

I should like to begin by saying how honoured I am to have been invited to give this opening address from the European Parliament. It is a great source of regret that I have not been able to free myself from my duties in Brussels to be with you in the beautiful city of Budapest.

The EIT What If conference is particularly concerned with questions of ICT and the generation gap as a part of a wider set of societal problems that we, in Europe, face. As I see it, there are three main sectors in which intergenerational inequity is of particular concern.

In the first, the last generation has shown a tendency to recklessly deplete our natural resources beyond limits of sustainability. Intergenerational equity means that each generation has the right to benefit from the same diversity of natural and cultural resources as the previous generation. This means each generation should conserve resources well enough to pass on to the next generation in a reasonable condition.

Secondly, although access to education has been significantly improved over the last two generations, there are still questions of

equality of opportunity and of the adaptation of current education to the future needs of our economies.

Thirdly; this generation has saddled the coming generation with a huge amount of debt. On top of public debt there is also a mountain of debt that has been accumulated in the form of public-private partnerships. This latter form of debt does not necessarily appear in government accounts and involves huge interest payments extending over the next generation. At the same time, youth unemployment in certain regions of Europe is climbing to astronomical levels. Moreover, the same youth will increasingly be

called upon to produce the economic means to care adequately for an aging population.

What are the solutions to these problems with specific reference to ICT and the EIT?

In so far as reversing a tendency to hand down a planet whose resources have been depleted, the solution is, firstly improving resource efficiency; secondly technological breakthroughs that will allow us to reduce the detrimental effects of human activity on the environment. Finally, international agreements - as for example the struggle to come to agreement on how best to combat climate change - remain of prime importance.

As for education, all levels of education require adequate funding and it is important that we are able to ensure equality of opportunity whilst making sure that education does not only become a matter of loan based funding. At the same time, it is essential that we encourage excellence as the basis on which future technological innovation will depend.

Finally; with regard to debt, the process of bringing down the debt over the next few years will undoubtedly be painful although it is certainly necessary. It is important that we prevent this downturn from affecting - any more than can be helped - both the young and the

ageing, often the first in line when it comes to unemployment. Ideally, we must produce much higher levels of growth - and the new technologies; not only in ICT but also the greentechnologies - will help to achieve this goal.

Against this background, it is to be hoped that ICT will foster greater communication and will contribute to a culture of mutual understanding and exchange of the skills and life experience across the generations. To achieve this, it is important that we find ways of bridging the digital divide.

To finish with a few words about the EIT:

the EIT is a role model of how best to go about promoting excellence in education combined with research and innovation. The main priorities of the EIT are energy, climate change and ICT as these, of course, represent core solutions to questions of intergenerational fairness.

The EIT has considerable support amongst MEPs and I am privileged to be the chair of a "Group of the Friends of EIT" here in Brussels. The objective of this group is to closely follow the activities of the EIT and facilitate its task in any way that we can.

Successful formulation of policy in the spheres of research, education and innovation

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will produce growth and this - alongside mechanisms that force politicians to respect principles of intergenerational equity - will contribute to the well being of society in general, for those in whatever stage of life they might find themselves.