

Remarks

Phili Viehoff

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REMARKS

Phili Viehoff

Remarks by Ms. Phili Viehoff, Member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur on Biotechnology for the Committee on Energy, Research and Technology, at the opening of the second day's proceedings, Tuesday 28 April 1987.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Developments in biotechnology have been looked at on a number of occasions in recent years by the European Parliament. In the past, it was mainly the Committee on Energy, Research and Technology which was responsible for drawing up reports, but for my last report, entitled 'Biotechnology in Europe and the need for an integrated policy', adopted in February by the European Parliament, a number of parliamentary committees were asked to deliver opinions; making specific policy recommendations for the medium and long term.

I found it of utmost importance that this multidisciplinary technology, with such a wide range of applications was discussed not only in the Committee for Energy, Research and Technology. Now that the results of biotechnology research are rapidly finding their way into commercial applications in many sectors of industry, agriculture and health care, with far-reaching consequences, it is important to consider the various policy aspects more closely.

I want to underline the fact that in a representative democracy, Parliaments, before *users* of future-oriented research work, are amongst the *makers* of the future. This is important to mention, because there is an increasing tendency in several European countries to forget or minimize the role of Parliament in advanced societies. The real decisions are too often taken by powerful interest groups.

It is true that Parliaments are facing increasing difficulties to play their role to its full and legitimate scope in a more and more complex and fast changing society.

It is not easy to enact laws on fundamental issues of complex nature like, for instance, biotechnology. In many instances it implies a high degree of confidence in the assessment and monitoring of the long-term implications and consequences of the decisions taken today.

This is not yet the case! The decisions taken today do have more than ever in the past far-reaching consequences for millions of people, whose daily life will be deeply affected in the future. In a modern representative democracy, it is a must that Parliament has the capability to legislate on the basis of honest attempts to forecast and assess the long-term implications and consequences of a given development; so that it is possible to monitor and direct the processes in such a way that the impact is for the benefit of mankind, not to its detriment. Since it has become clear that developments in biotechnology have an international-character, international cooperation, regulations and legislation are of great importance. Especially regulations in the field of deliberate release of manipulated micro-organisms, because they are not at all controlled by national borders.

Important is also the democratization of the decision-making process. This means that more attention should be paid to the provision of balanced information to the public at large in order to increase public awareness.