



## Resolution 1393 (2004)<sup>1</sup>

# Parliaments and the knowledge society

## Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its [Recommendation 1055 \(1987\)](#) on parliamentary assessment in Europe of scientific and technological choices and its [Resolution 1083 \(1996\)](#) on parliaments and the assessment of scientific and technological choices.
2. Already in 1987 the Assembly:
  - 2.1. considered 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”;
  - 2.2. welcomed recent initiatives in this sense in the French, German, British and European Parliaments;
  - 2.3. called on governments of member states 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 consequences” and 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”.
3. Nine years later the Assembly stated that:
  - 3.1. “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.
  - 3.2. 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.
  - 3.3. 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. 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.
  - 3.4. 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.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 7 September 2004 (see [Doc. 10252](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Randegger).



- 3.5. 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.
  - 3.6. 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' [TA].
  - 3.7. 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.
  - 3.8. 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."
4. In this text the Assembly invited the parliaments of member states "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" and "to encourage transparency and public debate on the scientific and technological choices that have to be made".
  5. Developments since then have proved that the Assembly was right in its earlier analysis. All the points reiterated above are still valid, if not more urgent. In the meantime, parliaments have set up their own structures for parliamentary assessment of scientific and technological choices. Parliaments are being overtaken by technological development, and in particular that of the information society.
  6. The Assembly welcomes the setting up in 1990 of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment Network (EPTA) which has today twelve members and three associates. The Parliamentary Assembly, as one of these associates, sees its role as being to promote pan-European co-operation in the field of TA and to facilitate the emergence of parliamentary TA structures and procedures in those countries where these do not yet exist.
  7. From 1961 until 1990 the Parliamentary Assembly organised, in co-operation with other international organisations such as the European Science Foundation, the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the OECD, seven international parliamentary and scientific conferences. These proved a useful forum for debate and interaction between parliamentarians and world class scientists.
  8. There are different models of technology assessment institutions; and it is for each parliament to decide which suits better its own structures and working methods. TA should not however be a means of substituting or reducing the responsibility of parliamentarians but of giving them the best possible informational basis for their decisions. It is then for them to decide whether or not certain real or possible consequences of particular choices are acceptable.
  9. The Assembly therefore asks national parliaments of Council of Europe member and Observer states:
    - 9.1. to promote parliamentary practices, which would enlarge and extend the evaluation of future perspectives and to develop science and technology assessment procedures;
    - 9.2. to study and base themselves on existing good practice in order to establish science and technology committees, in particular in the parliaments of emerging democracies;
    - 9.3. to co-operate within the EPTA Network;
  10. The Assembly decides to consider, in due course, the opportuneness of resuming the organisation, in co-operation with appropriate partners, of its series of international parliamentary and scientific conferences.