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Technology Assessment for Parliaments: towards reflexive governance of innovation

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Science, technology and innovation in politics

Science, technology and innovation as:

- key elements for economic growth and competitiveness
- challenges for existing public policies and legislation

Science, technology and innovation in parliaments:

- Regulation in order to mitigate risks and/or prevent abuses
- Set the framework for technological innovation to achieve policy goals or meet public concerns



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TA and Parliaments

Technology Assessment can support parliaments in science and technology governance by

«integrating any available knowledge on possible side effects, by supporting the evaluation of the technologies according to societal values and ethical principles, by elaborating strategies to deal with inevitable uncertainties, and by contributing to constructive solutions of societal conflicts around science and technology»

(Armin Grunwald)



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PACITA Parliamentary TA Debates

- June 2012:** Knowledge-based policy-making, Copenhagen
- April 2014:** Strengthening Technology Assessment for policy-making, Lisbon

Aims

- Build a common understanding of the role of TA for Parliaments
- Discuss further developments and deployment of TA activities

Participants

- Parliamentarians and policy-makers
- TA specialists (practitioners, researchers, etc.)

Format

- Presentations, panels and table discussions

What policy-makers expect from TA

- Structured and independent policy advice based on a comprehensive analysis of the issues at stake (including ethical, legal and societal dimensions)
- Foster a constructive dialogue between politics, science, stakeholders and society

«We have to fight blindness when we legislate, we have to have strategic thinking and we need to be aware through information. So TA is a very important tool»

Maria de Belém Roseira, Portuguese MP

«TA is not only about getting expert knowledge, but also about revealing the views of stakeholders and of the general public through participatory methods».

Felix Gutzwiller, Swiss MP



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From risk governance towards innovation governance

- Modern States have to mitigate the possible risks of innovation, while at the same time drive technological innovation to create growth and meet societal needs (cf. Europe 2020 Strategy, Horizon 2020, etc.).
 - For policy-makers, focus is shifting from risk governance (mitigating possible risks) towards innovation governance (designing innovation so as to avoid adverse impacts).
- TA has to open-up its traditional risk-based approach and frame its assessment in the context of innovation policies.



TA in the context of globalisation

Science, technology and innovation spill over the borders of nation-states. But, at the same time, they still need local actions and decisions.

- TA need to develop appropriate tools to address the local and global dimensions of science, technology and innovation:
 - European TA network (beyond EPTA)
 - Cross-European TA projects (help policy-makers to look at issues beyond national borders and integrate global challenges into national policy agendas).



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The difficult relationship between TA and Parliaments

TA results are difficult to integrate into policy-making:

- TA deals with uncertainties, whereas politics need clear answers.
 - Long-term perspective of science vs short-term perspective of politics
- Build a permanent and consistent communication between TA organisations and Parliaments by:
- Dialogue platforms (cf. PACITA Parliamentary TA Debates)
 - Involving policy-makers in TA projects

« TA is something apart, for which members of parliaments do not receive any recognition for the next election»

Ulla Burchardt, former German MP



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Expanding the TA landscape: from political desirability to political reality

Despite TA being considered by policy-makers and parliamentarians an important tool for policy-making process, there are obstacles on TA being adopted by Parliaments:

- Currently, financial constraints seems to be one of the difficulties (budget cuts)
- TA as an approach is unknown in some countries (especially for new EU members)



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Paths towards the introduction of TA in new countries

- Parliaments considering the establishment of a TA unit:
 - creating small structure supported by universities, science academies, research agencies or foundations (e.g. fellowships, similar to POST)
- Settings where TA is not (yet) well known / where policy-making go beyond Parliament:
 - access to the work done by other TA institutions in Europe, e.g. translating and adapting reports to the national context and trigger national debate on the issue and involve stakeholders
 - participating in cross-European projects

...with the goal to engage politicians on the issues in debate and support their involvement in TA activities



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Conclusion

« A good understanding of the interactions between science and society is increasingly important for policy-making in order to mitigate risk, to avoid gaps in regulation, and to increase social welfare, making the most of future opportunities »

Antonio Fernando Correia de Campos, former European MP and Chairman of the STOA Panel.



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Thank you!

Publications about the PACITA Parliamentary TA Debates

- D. Bütschi (2012). *Knowledge-based policy-making, Report of the first Parliamentary TA Debate held in Copenhagen on June 18 2012*, Berne: TA-SWISS.
- D. Bütschi (2014). *Strengthening Technology Assessment for policy-making, Report of the second Parliamentary TA Debate held in Lisbon on April 7-8 2014*, Berne: TA-SWISS.
- D. Bütschi and M. Almeida (forthcoming). «Technology Assessment for Parliaments: towards reflexive governance of innovation», in: Klüver, L., Nielsen, R. Ø. and Jørgensen, M-L. (Eds.): *Policy-Oriented Technology Assessment Across Europe. Expanding Capacities*. Palgrave Pivot, London.



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