The European Parliament
MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme 2011
Report to STOA
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MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme 2011

Report to STOA

technopolis [group], March 2012

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The relationship between scientific expertise and policy-making continues to develop and expand. Scientific knowledge not only underpins many aspects of public policy from healthcare and the ageing population to energy production and climate change, but politics and politicians have a role to play in public debates about scientific advances and new technologies particularly where there may be a need for regulation or legislation — in areas such as genetic modification, reproductive technologies, nanotechnology. Therefore the development of relationships between scientific experts and policy-makers is essential to improve the two-way flow of knowledge between policy-makers and scientists and to create a deeper understanding within each community of their respective roles, needs and decision-making processes.

Increased interaction between policy-makers and scientists has a number of benefits. Firstly, policy-makers gain a deeper understanding of the scientific process, the practicalities of undertaking research and the potential and limitations of scientific knowledge. This is essential both for integrating scientific advice into policy-making but also to develop knowledge relevant to the European Union’s specific policy goal to raise research investments in pursuit of innovation, growth and job creation. Secondly, scientists learn about the role of science in policy-making, the policy-making process itself and how to interact effectively with politicians. Finally the development of these relationships enables MEPs to extend their access to scientific expertise, not only through the new connections to individual practising scientists, but also to their wider professional networks, increasing opportunities for scientific input to future policy-making.

1.2 Background to the European MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme

To support the development of relationships between MEPs and scientists the European Parliament ran two MEP-Scientist Pairing Schemes in 2007 and 2008. Jointly organised and managed by STOA, on behalf of the European Parliament, and European Commission’s DG Research, these schemes brought together a small number of pairs of MEPs and scientists to build relationships through experiencing each other’s professional world and day-to-day activities.

The European scheme, based on similar successful schemes in the UK, France and Australia, consisted of a week in Brussels where each scientist shadows an MEP as they go about their Parliamentary business, followed by laboratory visits where each MEP spends time at the scientist’s place of work to experience how science is conducted in practice.

STOA wished to reintroduce the pairing scheme in 2011 and further develop and improve its role in engaging and building relationships between European scientists and parliamentarians. There are a number of areas where there was thought to be scope for improving the scheme:

• Improve the link between science and politics:
  – Improving the matching of scientists to MEPs’ interests to ensure more direct practical benefits of the interactions
  – Ensuring that the reciprocal visits of the MEPs to the scientists’ laboratories are undertaken (in the past the second feature of the scheme tended to be sidelined due to MEPs’ busy schedules)
  – Improve the link between science and society by improving the media coverage of the pairing scheme
• Improve the coverage of the pairing scheme across Europe, particularly in terms of the geographical coverage of participating scientists
2. The 2011 MEP-Pairing Scheme

2.1 Features of the 2011 Scheme
The main goals of the MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme project are:

• To enhance knowledge-based decision-making
• To facilitate a better understanding of the EU policies among scientists
• Foster a greater mutual understanding between scientists and parliamentarians and contribute to closing the gap between researchers and policy-makers.¹

From the policy angle, the pairing scheme introduces politicians to scientific experts, and by extension to their wider networks, who may act as a source of ‘fast-track’ scientific advice in the future. The scheme also permits policy-makers to get a better understanding of scientists’ point of view on policy issues. In the longer term the pairing scheme offers the potential to improve the process of bringing high-quality scientific advice into EU policy discussions.

From the scientific angle, the scientists learn how to effectively interact with politicians and can act as route to the dissemination of relevant policy information to scientific institutions and academia such as those relating, for example, to the Research Framework Programmes.

As one of the aims of the scheme is to develop long-term relationships between MEPs and scientists, the scheme is targeted at mid-career scientists who are well established in their field but who also have a long period ahead before retirement.

The 2011 MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme consisted of two parts:

• **Brussels Week**, that took place between the 21 and 24 November 2011: four days at the European Parliament in Brussels where participating scientists learned about the workings of the Parliament and its requirement for scientific inputs by shadowing their partnered MEP at work and listening to presentations from Parliamentary personnel and representatives of other European bodies²
• **Laboratory visits**: a visit by each of the participating MEPs to the laboratory of their partnered scientist to gain an understanding of science in practice through experiencing the scientific workplace and meeting a wider group of scientists.

2.2 Operation of the 2011 Scheme

2.2.1 Roles
The 2011 scheme was managed by STOA with support from Technopolis³ with a division of labour as follows:

• STOA:
  – Securing MEP participation in the scheme - identifying MEPs wishing to participate in the scheme and determining their areas of scientific interest
  – Organising the programme and logistics for Brussels Week - designing an appropriate and interesting programme of speakers for the scientists and planning the MEP-Scientist shadowing time
  – Working with the JRC to identify a group of scientists to participate in the scheme

• Technopolis

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¹ STOA Project on MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme: Specifications, March 2011
² Such as the European Commissions’ DG Research and the Joint Research Centre
³ Technopolis, as holder of a framework contract with STOA, were invited to assist STOA in the management of the scheme
- Securing participation of (non-JRC) scientists in the scheme - identifying and inviting suitable scientists to participate who matched the scheme guidelines and MEPs’ interests
- Supporting the practical and logistical needs of the scientists - providing information on scheme guidelines and requirements, assisting with travel arrangements, managing reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs etc.
- Collecting and collating relevant information from scientists for MEPs (CVs, presentations etc.)
- Attending Brussels Week to support scientists
- Securing press coverage for the scheme - identifying and inviting journalists to cover the scheme
- Designing an implementing an online survey to gather feedback from participating MEPs and scientists
- Writing a reporting on the scheme as implemented and proposing improvements

2.2.2 Identifying participants
Key to the scheme is securing the participation of MEPs and scientists.

MEPs
STOA invited MEPs to participate, targeting those who sit on relevant committees (i.e. those with the most direct requirement for scientific advice such as ITRE and ENVI) plus members of the STOA Bureau and Panel. Twelve MEP expressed an interest in participating and provided STOA with information on their areas of scientific interest.

Scientists
The pool of scientists in Europe is extremely large and therefore identifying appropriate scientists to match the needs of a very small number of MEPs is a ‘needle in a haystack’ problem. Therefore STOA and Technopolis partnered with a number of organisations with access to a well-defined group of scientists – the Joint Research Council (JRC), the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Curie Unit of DG Education and Culture. The JRC employs a large number of scientists while the other two organisations provide funding for scientists and therefore, as a group, they have access to a large pool of scientists as potential participants. The organisations were invited to propose suitable scientists who matched both the stated interests of the participating MEPs and the scheme’s guidelines (Figure 1). The organisations were extremely interested in the scheme and very willing to play a part in its delivery. The European Science Foundation (ESF) was also approached and while they were also very willing to help, the nature of their organisation, with its membership at the level of organisations (funding bodies, scientific academies etc.) it had less direct access to individual scientists.

Technopolis reviewed the list of proposed scientists against the guidelines to identify those who met the guidelines (a very small number did not) and who best matched the MEP interests. An iterative process was deployed whereby individual scientists were matched to MEPs and invited to...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Additional guidance/explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career stage</td>
<td>Experienced, established scientists</td>
<td>Ideally 5 or more years since PhD and 10 years or more before retirement. The aim is to create relationships that can develop into the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific field</td>
<td>Matching an MEP’s interest area</td>
<td>MEPs interests should be matched as far as is possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Nationality of MEP and paired scientist should be different</td>
<td>The idea is maximise cross-border connections and therefore the nationalities of MEPs and their paired scientists should be different nationalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Geographical spread amongst the nationalities and current locations of the group of scientists</td>
<td>The European Parliament is keen to have a good mix of scientists from older and newer Member States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
participate; if an invited scientist was not able or willing to participate then a second scientist was identified from the list and invited to participate and so on. In the event the list of proposed scientists was exhausted quite quickly additional scientists were identified via desk research and the ‘snowball effect’ – many scientists approached suggested colleagues or members of their networks as participants. These were reviewed by Technopolis and invited if they met the guidelines and matched MEPs’ interests.

In parallel to the iterative process STOA worked with the JRC to identify three scientists from among their staff who matched the interests of three MEPs and who were willing and able to participate in the scheme.

In terms of timescales, the partner organisations identified scientists during August and invitations commenced in September and continued into October. Securing the participation of a group of well-matched scientists was extremely challenging, mainly due to the relatively short timescales involved.

Figure 2 Process of identifying MEP-Scientist pairs

All in all, more than 40 scientists were approached and twelve MEP-Scientist pairs were made, exceeding the target of 10 pairs. The final pairings are listed in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 MEP-Scientist pairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>MEP</th>
<th>Scientist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | Fiona HALL  
ITRE Committee  
Country of representation: UK | Ida Westerberg  
IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute/ Uppsala University (SE) |
| 2    | Csaba TABAJDI  
Member of STOA Panel (& AGRI Committee) | Andra Blumberga  
Institute of Environmental Protection and Energy |
2.2.3 Advantages and disadvantages of the approach used to identify and select scientists

If the iterative process was felt to be the most appropriate method given the timescales available, it was however fairly time-consuming, in terms of both elapsed time and resources deployed. As so many scientists were unavailable on the dates of Brussels Week, more iteration was indeed required than anticipated.

It is important to note here that most scientists that declined to participate did so due to their unavailability during Brussels Week. Almost all were interested in participating but - as academics - they have teaching as well as research commitments, and require more advance notice to make a commitment to what is essentially a week away from their place of work. The majority of scientists approached were however extremely interested in the scheme and keen to participate in future.

The iterative process also did allow MEPs to select their paired scientist form a shortlist. We did consider inviting a number of scientists for each MEP simultaneously, however we felt that it would be inappropriate to make personal invitations to scientists, secure their interest in participating only to turn them down at a later date if they were not selected by the MEP. In the event securing enough well-matched scientists to participate was extremely challenging and this approach would not have been feasible.

2.3 Brussels Week

Brussels Week took place between the 21st and 24th of November 2011. All twelve scientists attended as planned. During the week prior to Brussels Week an MEP had to drop out but STOA was able to find another MEP willing to participate and for whom the original paired scientists was a suitable match. The programme for Brussels Week 2011 is provided in Appendix A.
STOA and Technopolis were on hand throughout the week to provide support to the MEPs and scientists and resolve any issues arising. During the event no major issues arose and the week ran smoothly.

Members of the media were informed of Brussels Week by Technopolis, STOA and the partner organisations. They were invited to attend an evening drinks reception on the first day of the week to meet participants. A number of articles were written about the scheme; copies are provided in Appendix B.

3. Feedback on Brussels Week

At the time of this report, Brussels Week has taken place, but the return visits from MEPs to their paired scientists are still under process. As of the 12th March 2012, four visits have taken place (further details on the organisation of the return visits are available in Section 4).

Feedback on the Brussels Week was collected amongst participants to the schemes after the event:

- During the final session on the last day of Brussels Week scientists were invited to provide verbal feedback on their initial impressions of Brussels Week. A number of MEP assistants also provide verbal feedback.
- Two weeks later, after a period of reflection both the scientists and the MEPs were invited to provide further feedback via an online survey. Ten scientists and nine MEPs responded to the surveys.

3.1 Feedback from MEPs

With nine out of 12 MEPs completing the survey, the feedbacks are fairly – if not fully - representative of the MEPs that participated in the Pairing Scheme. There is a fair degree of alignment in the responses provided which might suggest that the views expressed are a reasonable representation of all MEPs.

The analysis of the survey results shows that the scheme is relevant and of value to MEPs: all responding MEPs think that the scheme should be run again and they would recommend it to other MEPs (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Relevance/value of the MEP-Scientist pairing scheme (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the MEP-Scientist pairing scheme should be run again?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you recommend the MEP-Scientist pairing scheme to another MEP?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technopolis survey of MEPs

The large majority of MEPS felt that they benefited from the Brussels Week in the various ways corresponding to the objectives of the Scheme: It enabled MEPs to extend their network of contacts within the scientific community and gave them the opportunity to work with scientists to help them understand how science can support policy-making. MEPs also gained practical knowledge of specific scientific fields and have started to develop a better understanding of how scientists work (Figure 5). It is expected that this latter point is being developed further during the return laboratory visits.

Figure 5 How MEPs benefited from the pairing scheme (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of responses</th>
<th>How did you benefit from Brussels Week:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To a large extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended your network of contacts with scientists</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed a better understanding of the work of scientists and how science can contribute to policy-making</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of the organisation and planning of the pairing scheme, all respondents reported that the scientist matched their areas of scientific interest (to a large extent for six of the respondents, to a moderate extent for three of them) and all felt that they fully understood how the scheme worked and what was required of them.

The MEPs were invited to tell us what aspects of the Brussels Week, in their opinion, should be retained in any future version of the scheme and to suggest ways in which it might be improved. Not surprisingly most felt that the actual shadowing of MEPs should be retained (5 respondents specifically highlighted the importance of the time spent with their paired scientist).

The suggested improvements include:

- better preparation for the scientists, such as information/presentations on the forthcoming legislation which requires scientific input or which may affect scientific activity, the work of the European Parliament and the programme of STOA activity (although the latter two suggestions were included in the 2011 programme for participating scientists);
- better introduction between the MEPs and their paired scientists: three MEPs felt that the presentations by scientists was an important feature of the Week opening, but two also underlined that the presentations are too extensive for MEPs to assist, and would prefer a more personal introduction to their scientist;
- and better alignment of the Brussels Week programme with the activities of the relevant parliamentary committees so that scientists are both better informed and may be able to contribute to the discussions taking place.

3.2 Feedback from Scientists

All 12 scientists provided feedback during the session on the final day of Brussels Week and ten responded to the feedback survey. The description provided below is a combination of both sources unless otherwise stated.

Overall the feedback from the scientists was extremely positive. All scientists reported that they had benefited from and enjoyed the experience and all would strongly recommend the pairing scheme to colleagues. Scientists reported that they gained both professionally and personally from the scheme to date, with a slightly greater personal gain compared to professional gain (Figure 6). However several noted that further professional gain might arise in the future.

More specifically the scientists benefited in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the work of MEPs and the workings of the European Parliament particularly those related to science and technology. Scientists reported less benefit in terms of extending their networks with policy-makers, however this might be a result of the intensive one-to-one nature of the programme that results in deeper rather than more numerous relationships with policy-makers. Scientists reported the least benefit in terms on developing a better understanding of the opportunities for scientists to contribute to policy-making but, during the verbal feedback session, they expressed a desire to learn more about how they might contribute.

Figure 6 Professional/personal gain from the scheme (n=10)
Technopolis survey of participating scientists

Figure 7 How scientists benefited from Brussels Week (n=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what ways did you benefit from Brussels Week</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gained a direct insight into the work and daily tasks of MEPs</td>
<td>8 1 1 0 0 =1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained an understanding of the structure and processes of the European Parliament and its committees</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 =1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed a better understanding of the activities of the European Parliament related to science and technology</td>
<td>6 3 1 0 0 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained an understanding of the structure and processes of the European institutions/policies</td>
<td>6 3 0 0 1 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained an understanding of science and technology policies in the EU</td>
<td>3 5 1 0 1 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended your network of contacts with policy-makers</td>
<td>1 6 3 0 0 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed a better understanding of the opportunities for scientists to contribute to policymaking</td>
<td>2 4 3 0 1 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technopolis survey of participating scientists (Ranking based on a weighted total score of responses)

In terms of activities undertaken during Brussels Week, the most common activities were shadowing the paired MEP, attending committee meetings and attending working meetings (working lunches etc.) with European officials and/or external stakeholders (business, interest groups etc.):

- All scientists spent with their MEP, shadowing them as they went about their daily business. This time was also spent discussing scientific issues
- All scientists attended committee meetings, with most (9 out of the 12) attending the ITRE committee and others attending ENVI, IMCO, TRAN, ECON meetings
- 9 of the 12 scientists accompanied their paired MEP to working breakfast/lunches/dinners with European officials and stakeholders (such as officials from EC and Council)
- 8 out of 12 scientists accompanied their paired MEP to working breakfast/lunches/dinners with external stakeholders

For the scientists (who responded to the survey) the most interesting aspects of Brussels Week were the time spent shadowing their paired MEPs and the presentations on the activities of the European Parliament (Figure 9). This was followed by the presentations on the workings of specific parliamentary committees and internal policy departments (including STOA); the opportunities to learn about and network with fellow scientists (at the evening reception and during the scientists presentations); and finally the presentations from other European organisations. During the time spent shadowing the MEP, one-to-one time with the MEP was the most interesting activity by far for the scientists (Figure 8).

Figure 8 How interesting were different aspects of time spent with MEP (n=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of the time spent with your MEP, which activity was the most interesting for you (ranked 1 to 5, with 1 as the most interesting):</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one time with the MEP</td>
<td>7 1 1 0 0 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one time with the MEP’s assistants</td>
<td>1 3 1 3 2 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending committee meetings</td>
<td>1 2 2 4 1 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The planning and organisation of Brussels Week was rated very highly, with all but one aspect being rated as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ by all scientists (who responded to the survey) and scored as ‘very good’ by at least 70% of the scientists (Figure 10). The only aspect not scored as high related to the facilities available during Brussels Week and this was largely due to the inability to access the Internet to access emails and keep in touch with colleagues.

Technopolis survey of participating scientists (Ranking based on a weighted total score of responses)

The scientists were invited to tell us what aspects of the Brussels Week, in their opinion, should be retained in any future version of the scheme and to suggest ways in which it might be improved. Overall the scheme’s design was viewed as appropriate for the task, with 7 out of the 10 survey respondents reporting that the scheme should be retained largely as it was delivered. However a number of suggestions were made with regard to areas for improvement or further consideration:
• Alter the balance of the programme so that more time could be spent shadowing the MEPs. This would not only help to develop a stronger relationship but would also, the scientists hope, provide more time for discussions with the MEP on scientific issues. However while there was much discussion as to what could be dropped from the schedule, the scientists reported that most of the presentations by European Parliament and Commission staff were valuable.

• There was a concern that while the scientists presentations were useful to help the scientists get to know one another, they were of little value to MEPs as they were too busy to attend. However the MEPs reported the presentations as being of value (section 6) suggesting that where MEP assistants were able to attend sufficient feedback was provided to the MEPs.

• While most scientists felt that four days away from the office/laboratory is a long time there was not a firm view that Brussels Week should be shorter in duration.

• It was also suggested that the time with the MEP would be more fruitful if more advance guidance was provided to MEPs explaining what is required of them (this was reflected in the verbal reports of varying schedules arranged for scientists by their MEPs and their assistants).

• Finally Internet access is viewed as essential by scientists to enable them to keep on touch with colleagues back at base.

4. Laboratory Visits

4.1 Visits planning

The return visits of MEPs to their paired Scientists are currently being organised. As of the 12th of March 2012, four visits have already taken place and three others are planned between April and May 2012, as shown in Figure 11. Four other visits are being arranged.

Figure 11 MEP-Scientist pairs – return laboratory visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>MEP</th>
<th>Scientist</th>
<th>Status return visit (as on the 12/03/2012)</th>
<th>Date for return visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>Fiona HALL</td>
<td>Ida Westerberg</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>16 May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>Csaba TABAJDI</td>
<td>Andra Blumberga</td>
<td>No date agreed at present</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3</td>
<td>Teresa RIERA MADURELL</td>
<td>Marco Alves</td>
<td>No date agreed at present</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4</td>
<td>Giles CHICHESTER</td>
<td>Delilah Al Khudhair</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>1 May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5</td>
<td>Silva-Adriana TICAU</td>
<td>Lamine Aouad</td>
<td>No date agreed at present</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 6</td>
<td>Malcolm HARBOUR</td>
<td>Andrea Saltelli</td>
<td>No date agreed at present</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 7</td>
<td>Julie Girling</td>
<td>Graciela Alvarez</td>
<td>Done</td>
<td>8 March 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 8</td>
<td>Victoria Grace FORD</td>
<td>Patrik Jones</td>
<td>Done</td>
<td>26 January 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 9</td>
<td>Jacqueline Kay SWINBURNE</td>
<td>Julia Cordero</td>
<td>Done</td>
<td>24 February 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 10</td>
<td>Paul RÜBIG</td>
<td>Hermann Stamm</td>
<td>No update 4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 11</td>
<td>Ioannis TSOUKALAS</td>
<td>Angelo Cangelosi</td>
<td>Done</td>
<td>Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 12</td>
<td>Edit HERCZOG</td>
<td>Stéphanie Cornet</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>12/13th April 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 First feedbacks from the visits

Technopolis is following up on the organisation of the MEps one-day visits and has had some feedback from the scientists who were already visited by their MEPs.

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4 No feedback was provided on the status of this visit.
On the one hand, scientists have felt that the visits were a very interesting experience, both for them and their colleagues/students, making the latter able to share to some extent the experience they had during Brussels Week exchanging with European politicians about European policies. On the other hand, all scientists who have already received MEPs have tried to give them a taste of their research work as scientists and of their work environment and the difficulties they can encounter as European scientists.

Each scientist, in accordance with the interests of his/her MEP, individually set up the agenda for the visits. Various activities have been organised during the visits that have taken place so far:

- presentation of their research by the Scientists and their colleagues (and participation of the MEP to various experimentation)
- presentation of the scientific work environment (e.g. how research funding works for different grants, basic principles of research group operation)
- meetings and exchanges with university/research institute governing staff
- presentation to/exchanges with lab’s scientists and students (e.g. MEP Girling made a presentation on her work as a MEP when visiting Dr. Graciela Alvarez)
- participation to scientists meetings and coordination events (e.g. MEP Victoria Ford took part to the kick-off meeting for a Nordic network project with Prof. Patrik Jones)

5. Improvements to the MEP-Scientist pairing scheme

Taking on board the feedback from the participating MEPs and scientists and the experience of delivering the 2011 Pairing Scheme the following proposals are made to improve the scheme should it be delivered in future.

5.1.1 Selection of participating scientists

As the main reason for the difficulty in finding scientists to match the MEPs interest and the scheme’s guidelines was insufficient advance warning. This is particularly a problem as Brussels Week takes place during the term-time when most researchers have teaching commitments. The alignment with term-time would seem to be unavoidable unless Brussels Week is held in July or early September. However these may present their own problems related to exam/theses marking and preparing for a new student in-take (i.e. in September).

Therefore we suggest that the process of selecting MEPs and scientists starts earlier – ideally 8 months before Brussels Week and uses a two-stage process to select scientists: (i) an expression of interest from which a shortlist is developed based on the scheme’s objectives and guidelines followed by (ii) a selection of a scientist partner by participating MEPs. The process would be as follows.

Figure 12 Proposed process for selecting scientists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description /tasks</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of MEPs</td>
<td>• Date for Brussels Week agreed (and fixed)</td>
<td>Conducted &amp; competed during Month 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• MEPs invited to participate and selected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of Interest call to</td>
<td>• An open call for Expression of Interest (EoI) among scientists is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scientists</td>
<td>announced 7 months before Brussels Week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• EoI contains details of Brussels Week, including the (firm) dates and a</td>
<td>EoI announced at start of Month 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summary of the MEP areas of scientific interest plus the scheme guidelines with</td>
<td>EoI open during Months 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>respect to suitable scientists.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• EoI is promoted to scientists via partners such as the ERC, Marie Curie Unit,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and national academies and advertised in key publications (such as Research Europe).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EoI also promoted to the scientists approached during the 2011 edition of the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scheme (as many were interested). EoI will make clear that the shortlist of</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>suitable scientists will be selected and presented to MEPs to allow them to select</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EoI closes at end of Month 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
<td>Description /tasks</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortlist of scientists</td>
<td>Responses to EoI are reviewed against the scheme’s guidelines and MEPs’ interests and a shortlist of scientists made for each participating MEP</td>
<td>Shortlist of scientists for each MEP available by end of Month 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of scientists by participating MEPs</td>
<td>MEPs review their shortlist and select their first, second and third choice scientists for the scheme</td>
<td>Selection made by MEPs by end of Month 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientist participation confirmed</td>
<td>The first choice scientists are approached to confirm their continued interest in the pairing scheme and heir availability for Brussels Week</td>
<td>Confirmation of scientists during Month 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical arrangements finalised</td>
<td>Scientists informed of the logistical arrangements for Brussels eek and any requirements to be made of them (presentations etc)</td>
<td>Logistics finalised during Month 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels Week</td>
<td>Brussels Week takes place</td>
<td>Brussels Week at end of Month 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return laboratory visits</td>
<td>Return visits to the scientists’ place of work</td>
<td>Return visits in the 3 months after Brussels Week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.2 Programme of activities during Brussels Week

A number of minor changes to Brussels Week are proposed for consideration:

- If the time spent with MEPs cannot be extended then Brussels Week could be shortened to three days – losing the session on the Thursday morning and holding the feedback session at the end of the day on the Wednesday
- Consideration could be given to allocating more time to shadowing MEPs on the Thursday morning of Brussels Week (leaving the rest of the week as it was in 2011)
- The scientists’ presentations appear to be valued by the MEPs. The presentations could be sent in advance to the MEPs along with any articles of relevance (particularly those written for a non-scientific audience). The MEP could also send an introductory mail to their paired scientist prior to the Brussels Week, presenting them and the programme of the Week, in order to instigate earlier individual contacts within the pair.
- More guidance as to what is expected of MEPs could be provided including examples of good practice in terms of a schedule of activities. MEPs could be expected to provide their paired scientists with a schedule of activity in advance.

Finally STOA and the other relevant policy departments could be more pro-active in maintaining relationships with the participating scientists (and also the shortlist of potential paired scientists) for example through: adding (with permission) the scientists to their mailing lists for reports, newsletters etc.; informing them of relevant forthcoming studies and legislation etc.; inviting them to promote future editions of the pairing scheme to colleagues. This would help to develop the relationships further and provide the scientists with future opportunities to contribute to policy-making.

6. Conclusion

The feedback from participating scientists and MEPs suggests that the Pairing Scheme was well-received by both sets of participants, so much so that all participants would recommend the scheme to their colleagues. The MEPs gained insight into specific areas of scientific research and developed their understanding of how scientists might support policy-making. In addition, they extended their
networks of contacts with individual scientists and their research groups. Scientists gained a greater insight into the workings of the European Parliament and the role and working methods of MEPs, in particular their needs when it comes to scientific advice – not just in terms of content but also in terms of delivery style and relevance. Scientists felt that the gains were, in the first instance, personal rather than professional but felt that professional gains would materialise in the longer-term. The insights gained by both MEPs and scientists of each others’ professional worlds will contribute, albeit at a relatively small scale, to fostering a greater level of mutual understanding between scientists and parliamentarians. Regular editions of the scheme would increase the impact as more MEPs and scientists are offered the opportunity to participate in the pairing experience.

Beyond the actual pairing interactions, the Pairing Scheme sets out the objective of creating a long-term relationship between the participating MEPs and scientists. It is of course too early to assess if the contacts established between MEPs on the one side and the scientists and their research groups on the other side will lead to further productive interactions. However, the feedback suggests that all of the participating scientists are interested in remain in contact with their MEPs and to participate in further in European Parliament activities, such as conferences, STOA workshops or as individual experts. In fact, the 2011 edition of the Pairing Scheme has already led to a further collaboration between one MEP and his paired scientist, which bodes well for the future. In addition to the individual pairs of relationships made, STOA has increased its own network of contacts with individual scientists across Europe thereby increasing the network it can mobilise to support policy-making.
Appendix A Brussels Week Programme

A.1 Brussels Week Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday, 21 November</th>
<th>Wednesday, 23 November</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14:00 - 14:30: Welcome of scientists at European Parliament (EP).</td>
<td>09:30 - 17:00: Scientists visit committee meetings (**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30 - 15:00: EC, DG Research presentation, EU research policy.</td>
<td>17:30 - 18:30: Scientists visit their MEP's office (***)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00 - 15:30: EC, JRC presentation of its activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00 - 17:30: Scientist presentation of their research work</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:30 - 18:30: Reception at EP with MEPS, EC, EP and JRC staff</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuesday, 22 November</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:30 - 10:00: EP, DG COMM presentation of EP activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 - 10:30: EP, ITRE and ENVI Committee presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 - 11:30: EP, POL DEP A and POL DEP B Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30 - 12:00 EP, STOA presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 - 15:00: Scientists visit their MEP's office (*)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00 - 18:30: Scientists visit committee meeting(**).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(*) meeting MEP and his/her assistants, introduction to the MEP's interests and current work, planning week's activities

(**) shadow their MEP in his/her parliamentary activity.

(***) Conclusions, planning pair's future activities/meetings
Appendix B Media Coverage

B.1 Publicity prior to the event

Prior to the event, various media and social networks announced on the Brussels week Below are example of the media coverage from the Marie Curie website, the Innovation Union’s page on Facebook and the STOA Newsletter April-May 2011.
STOA PROJECTS

MEP-SCIENTIST PAIRING SCHEME

The idea of the MEP-Scientist Pairing Scheme is to link MEPs with leading scientists who are presently shaping or will shape European science. The purpose is to get the two sides acquainted with each other's professional environment, enhancing their mutual understanding and establishing valuable contacts.

Initially based on schemes in the UK, France and Australia, the European scheme has been run twice previously in the European Parliament, in 2007 and 2008, in cooperation with the European Commission, with very good feedback from participating MEPs and scientists. Based on this experience, STOA has decided to continue the scheme in 2011 as an independent STOA project. In addition, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Union's scientific and technical research laboratory, has offered to contribute to the scheme with its own scientists, if there is interest. As initiator of this activity, STOA would like to emphasise the valuable opportunity it provides for MEPs to become acquainted with and involved in science and technology issues.

The scheme can help enormously to raise the profile of the work of the European Parliament and that of the MEPs involved, within the scientific community. This may have a considerable impact on the interaction of the Parliament with the world of science, as it will concretely demonstrate to the scientists and the public at large the growing influence of science in political decision-making.

The scheme basically consists of two parts. The first is the so-called ‘Brussels week’. During this week the selected scientists come to Brussels, where they attend information sessions on the workings of the European Parliament and spend time shadowing their MEP counterparts in their daily parliamentary work. The activities of this week are scheduled for 21-24 November 2011. It will be followed by the second part, i.e. visits of the MEPs to the scientists’ places of work to see them in practice both in their laboratory and within their institutions and to meet their research colleagues.

Mr Busquin, then STOA Chairman, welcoming the participants in 2007, accompanied by MEPs N. Vakalis, J. Chatzimarkakis and S. Hassi
B.2 Press coverage of the event

The Brussels Week was covered by various European and national media, of which Research Europe and the EurActiv Website. Some MEPs and scientists also reported on their participation to the scheme on their website.

Example of articles are produced hereafter from the following sources:

- Euractiv, MEPs to learn about robots in job swaps with scientists (online:http://ihcp.jrc.ec.europa.eu/our_activities/nanotechnology/jrc-plays-an-active-role-at-the-mep-scientist-pairing-scheme-project, consulted December 2011)
- European Commission, JRC website, JRC plays an active role at the MEP – Scientist Pairing Scheme project (online: http://ihcp.jrc.ec.europa.eu/our_activities/nanotechnology/jrc-plays-an-active-role-at-the-mep-scientist-pairing-scheme-project, consulted December 2011)
- Article on the webpage of MEP Ioannis Tsoukalas (online:http://www.tsoukalas.org/newsArticle.aspx?ID=412&UICulture=el-GK, consulted December 2011), which has been reproduced in a couple of web sites and blogs, and in a couple of Greek newspapers (for example: http://lamiastereanews.blogspot.com/2011/11/blog-post_3904.html)
- Research Europe 8 December 2011, Job swap (from journalist Tania Rabesandratana)
MEPs to learn about robots in job-swap with scientists

The two first MEP job-sharing schemes were organised by the Commission’s DG-Research in 2007 and 2008. After the second scheme the Commission handed over to the Parliament’s Science and Technology Options Assessment unit which launched the third MEP-scientist pairing scheme this week.

STOA is the independent body in charge of providing expert assessments of the various scientific or technological options to the European Parliament’s Committees active in many fields.

Scientists developing robots to care for the elderly shadowed members of the European Parliament this week in a skills-exchange scheme designed to provide practical links between policy and science.

Pairs of MEPs and scientists learn more about one another’s working life, with scientists shadowing MEPs as they go about their parliamentary business, attending committee meetings and meeting officials working in key policy areas.

The MEPs will later spend time with the scientists at their research institutions.

The scheme is also designed to develop longer-term relationships between the legislators and scientists to enable further development of the particular research areas under the spotlight of the scheme.

Future skills are highlighted by scheme

The exchange gives an intriguing glimpse of cutting edge research deemed to be of significance to EU future skills. Of the 12 scientists in the scheme, there is a strong show of environmental expertise, but also the most senior crisis management expert in the EU and a robotics pioneer.

Artificial intelligence professor Angelo Cangelosi, who is partnering with Greek MEP Ioannis Tsalis (European People’s Party) – conducts research on teaching robots how to learn the names of objects, and to adapt to the environment around them.

His research attempts to reproduce human learning facilities in robots, so that they learn spatial awareness.

He told an explanatory meeting at the Parliament this week that it was hoped that such robotics research – which is partly EU funded – could eventually develop robots to care for the elderly and hospitalised children.

Meanwhile one of the EU’s most senior crisis management experts – Derick Al Khudhairi, the head of the global security and crisis unit at the Commission’s Joint Research Centre – is partnering UK Conservative Giles Chichester.

Water data is treated like state secrets

Al Khudhairi specialises in finding the unpredictable impacts of crises such as the Arab Spring, the e-coli outbreak in Europe earlier this year, and the economic malaise.

Crisis control and the environment are well represented among the job-sharing scientists.

Ida Westenberg, who is partnering British MEP Flora Hall (Liberals and Democrats), is an expert on observational data modelling.

During her explanatory session in the Parliament she warned about the lack of global water data. She said the availability of quality data on hydrology has been declining since the 1970s, at a time when such information is needed to determine the impact of water shortages.

Natural disasters such as hurricanes were partly responsible for destroying meteorological stations around the world, she said, and these are not replaced.

But Westenberg added that countries are not reporting data on water in the same way that they used to do, and this is hindering detailed analysis. "It is treated by governments increasingly like state secrets, because of the political issues affecting water," she said.

Next steps:

JRC plays an active role at the MEP - Scientist Pairing Scheme project

— filed under: safety, health, nanotech, nanobiosciences

"Brussels Week Seminar"

On 21-24 November 2011 the European Commission's Joint Research Centre is participating in the European Parliament's project "MEP - Scientist Pairing Scheme", managed by the European Parliament's STOA (Science and Technology Option Assessment) Panel. The JRC-IHCP (Institute for Health and Consumer Protection) joins the event and is represented by the Head of Unit 'Nanobiosciences', Hermann Stamm.

Run twice previously - in 2007 and 2008 - in cooperation with the European Commission, the initiative is aimed at creating a platform of exchange in which Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and JRC scientists get acquainted with each other's professional environment, establish contacts and analyse the steady growing influence of science in political decision-making.

The "Brussels Week Seminar" will host twelve pairs of MEPs and scientists coming from different organisations. Among them, H. Stamm (JRC-IHCP, Head of Unit 'Nanobiosciences') is being shadowing the MEP Paul Rübig (AT/EPP), Chairman of STOA Panel and member of the EP ITRE (Industry, Research and Energy) Committee.

During the seminar, MEPs will inform the attendees on their work and presentations of the STOA, ENV (Environment, Public Health and Food Safety), and ITRE Committees will be delivered. The scientists will join their MEP counterparts, attend Committee meetings of the European Parliament and finally spend time shadowing the MEPs in their daily parliamentary work.

In a next step, during the first quarter of 2012, the MEPs will visit the Joint Research Centre's premises in Ispra (Italy), for further contacts with its teams and scientific laboratories.

The scheme is both meant to raise awareness of the JRC work and scientific strenghts within the European Parliament and, conforming to the policy support mission of the JRC, to better inform the JRC scientists about the legislative process related to their research.

STOA is the Parliament's own Science and Technology Options Assessment unit. The European Parliament defines its position through reports prepared by its Committees. If Committees decide that it would be helpful to their policy making role to seek out expert, independent assessments of the various scientific or technological options in the policy sectors concerned, then they have STOA at their disposal.

More about STOA
- Program of the "Brussels Week Seminar" (application/pdf 68kb) en
Η Επιστήμη συναντά την Πολιτική: Ευρωπαϊκοί επιστήμονες επισκέπτονται το Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο και γίνονται Ευρωβουλευτές για δύο μέρες

(25/11/2011) Πρόγραμμα ανταλλαγής Ευρωβουλευτών επιστημόνων με τη συμμετοχή του Ευρωβουλευτή Ιωάννη Α. Τσούκαλα

Την ευκαιρία σε 12 διακεκριμένους Ευρωπαίους επιστήμονες να γνωρίσουν από κοντά τα έργα των Ευρωβουλευτών, αλλά και αντίστροφα, προσέφερε μια νέα δράση του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινοβουλίου, στοχος της οποίας είναι η εξαίρετη επιτυχία και η ευγενικότητα στη συνεργασία περιβάλλον της άλλης πλευράς η ενίσχυση της αμοιβαίας κατανόησης και η δημιουργία πολύτιμων επιστήμων.

Στο πλαίσιο αυτού του εργαλείου, ο Ευρωβουλευτής της ΝΔ Καθηγητής Ιωάννη Α. Τσούκαλας, φιλοδοξούσε στη Βρυξέλλα, για τρεις ημέρες του διεθνούς Ερευνητικού Εργαστηρίου Cargalais, Καθηγητή του Πανεπιστημίου του Πλέμνη της Μεγάλης Βρετανίας.
MEP-scientist pairing scheme

Last month, FRISBEE coordinator Graciela Alvarez and 11 other selected researchers spent time in Brussels as part of the MEP-scientist pairing scheme, organised by the Parliament’s Science and Technology Options Assessment office.

Each researcher followed an MEP’s daily activities, after hearing some presentations from parts of the European Commission and Parliament that are involved in science policy. The MEPs will later visit the scientists in their labs GPAN in Antony for the job swap’s second leg.

The pairing scheme was tried out before with the Commission, in 2007 and 2008. For this third iteration, STOA has tried a conscious effort to better match the areas of expertise of the scientists and the MEPs interests. For instance, Graciela Alvarez was paired with Julie Girling and with Martinna Yanakoudakis two Conservatives Reformist MEP from UK with an interest in, Food Safety and women’s rights and environmental policy.

STOA’s goal was not just to pair MEPs and scientists for the duration of the scheme, but to establish lasting links. That is the reason why they selected scientists are mid-career researchers, at least 10 years away from retirement.

STOA has a yearly budget of 850,000 and eight staff members. In addition to the job swap, it organises events and commissions research on issues ranging from transport and nanotechnology, through to copyright policy.

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The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 248298.
Job swap
The European Parliament is seeking to build bridges with scientists through an MEP job-shadowing scheme, as Tania Rabesandratana reports.

“I thought it would be very complex, but it’s not so terrible,” says Marco Alves, a researcher at the Wave Energy Centre in Portugal, who has just spent a week experiencing the very different work world of an MEP. Alves says he expected political debates at the European Parliament to be difficult to follow but was pleasantly surprised. “I thought the language used here would be different, but I understood everything,” he says.

Last month, Alves and 11 other researchers spent time in Brussels as part of the MEP-scientist pairing scheme, organised by the Parliament’s Science and Technology Options Assessment office. Each researcher followed an MEP’s daily activities, after hearing some presentations from parts of the European Commission and Parliament that are involved in science policy. The MEPs will later visit the scientists in their labs for the job swap’s second leg.

The pairing scheme was tried out before with the Commission, in 2007 and 2008. For this third iteration, STOA official Theo Karapiperis says: “We made a conscious effort to better match the areas of expertise of the scientists and the MEPs’ interests.” For instance, Alves was paired with Teresa Riera Madurell, a socialist MEP from Spain with an interest in energy policy. “Our goal is not just to pair MEPs and scientists for the duration of the scheme, but to establish lasting links,” Karapiperis says. That’s why the selected scientists are mid-career researchers, at least 10 years away from retirement.

STOA has a yearly budget of 650,000 and eight staff members. In addition to the job swap, it organises events and commissions research on issues ranging from transport and nanotechnology, through to copyright policy. Studies are carried out through contracts with different research institutes in Europe, in particular the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany. The STOA panel votes on its long-term priorities every year, and meets every month at the Parliament’s plenary session in Strasbourg, France, to review the progress of its technology assessment activities.

Riera, a mathematician by training, says STOA’s input is particularly important because some of her MEP colleagues are intimidated by science. “There are policy areas that can be more difficult [than science-based ones] but that seem more accessible. For instance, I was a member of the committee on women’s rights. It’s a very complex area linked to intricate employment policy issues, yet everybody there had an opinion,” she recalls. “MEPs don’t need to be specialists in everything. But we do need a basis to be able to make adequate decisions”.

“I’m fascinated by how problems are discussed here, and the variety of people and interests that MEPs meet in just one day,” says Hermann Stamm, head of the nanosciences unit at the Commission’s Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy. Stamm was paired with Paul Rübig, a Christian- democrat MEP from Austria, and chairman of the STOA panel. During Stamm’s visit, Rübig’s schedule included a discussion on female entrepreneurship in Turkey, a lunch with the UK chamber of commerce, and a meeting of the committee for Industry, Research and Energy, which covered energy efficiency, space and the European patent. “Now that I’ve seen how busy their diary is, it’s crystal clear to me that our messages to MEPs need to be very clear and concise,” Stamm says.

The German scientist says researchers and politicians approach issues differently. “Science doesn’t provide yes or no answers. It’s always nuanced: under these conditions, this happens; under these other conditions, that happens.” However Alves and Riera see similarities in the way both sides go about problems. “Every ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in a parliamentary vote stems from a long debate and agreement” within a political group, Riera says. Alves adds: “We scientists discuss all the time until we reach a consensus. We all seek solutions to problems.” Both consider any barrier between science and policy is “imaginary”.

“Most scientists are interested in policy,” Alves says. “This interest often starts because we want to understand where the money comes from and how priorities are determined.” Riera agrees: “It’s been really encouraging to see how interested Alves is in policy and work at the Parliament.”

More to say? Email comment@ResearchResearch.com

STOA
★ Since 1987, STOA has been providing the European Parliament with independent information to assess the potential impact of promoting specific technologies
★ Both Paul Rübig and Teresa Riera Madurell are members of the STOA panel, a group of 15 MEPs that decides on STOA’s activities
★ STOA is one of 14 members of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network, which includes similar offices in national and regional parliaments—including Switzerland, the UK, Greece, and Flanders in Belgium