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General Debate

Harnessing science, technology and innovation (STI) for a more peaceful and sustainable future

by Mr. Averof Neofytou, MP (Cyprus)

Madam President of the IPU,

Dear Colleagues,

In the face of unprecedented challenges (climate change, wars, geopolitical tensions and inequality) it is clear that science and technology offer important transformative tools. But how can parliaments, as the voice of our people, ensure that these tools are used for the common good and that no one is left behind?

Parliaments are in position to guarantee that the benefits of STI reach all segments of society, women, youth and vulnerable groups, particularly by shaping inclusive policies, which ensure digital literacy and access to the tools that innovation offers. We must therefore strongly champion and advocate for equal access to the internet and ensure that rural areas and disadvantaged communities are not excluded from this new wave of opportunities.

Moreover, we must help bridge the digital divides between countries. Parliaments can foster collaboration between nations, particularly in the Global South, by promoting technology transfer, supporting international research partnerships and advocating for equitable access to cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and renewable energy. These efforts must be enshrined in trade agreements and development-aid policies that actively support the sharing of technological advancements. No country should be left behind as the world becomes increasingly interconnected.

But these efforts will only succeed if parliaments themselves are well equipped. Therefore, we must enhance our own capacity to utilize scientific evidence in lawmaking and scrutiny. Science and policy are increasingly interlinked and it is therefore even more essential that lawmakers have access to independent scientific advice in order to properly inform decision-making. As I am a firm believer that evidence-based legislation is the cornerstone of good governance, I fully support the establishment of mechanisms such as parliamentary offices for science and technology, which can provide objective assessments of the long-term impacts of STI-related policies for future generations.

However, such mechanisms must not only serve immediate needs but also anticipate future challenges. To do so, parliamentarians need appropriate tools and resources to predict the long-term effects of technological change, such as capacity-building programs. This will help us understand emerging trends like AI, biotechnology and quantum computing, ensuring that we are proactive rather than reactive.

Dear Colleagues,

AI presents enormous potential but also risks, which may lead to discrimination, violence and the spread of false information. Parliaments must therefore work swiftly in designing and implementing robust regulatory frameworks that safeguard human rights and the rule of law while allowing innovation to flourish. This will require constant vigilance and coordination between legislators, the scientific community and civil society.

In fact, advancing communication and interaction between parliaments, governments, civil society, the scientific community and the private sector is crucial for building trust and ensuring that STI policies are inclusive and transparent. Regular consultations, public hearings and forums where all stakeholders can contribute to the debate on science and technology are essential mechanisms for democratic accountability.

In addition, as Parliamentarians, we have a moral duty to contribute to the development of ethical frameworks for STI. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's draft Charter on the Ethics of Science and Technology provides a valuable starting point. We must ensure that innovation respects human dignity, protects our planet and upholds the value of justice. Cyprus is fully committed to this global effort and we encourage all members to integrate ethical considerations into every step of the innovation process.

Parliaments have a critical role to play in ensuring that the STI powerful tools are used to build a better future for all, not just the privileged few. Collectively, we can create a world where technology serves humanity, where innovation uplifts the vulnerable and where progress is achieved without sacrificing our values and principles.

Thank you for your attention.