

OPECST'S PRACTICE AS REGARDS SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE

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Despite the complexity of the subjects addressed by OPECST (Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology Assessment), the latter's operation is mainly based on the involvement of its parliamentary members - deputies and senators.

It is OPECST's collegial body which appoints the rapporteurs, who are parliamentarians.

Again, the collegial body holds the power of decision to commence or orientate a study. This decision is taken after presentation by the rapporteur of a feasibility study, the power of referral being a prerogative of the standing committees and Bureaux of the assemblies.

It is also the same body which decides to publish the report and amend, adopt or reject the rapporteur's conclusions and recommendations.

However, bearing in mind the complexity of the subjects within the ambit of the Office, the legislator has nevertheless laid down that the latter can ask for the opinion of experts.

Practice shows that OPECST has progressively defined a line of conduct with respect to external experts, demonstrating the usefulness of regular cooperation with them, but tending to avoid the conclusion of exclusive or permanent ties with a given panel of experts.

1 - Hearing of scientific experts by the rapporteurs : a preferred investigative method at OPECST

The 1983 Act lays down that the Office *'implements study programmes'* and the rules of procedure of the Office state that experts, appointed by the president on proposal by the rapporteur, *'can be tasked with carrying out investigations as part of the study entrusted to the rapporteur.'*

While, during the first years of operation of the Office, ad hoc studies were entrusted to external experts, these then being published in an annex to the report, this procedure is scarcely used any longer.

In practice, on specific points, the rapporteurs can consult scientific bodies or researchers to obtain specific information more informally.

In actual fact, the rapporteurs generally find an easily accessible mass of information: scientific publications, research journals, agency decisions and

opinions, notes by the scientific services at embassies, reports by international and Community organisations.

The private hearings organised by the rapporteurs in France and abroad allow them to crosscheck information and identify the most consensual or most debated issues. Public hearings open to the press afford them an opportunity to conduct debates during which the various points of view are exposed and compared.

Also, while drafting reports, parliamentarians organise many visits to public and private laboratories, as well as to companies, allowing them to have direct 'face to face' exchanges with research teams and managers.

Number of reports presented	21
Number of persons heard in France	1452
Number of persons heard abroad	1621

Statistics - November 2002 / November 2007

2 - The scientific board : scientific personalities backing up the work by OPECST's parliamentarians

By providing OPECST with a scientific board, the 1983 Act innovated, but it also ensured, as evidenced by the preparatory work, that the Office would keep control over the activities of this body made up of non-parliamentarians. According to the 1983 Act, the members of the scientific board are appointed by the Office, their mandate is limited to three years, and the Office refers matters to the scientific board whenever it feels it necessary.

The rules of procedure: specify that the mandate of scientific board members is renewable; task the president and first vice-president of OPECST with ensuring the appointed personalities are independent; lay down that the scientific board is convened and presided over by the president of the Office, and that these two bodies shall hold at least one joint meeting per year; and define the powers of the scientific board with respect to the rapporteurs - the scientific board shall provide its support in carrying out

feasibility studies, suggest names of experts prepared to work in conjunction with the Office, and express opinions on the scientific value of work conducted by experts.

In practice, joint meetings of the Office and scientific board form the usual way of operating. The board is always convened at the same time as the Office. The purpose of these meetings is generally to seek out study topics that can be examined by the Office and, more rarely, to obtain the opinion of scientific board members on a topical subject of concern to the Office (programme bill on research, in 2005, environment 'Grenelle' and implementation of the programme bill on research in 2007).

The Office and its rapporteurs have become accustomed to asking for support from the members of the scientific board, depending on the subject addressed, especially for them to participate in steering committees or public hearings open to the press.

Composition of the scientific board

M. Michel CABOCHE, Directeur de recherche à l'INRA, Membre de l'Académie des Sciences
M. Daniel CARIOLLE, Directeur de la Recherche à Météo-France
M. Pierre CASTILLON, Membre de l'Académie des Technologies
Mme Anny CAZENAVE, Directeur du Laboratoire d'études en géophysique et océanographie spatiales (LEGOS), Membre de l'Académie des Sciences
M. Hervé CHNEIWEISS, Directeur de recherche, Directeur du groupe de neuro-oncologie moléculaire et clinique, Collège de France
M. Yves COPPENS, Membre de l'Institut, Professeur au Collège de France, Membre de l'Académie des Sciences
M. Jean-Marie DANION, Directeur de recherche à l'INSERM (U 666 – Strasbourg – Physiopathologie clinique et expérimentale de la schizophrénie)
M. Jean-Marc EGLY, Institut de génétique et de biologie moléculaire et cellulaire (IGBMC), Membre de l'Académie des Sciences
M. Jean-Pierre FINANCE, Président de l'université Henri Poincaré à Nancy, Laboratoire lorrain de recherches en informatique et ses applications
M. Laurent GOUZENES, Directeur du Plan et des Programmes d'études (ST Microelectronics SA)
Mme Claudie HAIGNERE, Ancien Ministre, conseiller auprès du Directeur général de l'Agence spatiale européenne, Membre de l'Académie des Technologies
Mme Sylvie JOUSSAUME, Directeur de recherche au CNRS, IPSL – Laboratoire des sciences du climat et de l'environnement
M. Jean JOUZEL, Directeur de recherche au CEA, Sciences du climat
M. Axel KAHN, Directeur de l'institut Cochin, Membre de l'Académie des Sciences
M. Étienne KLEIN, Directeur des sciences de la matière (CEA)
M. Daniel KOFMAN, Professeur à Télécom Paris, Ecole nationale supérieure des télécommunications, Chairman du Réseau d'excellence européen Euro-NGI
M. Jean-Claude LEFEUVRE, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, Président de l'Institut français de la biodiversité
M. Jean-Claude LEHMANN, Membre de l'Académie des Technologies
M. Jean-François MINSTER, Directeur scientifique du groupe TOTAL, Membre de l'Académie des Sciences, Membre de l'Académie des Technologies
M. Michel PETIT, Conseil général des technologies de l'information – Président de la section scientifique et technique, Membre de l'Académie des Sciences
M. Joël de ROSNAY, Cité des sciences et de l'industrie
Mme Annie SUGIER, Directrice à la protection (Institut de radioprotection et de sûreté nucléaire)
M. Jean THERME, Directeur du CEA-Grenoble, Membre de l'Académie des Technologies
M. Dominique WOLTON, Directeur du laboratoire information, communication et jeux scientifiques (CNRS)

3 - Working groups or steering committees : precious aid for rapporteurs

The Office rules of procedure set forth that a working group, whose members are appointed by the president on proposal by the rapporteur and whose composition must reflect the array of scientific disciplines and technologies concerned, the various conceptions present and the varied interests at stake, can be set in place, on the initiative of the rapporteur.

Recourse to steering committees is frequent.

The members of the steering committee attend the hearings organised by the rapporteur and make suggestions for the drafting of hearing reports.

In-depth work is undertaken in steering committees. Under the guidance of rapporteurs, fruitful exchanges have taken place between their members to orientate work programmes and also seek out the most interesting topics.

Number of reports presented	21
Number of steering committees set up	11
Number of persons having participated in steering committees	86

Statistics - November 2002 / November 2007

4 - Adversarial public hearings open to the press: a proven practice allowing experts to dialogue together and with the administration and citizens, under the guidance of a parliamentarian

While the 1983 Acts lays down only that '*the delegation* (i.e. OPECST) *can obtain the opinions*' of some organisations, such as trade unions and associations for the protection of the environment or the defence of users of public services and consumers, the rules of procedure specify that it is empowered to hold all the public hearings it deems opportune and that the rapporteur can organise '*public hearings*'.

Very soon, the rapporteurs became accustomed to organising adversarial public hearings bringing together twenty or so participants, completing the many private hearings they organise in France and abroad. Generally, the lists of participants, chosen by the rapporteurs, are submitted to the President and First Vice-President of the Office for their opinion.

For the past few years, the Office has also taken the initiative of organising public hearings open to the press on topical subjects or to ensure the follow-up of a previous report.

Experts are systematically convened to these hearings which enable exchanges to take place with other stakeholders: industrialists, representatives of the associative world or administrative or political authorities, whether international, national or local.

In addition, in 1998, a study on GMOs having been brought before the Office, it organised a 'consensus conference'. A steering committee selected scientists tasked with informing the panel of citizens that had been set up by a polling institute. During a solemn session, 'enlightened' citizens gave their conclusions which were appended to the report.

	Number of hearings	Number of participants	Length of the debates
Public hearings in the framework of a report	18	358	124 hours
Follow-up or topical public hearings	9	173	49 hours

Statistics - November 2002 / November 2007

5 - Establishing relations of confidence with the scientific community

Since its creation, the Office has sought to build regular and close ties with scientific experts and research bodies.

Every year, it organises visits of laboratories, in Paris and the provinces.

Since 2005, it has set in place, with the

Academy of Sciences, a partnership based on exchanges with parliamentarians, academics and young researchers.

Office parliamentarians participate in conferences organised in France and abroad and receive foreign delegations.

6 - Acquiring concrete knowledge of the world of expertise, its value and its limits

The quality of OPECST's work is therefore based on a balance between the direct involvement of parliamentarians and the participation of experts, both being indispensable.

This work has led most of the Office's rapporteurs to have a better understanding of the world of scientific expertise.

The Office itself has organised an adversarial public hearing open to the press, on scientific expertise, which allowed it to evaluate the controversies within the very community of

scientific experts, not only regarding given 'expert opinions' but also on the expertise procedure, on how an expert's report is issued and, lastly, on the relationship that the expert and decision-taker must establish and on the responsibilities attaching to each of them.

Last, the Office belongs to a European network of science and technology assessment bodies, *European Parliamentary Technology Assessment*.



Some examples of reports

October 2007