

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

Speech by
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Speaker of the House of Representatives, Malta

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

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Dear Chair,
Dear colleagues,
dear fellow Parliamentarians

Science, technology and innovation are part and parcel of humanity as humans use these important tools with the aim to improve their lives and the lives of others. Science, technology and innovation are important tools. They are indeed essential and will remain crucial as long as there is humanity. The essence of these tools is not questionable. The question however that all of us here should be asking is how these tools are being used. Are they leading towards the desired results? Are these tools leading towards more peace and sustainability in our communities?

Science, technology and innovation play a fundamental role in finding innovative solutions to complex challenges, such as access to education, healthcare, clean water, food security and clean energy, which are crucial to eradicating poverty. Furthermore, these tools are a strong driver of economic growth, creating job opportunities for highly skilled professionals who generate innovative solutions, with a special emphasis on those that promote social inclusion. This, in turn, should reduce inequalities and improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable communities.

Let us have a look for instance at how humans reacted when the COVID pandemic hit us in such an unexpected way. Through science, technology and innovation a vaccine to counter this virus was created in a record time span. This is the positive side of humanity. We can react quickly and effectively when using these tools in a correct way. I never question the ability of humans to create and innovate. It is something that we are very good at. But when it comes to distribution and equal access to what humans manage to create, then it is here where we need to work more. The fact that we are living in a digital age. The fact that we are debating how to deal with robots and artificial intelligence and at the same time having millions of people dying of hunger, then there is something which is not working as it should be.

Let me give you a simple example on how there can be a mismatch between science technology, innovation on one hand and economic interests on the other. Banks are getting more digital, same as other sectors are doing. Until few years ago we used to go to bank branches every time we needed to make a financial transaction. With digital transformation, we do not need to go to branches anymore. Bank branches are getting less busy and therefore the economic sense tells you that the bank should close the branches. Digital transformation makes sense both for the customer and for banks. But then what about the elderly who do not use a smart phone for example or what about less educated people. Therefore, it is crucial that technology and innovation should move hand in hand with social responsibility. Here comes the role of us politicians, us parliamentarians. Our job is to make sure no one is left behind. Our measurement of success should not only be economic growth. The financial part is important and will remain important. But financial growth should always respect social responsibility.

Social responsibility should not only be catered for on a local and national level but on a global level as well. That is why we have international institutions. Global challenges need global solutions. It is unacceptable that extreme poverty and hunger continue to persist in today's world. We must turn climate and environmental challenges into opportunities for a cleaner, greener world, by scaling up renewable energy, transitioning away from fossil fuels, and achieving net zero. We must also work to ensure our ocean's health, resilience and sustainability, and take action to address sea-level rise which disproportionately impacts small island developing States.

Let us therefore harness the benefits of science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation, to improve every aspect of our lives, while keeping a watchful eye on potential threats. The way forward is two-fold. First, we need to always keep investing in better education. Education is the key to build inclusive societies. It is important that we treat education as life-long experience. Science and technology change fast over a short time span and what was relevant two years ago is probably obsolete today.

Second, our Parliaments and our legislations should carry out more social impact assessments to make sure that our policies, our legislation are social proof. We, Parliamentarians have a duty to promote inclusive policies and inclusive legislation.

To conclude, dear colleagues, dear Parliamentarians I have no doubt in the ability of human beings to create, to innovate and find solutions to difficult situations. History has proved time and time again that we are capable to embrace challenges. It is the will, it is the correct way in using those solutions that sometimes we lack. It is that moral compass that we must always try to use in the right way in order to have better lives, better societies and a better world.

Thank you.