

HEARING

of the US House of Representatives Committee on House Administration's Subcommittee on Modernization on *"The Path Toward a More Modern and Efficient Congressional Research Service"*

April 26, 2023

Statement on:

The work of the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS) in support of Members of the European Parliament and parliamentary Committees

Submitted by:

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I wish to thank Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer and the Members of the Subcommittee for the great honor and privilege of being here today.

I have been asked to speak to you on how and why the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) was established on 1 November 2013, and to briefly describe how its work has developed over the last ten years. I myself have been the Director of the European Parliament Liaison Office in Washington DC since 2019. However, before coming here my last two positions - as Director of the European Parliament Library and as Acting Director for Impact Assessment and European Added Value - were in the EPRS. Indeed, I contributed to the process of 'standing up' the new research service in 2013.

Reform efforts are a constant in the history of all parliaments. After the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, when the European Parliament became a fully-fledged co-legislator, or 'co-equal branch' of the EU legislature - as you might phrase it here in the United States - the need to reform was felt to be imperative. It was about having the wherewithal to function efficiently and effectively, but it was also about equipping the EP with the tools it needed to fully exercise its prerogatives, to fully play its role as co-legislator with the Council of the EU.

When Parliament became co-legislator in 2009, the first substantive step taken in supporting its role was to increase the professional staff complement on the parliamentary committees (2010 and 2011). The second step was to create a greater capacity for scrutiny and oversight support for the parliamentary committees (2012), rolled into the EPRS soon after, and the third step was to create a new Research Service (2013). It was also around this time that an office was created in Washington DC to foster and deepen relations with the US Congress.

The U.S. Congress, equally, has had periods of reform activity which have given rise to non-partisan legislative institutions (Office of the Law Revision Counsel, Legislative Counsel, CRS, GAO, CBO, JCT and the Offices of the Parliamentarian). These have been created with the express object of safeguarding Congress' powers in the legislative process using knowledge and expertise. From the EP's point of view, these bodies are exemplars and world leaders, benchmarks to be studied and measured against.

What Parliament's leadership did was to arrange for extensive analysis to be carried out, studying the strengths and weaknesses of the support given to Members of Parliament in the United States, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. The key conclusion was that the provision of independent, scientific, advice to Members and analytical support to committees in exercising scrutiny and oversight of the executive needed to be strengthened in the EP.

The motto of the new structure - EPRS - became "*empowering both Members and committees through knowledge and contributing to the Parliament's effectiveness and influence as an institution*". In deciding that the European Parliament needed to have at its disposal a world-class parliamentary research service, capable of providing Members and committees with independent, objective, authoritative and timely research on, and analysis of, policy issues, the EP looked to the U.S. experience of non-partisan legislative institutions, and especially to the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

Inspired by the U.S. example, the mission and vision for the EPRS became:

- to be independent, non-partisan, objective and authoritative;
- to provide a comprehensive service, backed by specialism in all policy fields;
- to be client-oriented and responsive to the needs of Members, offering them a single point-of-entry for requests for research, analysis and information, and to reply to requests in a timely manner;
- to complement the provision of written material with 'in-person' briefing of Members;
- to ensure the clear, simple branding of products and services, and easy accessibility to both physical and digital forms;
- to maximise readability and use visualization techniques and visual media as much as possible, notably the use of infographics and data.

From the very outset, the EPRS has sought to develop a productive and professional relationship with the CRS and to learn from their experience on Capitol Hill. The EPRS encouraged visits to Brussels by CRS staff, to exchange best practices and foster personal contacts between specialists.

There were two main challenges at the genesis of EPRS in 2013:

- a. how to build up credibility as a research body, to build up the back-catalog of research and publications, and, in short, to become authoritative, and at the same time, to be as integrated as possible in the tissue of legislative activity;
- b. matching ambition with resources and recruiting as many specialists as possible, to build up to sufficient numbers to be effective while managing to remain budgetarily-neutral. Achieving budgetary neutrality involved a shift of resources from other activities and making the difficult choices that go with such reallocations.

Members' Research Service

The Members' Research Service is the part of the EPRS which most closely corresponds to the CRS. A lesson learned from the CRS was the need for a comprehensive range of products and services, backed by specialist internal expertise and knowledge sources in all policy fields.

Policy specialism thus became a key driver for its two main tasks. (1) responding to individual requests for research and analysis, and (2) generating a wide range of in-depth analytical and briefing publications for all Members, across all major policy fields. These objectives could only be achieved by putting in place of a high degree of policy specialism among EPRS staff.

Building a dedicated team of policy specialists within the Members' Research Service, with little or no extra cost was done by a combination of:

- (i) reallocating and training existing staff, many from the EP Library,
- (ii) a resource-sharing agreement with the EU's two main advisory bodies¹ in return for 60 staff (or vacant posts), and
- (iii) an open competition for the recruitment of post-doctoral researchers on six-year contracts.

By the end of 2021, there were 73 policy analysts and 24 information specialists in the Members' Research Service, up from 20 when it was created in 2013. The EPRS staff complement as a whole is now over 300.

The CRS has been a model for the MRS' task of responding to Members' requests with in-person tailored research for individual Members, in addition to written responses.

Requests for research or analysis from Members or their staff are handled on a strictly confidential basis. Numbers have been steadily increasing: **1,754** in 2019; **2,816** in 2020; **2,325** in 2021 and **2,750** in 2022. In the current legislative term (2019 - 2024) so far, **86%** of all Members have made requests to the Members' Research Service (MRS) for substantive research or analysis. This compares with **74%** in 2014-2019 and **22%** in 2013/2014.

Around 35 per cent of requests were answered on the same or the following day, and around 70 per cent were answered within less than a week.

In terms of the second task of providing publications for all Members, the guiding principle has been that briefings and studies should content-rich, but nevertheless clear, accessible and easy to read.

From mid-2019 to end 2021, i.e. the first half of this five-year parliamentary term, the Members' Research Service produced a total of **1,500** publications covering all policy areas, issues and legislation within the EU. All are public and can be accessed via the EPRS catalog, the Parliament's Think Tank internet website, or using the EPRS App, available on Google Play and the App Store..

¹ the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and European Committee of the Regions (CoR)

A standardized range of publications was introduced from the outset:

- *At a Glance* notes, providing a one-to-two-page summary of a topic;
- *Briefings*, offering a more detailed overview of a policy, issue or piece of legislation (up to 12 pages);
- *In-depth analyses* and *studies*, giving a much more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the same (up to, and more than, 36 pages, respectively).

There has also been strong emphasis on the use of infographics, data and statistics in EPRS publications, to offer a concentrated visual presentation of useful figures and other information on any subject.

A 'Graphics Warehouse', making available many of the infographics used in EPRS publications for download, is now accessible on the EPRS intranet, for use by Members or staff, featuring over 2,000 charts, tables and other graphics. A parallel 'Map Warehouse' carries over 350 maps, while a 'Statistics Warehouse' gives easy access to a wide range of EU and international data.

The MRS continually tries to innovate, constantly expanding the range of briefings and adding new products. Examples are podcasts available on any podcast app, animated subject videos, the online *EU Legislative Train Schedule* website, which uses visual tools to track the detailed progress of significant legislative proposals, or a comprehensive set of short notes on the practical benefits of EU policy for individual citizens, known as the *'What Europe does for me'*.

Supporting the evidence-base for law-making, and incorporating foresight techniques

Impact Assessment

The European Parliament has taken the U.S. models but adapted them to its own specific circumstances and needs. A second pillar of EPRS is inspired in part by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and deals with tools for ex ante and retrospective impact assessment and evaluation. This reflects the nature of the EU legislative process, and specifically that impact assessments are made available upstream at the legislative stage, rather than downstream at the rule-making stage, as is the case in the U.S. This creates a need for support to parliamentary committees in effective oversight and scrutiny of the executive, and to nourish evidence-based policy-making as well as contributing to the quality of law-making itself.

An important aim therefore of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added value is to increase the practical capacity of Members and committees to scrutinise and oversee the European Commission and other executive bodies during successive stages of the EU policy cycle.

Scientific and Strategic Foresight

A Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA) unit in EPRS undertakes a range of forward-looking studies, workshops and other activities, at the request of the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA), made up of 27 Members of the European Parliament, nominated by eleven parliamentary committees.

This internal advisory structure was created in 1984, when a similar body existed in the US Congress and works closely with the standing committees dealing with research and technology. It has increasingly looked to focus on issues related to scientific foresight and has, among other activities, created a Centre for Artificial Intelligence.

The EPRS has a complementary but separate unit dealing with Global Trends, called the Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit. Its purpose is to instil forward thinking in legislation and to help foster a culture of 'anticipatory governance'. The unit, working jointly with the European Commission, supports the ESPAS project – the process of EU inter-institutional, administrative-level cooperation on strategic foresight and long-term-trends. It prepares publications on a wide variety of issues: health, microprocessors, energy, migration, geopolitical and geo-economic shifts, and aims to develop scenarios, allowing future proof understanding and policy-making. Assessing risks of future shocks, capabilities and resilience in an annual report is part of an effort to strengthen foresight literacy through training and the development of methodologies.

Knowledge Management

A third pillar of the EPRS is the EP Library, which has of course existed since the Parliament was established in 1953.

The Library provides remote knowledge services to Members and staff, specifically access to a fully-fledged research library and to many specialised and legal databases, subscription-based journals, newswires and information sources. It answers reference requests and questions from all parliamentary clients, working with the Members' Research Service. The Library also contains a substantial historical collection, which is curated and open to the public in Luxembourg.

In parallel, the Library answers a large number of citizens' enquiries, providing a highly reactive knowledge service to citizens. It welcomes visitors and scholars and intends to open up to the public much more, preparing to offer a genuine, multilingual public library to form part of the Parliament's offer to citizens and visitors.

Overview

In recent years, the EPRS has had considerable success in terms of the goals it set itself in 2013. It now reaches almost 90% of the Members of the European Parliament. Its public reports are more frequently cited in academic literature and are certainly used by teachers and students of the EU. It has continued to develop an increasingly sophisticated range of products and services designed to support the Parliament, as the only directly elected institution within the EU system, in fulfilling its key legislative and oversight roles. Aspiring to reach, and indeed set, the highest global standards as a parliamentary research service and in-house think tank – for Members, committees and the institution as a whole – EPRS continues to seek ways to underpin and enhance the work of the Parliament, helping to empower it through knowledge as an effective and influential EU institution, as we move closer to the next European elections in 2024.

Annual Statistics 2022:

2,750 replies to confidential Members' Hotline requests
15,182 reference requests to the Library
1,041 EPRS publications, including 164 online-only publications
7,717 books loaned by the Library
56,023 e-books accessed
13,433 participants attending 72 events (in-person or online)
3.1 million page-views on the internet
275,000 page-views on the EP's intranet
24 visits to or from other national parliamentary research services
10,839 replies to citizens' enquiries
25 presentations of EPRS research to nine parliamentary committees

Figures from the start of the legislative term in 2019 to the present:

99% of MEPs used EPRS products and services since July 2019
89% of MEPs made research requests since July 2019 (626) (454 in 2022)
84% of MEPs have been visited for briefings (594) since July 2019 (332 in 2022)

References

EPRS mid-term report – July 2019 to December 2021:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Mid-term-Report-2022-final.pdf>

www.europarl.eu/thinktank