

Speech voor in ontvangst nemen Rli verkenning

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Introduction

Henry Meijdam, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased with this survey of technological innovations in the human environment. The Council has explored the impact of technological innovations on the human environment in the area of healthy nutrition, efficient mobility, and 'smart' buildings.

The overall message of the report is positive and optimistic. This is a report at the right time about the right subject.

Technology shift

We are on the threshold of a technology shift that will bring us new opportunities. We all hope new technologies will bring us economic growth, leading to jobs and better work and living conditions for many, not just in our country or in Europe, but all over the world. New technologies are the basis for our future prosperity.

Technological innovations lead to new solutions for global challenges. Challenges posed by climate change, by the need for healthy ageing or by the growing demand for food, with 9 billion mouths to feed worldwide in 2050. Or challenges posed by the growing scarcity of our natural resources.

For challenges like these, technological innovations are key.

Therefore, it is important for enterprises, knowledge institutions and government to work closely together to develop these innovative solutions.

Networks

A central element in the current wave of technological development is the importance of networks.

In the world of the Internet of Things, products and devices will become smart.

Smart! A word that soon, may be applied to anything you can think of.

We all have already our smartphone.

Your car is probably already much smarter than you thought, as it is full of microchips and digital devices.

But not before long it will be smart enough to drive itself.

Smart cities

And your smart car will not just drive in an ordinary city.
No, it will drive through a smart city. As we all know: the city is growing in relevance.

In the Netherlands we see gradual movement from rural areas towards cities. These growing cities offer many opportunities and challenges.

How can we take care of efficient mobility without endless traffic jams in our cities?

How can we provide reliable energy?

How can we keep our cities safe, 24 hours a day?

The close proximity within cities means that networks can be especially useful. The council shows this in its survey.

Role of government

The technological possibilities are coming soon and without doubt.

An important question is: how are we going to deal with them?

Do we welcome all innovations alike?

Or do some innovations raise the question how we secure our public interests?

We all know the answer.

We need to find the right balance between providing scope for new innovations and guarding public interests.

The government has to rethink some of its policies.

The Council rightly calls for a more agile government.

Governments tend to make policies based on the processes and structures of current technologies.

These policies are often not a good fit for new innovative technologies and can pose obstacles for innovation.

Our taxi law, for instance, requires a paper receipt, even though in current days, a digital receipt can be more convenient and serves the same goal: transparent pricing.

Moreover, institutions cannot keep pace with societal and technological developments.

Changing a law takes years, even when it concerns an evident improvement.

For example, it took two years to amend the rules to allow for LED street lighting, whilst this lightning was cheaper and more energy efficient.

So something needs to change, to allow for fast adoption of new technologies.

Change to seize the opportunities enclosed in innovations.

Yet, that does not imply that the government should just get out of the way at all times.

The main goal of regulation is to guard public interests.

Even though technology changes, public interests do not.

Transportation

Think of transportation.

Security is a public interest and with our current cars we demand, for example, that drivers have a driving licence and that cars have a regular check-up.

Moreover, truck drivers have compulsory break times.

When we have a driverless car, some of these rules will become obsolete.

Probably, there will be no need for a driving licence or compulsory break times.

However, security remains important and a regular check-up will remain important.

And maybe we will even need new regulation to prevent hacking of these driverless cars or to deal with liability issues.

The Council illustrates this as well.

The new, smart technologies lead to a whole range of questions. That is not a reason to fear innovations.

There are good examples where the right balance between providing scope for innovation and guarding public interests has been found.

In the Netherlands, for regulation in construction the 'equivalence principle' was introduced.

This means that alternative solutions that deviate from norms are allowed, if the applicant can demonstrate that the alternative solution is at least equivalent to the set standards.

In short: regulation should focus on the public interest it is to secure.

It should **not** focus on the way this is done.

I think that further exploration of new concepts of regulation can lead to the best of both worlds: it may secure public interests.

And it may provide scope for innovation that can be adopted smoothly.

To close

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is clear that we need technological innovations to find answers to the big questions of our society.

This will provide us with growth, jobs and better living conditions for many. To make that happen, governments have to rethink, how we can secure our public interests in our regulation.

With this report, the Council has given an important and positive contribution to the debate and the work that has to be done.

I want to thank the Council for this report.

Link naar Maarten Camps' nieuwsjaarsartikel in economenblad ESB

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ez/nieuws/2015/01/08/camps-verzilver-de-kansen-die-vernieuwing-biedt.html>