

## **PANEL *Democracy and civil rights in the Information Society***

### **ITALY**

Thank you, Mr. President , for giving me the floor.

Let me firstly give some brief information about my parliamentary activity. I am a MP from the Chamber of Deputies, member of the Standing Committee for European Affairs and – at the same time – member of the Parliamentary Committee for technological Assessment.

So, I have been involved at least for the last 6 years in matters related to science and technology from a particular point of view: I am referring to the political point of view and – more specifically – to the parliamentary point of view.

So, I asked to have the floor in this panel because I believe that its title “*Democracy and civil rights in the information society*” is particularly stimulating for us as politicians and calls for a strongly political approach to the new opportunities offered by the information and communication technologies.

Democracy and civil rights are not matter of science, they are not matter of technology, but they are matter of politics.

I must admit that yesterday I heard many interesting things during the Mr Dator’s opening remarks and the scenarios that he so vividly depicted have to be considered very seriously by each of us.

I don’t know what Mr Dator thinks about the future destiny of parliamentary assemblies.

I don’t know is the hypothesis of a new electronic democracy – without Parliament – is a realistic forecast or not.

But I am sure that – not only as a parliamentarian, but mostly as a citizen living in a democratic country – I have to do, and I will do, my best to contrast this forecast and to avoid such a destiny.

In my opinion democracy in modern world (that is the world that was born in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages) is not simply “*the expression of the people’s will*” (according to the Greek origin of the

word). This concept is just an abstraction and many historians teach us that such direct democracy never existed.

Concretely and historically speaking, modern democracy cannot be detached from the rule of law and from representative institutions. And parliamentary assemblies are the pivotal institutions of democracy.

In modern world – where economy and social life are so complex and articulated – the dream of a democracy where each citizen is able to express his/her own will directly, as a self-sufficient political subject, is an illusion.

Citizens need politics, today more than in the last centuries, exactly because science and technology are – today – more developed than 2 centuries or 2 decades ago.

We, citizens, need politics, because politics gives us the appropriate instruments necessary to choose our own future. Without politics - that is without modern democracy and modern parliaments – our future would be shaped by scientist – or by dictators – because the isolated citizen, alone with his/her personal computer is a very weak political actor, unable to recognize and to choose what is the best for “the society as a whole”.

This citizen can very easily be manipulated or misled. Democracy, with its institutions, is the best way that we have invented to deal with a complex society according to the rule of law.

I don't believe that a wise use of ICTs can subvert this model. In a wise and hopeful scenario the ICTs can offer new opportunities to strengthen democracy and its institutions (above all the parliament) and certainly not to put these institutions in a museum together with the portraits of the Father-Founders.

On the contrary, I strongly believe that new information technologies, exactly like biotechnologies or space technologies, call for a stronger political and parliamentarian involvement and commitment.

I would like to recall just few examples.

1. who decides how to allocate the economic resources? This is particularly true (in developed countries) for space technologies, but it is true also in the case of ICTs.

Particularly in developing countries, who sets priorities in information society when economic resources are limited, public investment are needed and the needs are compelling ? How can we be sure that “the best for the society as a whole” will be chosen without free political parties, free press, regular elections, transparent parliamentary assemblies ?

2. A second example. The ICT development calls for a balance between freedom of access to information and protection of privacy. But also between these two fundamental rights and others fundamental rights (like protection of young people, copyright, and so on). How can we carry out this complex task without a legislator ?
3. Finally, I would like to point out that the national institutions, the national political bodies risk to be not useless, but – on the contrary – not sufficient when the task consists in dealing with the Internet or with the ubiquitous society depicted by Mr. Dator. The WEB doesn't have national borders. Everybody knows that there is a global debate (in the framework of U.N.) on the issue of the “Internet governance”. So, we can easily realize how the new information technologies call for more politics, call for a sort of global governing political institution that carry out the task of balancing national legal systems with an international set of cyber-rights .

I conclude suggesting that this debate should not be conducted only within the executives representatives (the U.N.), but also – and increasingly - within national parliaments and within interparliamentary institutions and forums – like Interparliamentary Union and like IPAIT – because the protection of rights is, in modern democracy one of the major commitment of representatives bodies.

Thank you for your attention