



Resolution 2333 (2020)¹

Ethics in science and technology: a new culture of public dialogue

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that the convergence between nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive sciences, and the speed at which the applications of new technologies are put on the market, have consequences not only for individual human rights and the way they can be exercised, but also for the ways risks and benefits are distributed in society. It also notes that, while fundamental scientific research is subject to strict ethical rules and scrutiny, applied research is often subject to competition at global level to bring products quickly to the market, with less rigorous oversight and lower standards with regard to respect for human rights.
2. Developments in science and technology must respect fundamental values and human dignity, and scientific and technological foresight should no longer remain the exclusive remit of researchers and industry. Public authorities have to involve citizens more widely in decision making on science and technology, and policy options should be subject to public debate and scrutiny, to make sure that new advances in these domains sustain human progress. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic, with its profound global impact on our societies, has opened a wide spectrum of issues, including the issue of protection of privacy regarding track and trace applications, which require participatory policy and decision-making processes during, and well beyond, the crisis.
3. The need for public debate and appropriate consultation is clearly stated as a principle in Article 28 of 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). The Assembly considers that this principle should be extended to applications of converging technologies beyond the biomedical field.
4. Fostering constructive public debate on advancements in science and technology is key to ensuring democratic and effective governance. A wide range of methods for organising public debate exist; they provide for flexible solutions which may be tailored to country specificities and historical contexts and could meet different levels of institutional and financial capacity.
5. The Assembly therefore calls for the member States to develop a new culture of public dialogue, making use of existing tools, such as the “Guide to public debate on human rights and biomedicine” drafted by the Council of Europe Bioethics Committee (DH-BIO) and the toolkit developed by the European Union project Engage2020, and in this respect to:
 - 5.1. establish “train-the-trainers” programmes to distribute knowledge and build the capacity of institutions at different levels to organise and facilitate public debate, to create incentives for citizens and other actors in society to participate and to lead effective consultation processes on complex issues ensuring that citizens have access to balanced information and are given sufficient time to deliberate;
 - 5.2. set up intermediary institutions, where relevant, to create links between science and technology, the relevant public and policy making;

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 15 September 2020 (see [Doc. 15117](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Stefan Schennach).*
See also [Recommendation 2176 \(2020\)](#).



- 5.3. introduce modules on public debate and societal engagement as part of the academic curriculum in science and technology;
 - 5.4. include debate on scientific and technological developments and ethical considerations in school curricula, both in terms of regular practice to cultivate dialogue and to develop the ability to understand and analyse complex matters in the domain of science and technology as part of education for democratic citizenship;
 - 5.5. encourage public service broadcasters to strengthen co-operation with practitioners in order to support – not take over – societal engagement processes in public debates;
 - 5.6. encourage the development and use of specialised tools to support fair, open, transparent and unmanipulated online public debate, which also work to facilitate cross-national and multilingual engagement.
6. The Assembly considers that national parliaments have a key role to play in this process and invites them to:
- 6.1. make wider use of public debate as part of parliamentary decision-making processes and provide targeted training to their members in this respect;
 - 6.2. explore the cross-political and cross-ideological value of public debate, for example by setting up committees for the future;
 - 6.3. consider setting up parliamentary technology assessment, with a requirement to make use of public debate in assessment procedures.
7. The Assembly invites the European Union to co-operate with the Council of Europe to support a culture of public debate, strengthen democratic governance and encourage citizens' involvement in crucial choices which are required in order to recover from the Covid-19 crisis and to rebuild more resilient and sustainable European societies.