



Resolution 1120 (1997)¹

Impact of the new communication and information technologies on democracy

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In view of the technical, political and cultural changes currently under way, the Assembly feels it should help to identify the opportunities opened up by the new communication and information technologies (NCITs) for meeting the needs of our societies more fully. The developments and applications of the NCITs should afford real social benefit. They must serve the promotion of freedoms, foster the self-fulfilment of citizens and their more effective participation in public affairs, stimulate economic development and employment, facilitate social and cultural progress and advance education and the acquisition of knowledge. They must be harnessed to the interests of man, social progress, democracy and peace.
2. The Assembly wishes to stress the positive challenges of the development of the new communication and information technologies. These open up huge possibilities, for instance in the field of education, and can also play an important role in the promotion of democracy as they make it possible for contacts and the exchange of ideas without censorship by undemocratic authorities.
3. In this context, the Assembly considers it essential:
 - 3.1. to find ways of averting the following risks: a reduction in political choice, the manipulation of consciences, the commercialisation and fragmentation of political messages, a surfeit of opinion polls, the marginalisation of parliamentary procedures, social discrimination, the monitoring of citizens and the drift towards an instantaneous but devalued form of democracy;
 - 3.2. to take account of the new prospects offered by the NCITs for developing interactivity as a remedy for the passiveness characterising those who merely observe events. The NCITs provide an opportunity to create a new type of two-way communication and develop a new concept, "electronic citizenship";
 - 3.3. to decide what belongs in the public sphere and what should be subjected to market forces.
4. Consequently, the Assembly calls upon national parliaments to promote policies which take account of the following requirements:
 - 4.1. at the legal level:
 - a. taking legislative action in order to ensure the most effective use of these technologies for the benefit of the public and to reconcile technological progress with respect for democratic principles and human rights;
 - b. avoiding the introduction of complex and unworkable rules which would hamper the evolution and development of the NCITs necessary for the common good. Whenever it is necessary to regulate, the proportionality principle must be applied so as to strike a proper balance between the measures taken and the objectives pursued, between respect for freedoms, the protection of privacy and the fight against crime;

1. Assembly debate on 22 April 1997 (11th Sitting) (see [Doc. 7772](#), report of the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations, rapporteur: Mr Masseret; and [Doc. 7805](#), opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Rodeghiero). Text adopted by the Assembly on 22 April 1997 (11th Sitting).



4.2. at the political level:

- a. organising training in the NCITs from the earliest age in the public and private education system. The necessary funds should be made available to ensure that the public sector has all the appropriate resources. This is a prerequisite of equal opportunity for all citizens, regardless of their social status;
- b. providing universally accessible and affordable computer facilities that cover all the possibilities offered by national and international networks;
- c. endowing national parliaments and decentralised authorities with the equipment needed for developing consultations between elected representatives and citizens, thereby ensuring increased participation by the latter in political decision-making;
- d. promoting appropriate national legislative measures so as to set a legal framework for the preservation of private data, the protection of young people and respect for ethical rules and human rights;
- e. ensuring respect for the confidentiality of automated private and personal data, in particular by applying the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108) and Committee of Ministers Resolutions Nos. (73) 22 and (74) 29 on protection of the privacy of individuals vis-à-vis electronic data banks, Recommendation No. R (94) 13 on measures to promote media transparency, and Recommendation No. R (95) 4 on the protection of personal data in the area of telecommunication services, with particular reference to telephone services.

5. The Assembly also requests national parliaments to inform it annually of any steps taken or being prepared in connection with the various situations created by the NCITs, so that they may be presented and discussed at interparliamentary conferences organised by the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations.