Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1934 (2013)[1]
Final version

Ethics in science and technology

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly observes that, within the context of growing global economic competition, the political and economic pressures on science and technology to continually innovate, and to accelerate and facilitate economic success can collide with ethical concerns and could lead to a lowering of the standards needed to prevent the hazards of scientific and technological research and fully protect human dignity. At the same time, the increasing complexity of science and technology – through their growing convergence and interdependence, and the way they interact with society – is making it difficult to accurately foresee and assess their long-term consequences.

2. Therefore, the Assembly holds that more concerted ethical consideration should be given – at national, supraregional and global levels – to the goals and purposes pursued by science and technology, to the instruments and methods they employ, to their possible consequences and side effects, and to the overall system of rules and behaviour within which they operate.

3. The Assembly believes that having a permanent structure for ethical reflection at the global level would make it possible to address ethical issues as a "moving target", rather than fixing an "ethical code", and enable a periodic re-questioning of even basic assumptions, such as the definition of "human identity" or "human dignity".

4. The Assembly welcomes the initiative of UNESCO in setting up the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) with a view to engaging in ongoing ethical reflection and exploring the possibilities of drafting and periodically reviewing a set of fundamental ethical principles based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It believes that the Council of Europe should contribute to this process.

5. In this respect, the Assembly recommends that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe consider establishing a flexible and informal structure for ethical reflection, through co-operation between relevant Assembly committees and members of relevant expert committees, including the Committee on Bioethics (DH-BIO), with a view to identifying emerging ethical issues and main ethical principles that could guide political and legal action in Europe.

6. To reinforce the common European framework of ethics in science and technology, the Assembly recommends that member States, which have not yet done so, sign and ratify the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine: Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (ETS No. 164, "Oviedo Convention") and its protocols and fully engage in the work of the Committee on Bioethics.

7. Furthermore, the Assembly recommends that the Council of Europe member States:

7.1. extend ethical reflection and assessment to all fields of research, using the experience gained in the field of bioethics;

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1. *Assembly debate* on 26 April 2013 (18th Sitting) (see Doc. 13141, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Kaźmierczak). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 April 2013 (18th Sitting).

7.2. entrust the competent bodies to draft guidelines outlining general ethical principles to be applied in all areas of scientific research, and more detailed national codes on research ethics to be applied to specific fields, including social sciences and humanities;

7.3. consider ethical reflection and the assessment of scientific research and technological development as priorities and allocate adequate administrative support and funding to the advisory and monitoring institutions, while guaranteeing their independence;

7.4. where necessary, reform existing procedures and structures to harmonise ethical rules and streamline monitoring procedures;

7.5. where necessary, review and reform existing rules in the evaluation system of professional achievements of scientists to eliminate elements in the evaluation system which could reward non-ethical behaviour (such as violations of the rights of intellectual property, plagiarism, manipulation of scientific data, “artificial multiplying” of scientific achievements, for example by means of “dismembered” publishing of results);

7.6. encourage the setting up of more committees on research ethics at the level of universities, hospitals and other medical establishments in order to enhance the understanding and application of ethical principles and related legislation among students and researchers;

7.7. endeavour to ensure that courses in all scientific disciplines include obligatory modules on ethical reflection in science and technology;

7.8. increase the capacity of researchers and scientists to deal with ethical issues in their work through awareness raising and dedicated education;

7.9. introduce, in the secondary education curricula, opportunities to initiate deeper critical thinking on some fundamental issues related to science and technology, including the definition of “human” and the place of human beings in relation to nature;

7.10. facilitate wide public debates on ethical issues emerging from scientific research and the development of new technologies.

8. Referring to its Resolution 1870 (2012) on the need for independent and credible expert assessments, the Assembly recommends that all Council of Europe member States reconsider the existing protocols and control mechanisms concerning independent scientific and technical assessments of risks to human health and the environment, and improve them as appropriate, in particular to:

8.1. prevent new processes from being implemented and new products from being commercialised without sufficient guarantees concerning their safety for human health and the environment;

8.2. prevent conflicts of interest and ensure the highest reliability of results, *inter alia* by measures allowing sufficient lapses of time for the assessment of long-term risks;

8.3. ensure the highest transparency and independence of scientific and technical assessment, *inter alia* by introducing an assessment traceability system and by setting up a public fund to finance “sensitive” expert assessments.

9. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to develop their own scientific and technological capacity assessment and increase the involvement of the public in political decision making as regards scientific and the relevant technological choices, and regulation. The parliaments are also invited to take an active part in the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA) network.

10. The Assembly invites the European Union and UNESCO to co-operate with the Council of Europe to reinforce the common European framework of ethics in science and technology and, to this end:

10.1. create European and regional platforms to regularly exchange experiences and best practice covering all fields of science and technology, using the experience acquired in the framework of the European Conference of National Ethics Committees (COMETH) initiated by the Council of Europe, and more recently the Forum of National Ethics Councils (NEC Forum) funded by the European Commission, and the meetings of the Council of Europe Committee on Bioethics;

10.2. draft and periodically review a set of fundamental ethical principles to be applied to all fields of science and technology;

10.3. provide further guidance to help member States harmonise ethical rules and monitoring procedures, building on the positive impact of ethical requirements under the European Commission’s Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (2007-2013) (FP7).