likely to contribute to social well-being.
8. The response has been the introduction, often in an institutionalised form, of a new form of collaboration between the worlds of science and politics, usually referred to under the English term "technology assessment".
9. Although technology assessment was initially shaped by preventive, or even negative, considerations, its methods have increasingly reflected a desire to improve living conditions by channelling technological development, on the basis of broad-ranging consultations between the relevant partners.
10. Technology assessment is both a form of investigation and an institutional process. It assesses the consequences of technological development and contributes to national decision-making on technological strategies and their technological and economic impacts.

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1. Assembly debate on 23 April 1996 (16th Sitting) (see [Doc. 7482](#), report of the Committee on Science and Technology, rapporteur: Mr Birraux). Text adopted by the Assembly on 23 April 1996 (16th Sitting).



11. Despite organisational differences, technology assessment bodies share a common objective: to offer parliaments high quality, independent information on scientific and technical problems. The aim is to adapt technology more closely to society's needs by setting out the parameters of choices and the consequences of those choices in terms of risk.

12. In Europe, parliamentary assessment bodies are still in their infancy. Only five countries have established such institutions. Much remains to be done to develop appropriate working methods. Each country must establish its own institutional structure for technology assessment, taking into account its particular social, economic, political, scientific and cultural characteristics.

13. The Assembly therefore invites:

a. the parliaments of member states, where applicable:

1. to take immediate steps to set up technology assessment bodies, drawing on existing experience, adapting it to the available material and human resources and laying down clear priorities;
2. to encourage transparency and public debate on the scientific and technological choices that have to be made;
3. to promote greater awareness of the need for technology assessment in the relevant circles and among the general public, thus stimulating the creation of such bodies;
4. to ensure the independence of technology assessment;
5. to make available to newly established technology assessment bodies in the countries of central and eastern Europe certain costly studies already available in other countries in order to allow them a more effective management of priority areas;

b. its relevant committees:

1. to organise colloquies and seminars and encourage exchanges of information and contacts to facilitate the establishment and functioning of technology assessment bodies in the various countries;
2. to give special assistance to the establishment of technology assessment bodies in the countries of central and eastern Europe, in order to speed up their integration into the European economy;
3. to encourage international co-operation in the technology assessment field and, where appropriate, contribute to exchanges of information between technology assessment bodies and with international organisations helping them to face problems of global importance and to avoid wasted intellectual effort;
4. to associate themselves on a subject basis with the activities of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment Office (EPTA), thus possibly laying the foundations for a European clearing house.