

A masked performance before the German Bundestag: industry and business groups provide each other with reviews now

A new report on technology assessment for the German Bundestag completely disappoints, but should not discourage us

Why is this report not what it pretends to be?

Why is this masked performance such a sad low point in the entire saga of wireless communication technologies and 5G?

Why are we now in dire need of forming a transparent political and social will?

Let's start with (roughly) outlining the situation

Corona and war and their (often still unforeseeable) impact and challenges on society and its individual members capture understandably a large amount of public attention. As we focus on key issues of health and the environment, especially the climate issue is always front of mind – also from a global perspective.

The debate about the technological advancement of wireless communication technologies and 5G is just as crucial and relevant to our future, but less front of mind. Even in this difficult time, there are committed grassroots initiatives and voices raising awareness in many places and diverse ways. We, too, try to keep a culture of open debate alive, for example, in the form of international statements or conferences. At the same time, industry and business groups rapidly expand the deployment of wireless communication technologies and 5G with the approval and support of the government, which is accompanied by diverse campaigns and promises of a perfect world.

We admit this is a rather rough and approximate outline of the situation, but it will do for the moment. The recently published report on technology assessment for the German Bundestag was eagerly awaited – the results are mostly disappointing because the report provides rather little constructive guidance on the outlined situation. And what makes this low point even worse and sadder: industry and business groups provide each other with reviews now.

¹ See, for example, our statements In the Global Corona Crisis: Courage for a Change in Policies regarding Wireless Communication Technologies from 24 April 2020 – https://kompetenzinitiative.com/corona-krise-mut-zum-mobilfunkpolitischen-kurswechsel-courage-for-a-change-in-policies/ – The Politics of 5G regarding the Situation in Germany from 15 August 2021 – https://kompetenzinitiative.com/5g-politik-the-politics-of-5g-zur-situation-in-deutschland-regarding-the-situation-in-germany/ – Public Conference at the Electoral Palace of Mainz, 4-6 October 2019 – https://kompetenzinitiative.com/mainz-2019/ – and at the Goethe-Museum Düsseldorf, 14-16 October 2022 – https://kompetenzinitiative.com/duesseldorf-2022/

A short reminder of the obvious regarding the meaning and significance of technology assessments

As a first step, let's view this publication from the outside. At this point, we would like to share some observations that are self-explanatory, but it does not hurt to be reminded of them every now and then.² Even at the risk of appearing somewhat meticulous, we should first trust our eyes and read what is actually written.

The title of the report, which was only recently published for the German Bundestag on 14 February 2023, says: Report by the Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment (18th Committee) Pursuant to Sec. 56a Procedural Rules. Technology Assessment (TA). Possible Health Impacts due to Different Frequency Ranges of Electromagnetic Fields (HF-EMF).

In the foreword by the committee, it says, among other things: With this Technology Assessment Report from the Office of Technology Assessment (TAB), the German Bundestag receives comprehensive and well-researched information for its parliamentary work regarding the research, health, and technology aspects of this important issue in its political context (p. 6).

The names of all the members of this committee are listed: Kai Gehring, Dr. Holger Becker, Lars Rohwer, Laura Kraft, Prof. Dr. Stephan Seiter, Prof. Dr.-Ing. habil. Michael Kaufmann, Ralph Lenkert.

On page 7, we find the names of the project team members who authored the Final Report for the TA Project, which the report of this committee is based on, with the title: Possible Health Impacts due to Different Frequency Ranges of Electromagnetic Fields (HF-EMF).

² We refer here and also thereafter to the online publication (in German only; there is no official English translation available at this time): https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/056/2005646.pdf – Accessed on 6 March 2023.

On page 8, which is otherwise blank, it says at the bottom: The Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB) has been advising Parliament and its committees on issues of scientific and technological change.

So this is a project of the Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB), which has been forwarded to the German Bundestag by the Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment that gave it its stamp of approval for being *comprehensive and well-researched information*.

We summarize: Two democratically legitimate bodies endowed with high authority certify that the report provides parliament with *well-researched information*. This really sounds trustworthy. We cannot be too cautious because we are dealing with risks here and we should be able to have faith.

Additionally, the Office of Technology Assessment (TAB) makes the following claim concerning its own self-image, as described under the title Assessing the Consequences of Technology – for Parliament and Society on its website: With its impartial analyses, TAB contributes to improving the information base of the German Bundestag and to providing a scientific foundation for its opinion-forming and decision-making. In addition, TAB activities support the public dialogue on technological developments and innovations.³

It all sounds great. Let's remember that in the year 2023 we are simply stating basic facts that especially today are and will remain extremely important: Technology assessment (TA) is one of the great achievements of the late 20th century – established, developed, and by now institutionalized in many places at diverse social, scientific, and political levels. This achievement is based on the often painful, frequently destructive, in extreme events even existentially devastating impact of the technological advancements of our modern age. In this context, the still highly

³ From the TAB website: https://www.tab-beim-bundestag.de/english/about-us.php - Accessed on 19 March 2023.

recommended European publication Late Lessons from Early Warnings: The Precautionary Principle 1896–2000 should be mentioned. With its programmatic title at the turn of the millennium, it has been and will always be an appeal to our century.4

What the Office of Technology Assessment is saying about itself in its opening line lies at the heart, at the core, at the center of technology assessment: The Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB) is an **independent** scientific institution.⁵

So back to the project at hand. Against this background and at first sight, we can expect absolute credibility and trustworthiness – a key document claiming to provide guidance on an issue highly relevant to all of society during a very difficult time.

We continue reading and – while our patience has really been tested - we realize:

The report is not a technology assessment because the key part is missing

Reading the report is tedious and time-consuming. We are in search of additional information on the sponsors and reviewers of the project. This information usually belongs in the front or back matter of a publication.

Somewhere else in the report, we come across a true statement (p. 15): Furthermore, it is important that research independence can be easily traced and that the highest level of transparency can be provided with regard to possibly existing conflicts of interest.

This is important, extremely important.

The following sentences in the introductory part of the report let us sit up and take notice: Likewise, this report also makes use of the evidence matrix developed by the Swiss Research Foundation for

thttps://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/late-lessons-2thttps://www.tab-beim-bundestag.de/english/about-us.php

Electricity and Mobile Communication (FSM) and ETH Zurich (p. 11). Or put another way: This is where the well-researched information, the well-researched assessment tools and criteria come from. And "ETH Zurich," Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, sounds excellent.

You have to make it to page 20 to finally find the names of the key reviewers spelled out: Current research on possible health effects or risks of HF-EMF. Dr. Gregor Dürrenberger, Dr. Jürg Fröhlich; FSM – Swiss Research Foundation for Electricity and Mobile Communication, ETH, Zurich.

And in the same place, it is also revealed who the people are who are responsible for the publication (p. 21): The responsibility for selecting, structuring, and condensing the information materials as well as merging those materials with the information from our own research and analyses lies with the authors of this report: Dr. Reinhard Grünwald, Dr. Christoph Revermann and Dr. Pauline Riousset.

We keep searching, but in other places. At the venerable and highly esteemed Swiss Federal Institute of Technology or ETH Zurich for short, the administrative office of the FSM is located.⁶ In addition, we learn from the FSM website that the corporations Swisscom, Swissgrid, Sunrise, Cellnex, and Ericsson are its current sponsors. That this written report was paid by Swisscom AG, we know from the e-book Mobilfunk – ein Risiko? [Wireless Communication Technologies – a Risk?], which forms the basis of this report.8 The same brochure, also published by the Swiss wireless service provider Sunrise, openly reveals this fact on the inside of its title page. This brochure is based on a literature study of the current state of knowledge on possible risks from radio frequency radiation of wireless communication technologies by the FSM, which was commissioned by the Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB).9

See: https://www.emf.ethz.ch/en/foundation/administrative-office – Accessed on 21 March 2023.
See: https://www.emf.ethz.ch/en/foundation/sponsors-supporters – Accessed on 21 March 2023.
Page 2: https://www.emf.ethz.ch/fileadmin/redaktion/public/downloads/Haupttext.pdf – Accessed on 21 March 2023.

https://www.sunrise.ch/content/dam/sunrise/residential/spotlight/2019/20191216_FSM_Mobilfunk_Stand%20des%20Wissens.pdf.

We ask ourselves why readers of this report have to go to such length to unearth the most basic and self-evident information. We leave this question unanswered for now and stick to the basic facts before our eyes.

There is clear evidence:

This production can be anything. It is not a technology assessment. This can be conclusively, firmly ruled out – for certain.

Even though its title says so. Even though two democratically legitimate bodies endowed with high authority must have seen this report because they certified it. Even though the Office of Technology Assessment (TAB) is the commissioner and shoulders the responsibility of the report.

The indispensable requirement of technology assessments is their independence, precisely because they are so immensely important to our lives. **Independence** is the stable, secure, and reliable foundation of any technology assessment. Otherwise, it's not a technology assessment.

Or put another way: This production on health effects is at its core solely based on the expertise established and assigned by industry and business groups that provide each other with reviews.

That industry and business groups conduct studies on their own dime to accompany their activities is right and proper, as long as they remain recognizable as such. This is common practice also in other areas. That in Germany industry and business groups in the area of wireless communication technologies are now permitted to create and present their own reviews in the masked production of a technology assessment for the noble house of the German Bundestag is pretty rich.

We still keep reading and realize that this masked performance has a program:

The staging of constant contradiction and confusion, with certain effects

First let's point out a fundamental contradiction, a virtually insoluble paradox of this masked performance we are faced with here: We all enjoy being greeted with beautiful and by now fashionable words like *risk governance and participation* (p. 17–18). But simultaneously and in one and the same breath, a quasi-authoritarian style persists that paints a picture of a now finally well-established foundation of the *existing body of knowledge*, among others, through a *purely evidence-based approach* as well as a *detailed and substantial review* presenting findings *in their essence* as a *collection of facts or resource book* (p. 20) so that everything else may follow from this sound knowledge base.

We therefore pay special attention to how the current state of scientific knowledge is presented and characterized, for example, with the following general statements (p. 12):

Even in studies of high scientific quality, the presence of certain biological or health effects or lack thereof can frequently not be consistently shown. Thus the body of evidence is frequently not clear and the need for research to clarify open questions continues to be high.

We repeat certain phrases here: 'high scientific quality' and at the same time 'cannot be consistently shown', 'frequently not clear', and 'open'. In these general statements, we find the condensed version of the program of the entire report, and we will come back to this program in a moment.

First, let's take a closer look at more detailed descriptions and provide an example of statements made with regard to the

extremely important research area of cancer development and cancer promotion.

First, the structure at a glance. Findings with significant effects (tumors) are presented in sentences like these: Findings of two large studies of high quality would have led to an intense discussion about the body of evidence ... (p. 120). These types of ongoing discussions would be in many respects typical of the controversies that characterize the entire field (p. 144). And they are doing it again: recognizing the high quality of the research, while at the same time hinting at vague, controversial findings and discussions. Likewise, but in another place, it is reported that the findings of these studies had consequences: in 2020, the Court of Appeal in Turin upheld the ruling of a court that recognized a connection between the petitioner's acoustic neuroma and his occupational exposure to a cell phone (p. 148).

A few more detailed quotes:

With regard to cancer development and promotion, the report says that current animal studies have intensified both scientific discussions and the public debate about brain tumor risk. From a scientific perspective, there is a considerable need for clarification because, even though the findings of both studies point in the same direction, certain details are partly inconsistent or unclear, and the question regarding the causal mechanisms of action remains unanswered (p. 142f). At the same time, but in a different paragraph, it is reported that an American expert panel recognized clear evidence in these findings. The FSM reviewers, on the other hand, referred to them as mere suggestions (p. 147).

Then again, in a different paragraph, the following statement regarding cancer is made: Overall these findings belong to the most import findings of the last years. Since the evidence of effects was replicated, further high-quality and intensive research efforts should be made to pursue this. After all, these findings represent a not insignificant aspect in the risk assessment for humans (p. 117).

Enough of it.

This style of presentation where constantly two opposites are presented **simultaneously** – conceding and qualifying, stating in the affirmative and also in the negative, valuing and devaluing – drives and pervades the entire text. This is its inner program, as already pointed out earlier. This program works with a sort of writing acrobatics that is as strained as it is bold; you have to hand it to them: it is very well crafted and rhetorically and stylistically very effective.

The defining impression or effect while reading goes something like this, expressed in everyday language:

'Well, hmm, sounds rather complicated. It's a little annoying, a little tiring, too. It feels like being dropped into a world of mere approximations, following the well-known motto: We know nothing really. So much is evident. Well, great, so then go on.'

From an interdisciplinary analytical and thus rather abstract perspective, this program works like this:

Here we have a text construct before us that takes on a mask of supposedly being scientific and holding high authority and, by way of habit, churns out speech acts with simultaneously opposite meanings, which are intended to constantly create ambivalence and ambiguity while reading. The act of reading can become enormously irritating and confusing; any potential disposition to act is at least paralyzed for now, even if it cannot be completely demoralized.

Furthermore, these types of methods are not exactly new. They are well known from history and the artistic creation of fictional worlds and realities, such as in literature and theater. They are often used in these settings to express comic and tragic aspects, and more often than not tragicomic ones. In this context, they can be very appealing in their own way of speaking because the audience can easily be irritated and unsettled by such aesthetic

strategies. In aesthetic spaces, such effects can even be used in their own way to encourage reflection, to ultimately have a therapeutic effect and be healing.

But to apply such a strategy to a supposed key document meant to build real understanding in society during a time of crisis and great tension?

It can be toxic.

We are aware of the complex and open-ended relationship of socalled reality and fictionality and that, especially in our time, the debate about fiction, fake, and facts is constantly stirred up again. You can play with it, eventually also use it for political gain. And many play with it and it is often used politically. As in this present case, the well-known key strategy used by industry groups is at work again by casting doubt on findings and raising doubt about the development of scientific knowledge.

We urgently ask you to realize and admit that this is not a game anymore.

We urgently ask you to open your eyes and to see clearly:

This is not a technology assessment. It doesn't exist here. It simply doesn't. And since there is no technology assessment here, it cannot be a solid, secure, and reliable foundation for anything real that may come thereafter.

We don't know if those involved in this project were aware of what is being done here or what they are participating in.

However, we need to see it for what it is, that this entire masked performance and its construct is – to put it mildly – a clear and massive affront.

First, an affront to the generations of scientists and politicians who devoted their work to technology assessment. Also, an affront to the intense ongoing EMF research efforts over the past three decades and their processes of scientific knowledge creation as well as the achievements of each single scientist, which most certainly also include stellar achievements. And finally, an affront to the tried and tested rules of our free and democratic basic order we are all called to protect and shape.

It's a sad low point.

We would therefore like to add a few personal and scientific remarks before we will eventually conclude with our view of the current state of knowledge.

A few deeply human and personal words about this masked performance

We are allowed to share such remarks because many of us have been part of this saga of wireless communication technologies right from the start, our interdisciplinary charitable initiative for more than 15 years now. We have witnessed a great deal of things and made our experiences.

In this area (and probably also beyond), it is generally not some invisible or anonymous or otherwise named superior force that controls our destiny with its acts, as is often heard. We humans are the ones by now who in most cases get this all done by ourselves when something destructive or constructive happens to us and all of life, in a given location and on our planet overall.

It is also us who, individually or collectively, shoulder the responsibility for it to varying degrees. There is nobody else to blame. Who would like to or even can be responsible for this masked performance?

We dare not even imagine what personnel, institutional, and eventually financial efforts it must have cost to bring such a masked performance to the German Bundestag and before the eyes of our parliamentarians.

In view of such an elaborate masked performance, we inevitably also think of all those working on this issue with selfless efforts – including countless citizens, diverse initiatives, and worldwide organizations committed to helping those affected, last but not least our initiative with its modest means included. And we also think of the many things that are questionable and go horribly wrong in this area that affect individual lives and livelihoods. This is risky terrain and we could easily slide into a depressive mood or self-pity as we think such thoughts.

We shake ourselves and we don't want that.

We will turn to additional facts. We know and experience locally as well as globally that, since their introduction about 30 years ago, wireless communication technologies and 5G have opened up and established huge markets worldwide. A lot of money is made and livelihoods are sustained through developing, producing, marketing and working in this area. We also know for a fact that this development would not have been possible without lobbying as recent studies have clearly shown.¹⁰

This is a fact of life. It is therefore a key question for many of us how we can learn to distinguish legitimate economic interests from abusive lobbying.

¹⁰ E.g. the landmark report by Klaus Buchner and Michèle Rivasi – https://www.michele-rivasi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ICNIRP-report-FINAL-JUNE-2020_EN.pdf

And a few more interdisciplinary scientific comments on this masked performance

And one more thing from an interdisciplinary scientific perspective in plain English. Many scientific publications in this area, especially those that have a more or less official status or are produced more or less by industry groups, basically suffer from the fact that they are completely inadequate in terms of hermeneutics.

Innovative history, theory and practice of science that have learned from the past have known for a long time – to put it plainly – that any research or science has a social dimension. As long as we are humans and the way we are, the following applies in principle: our scientific work – no matter whether it occurs in laboratories, with or without instruments or machines, or at a desk – is also always shaped – down to our designs, methods, and other tools – by complex constellations of ruling political forces, overall social conditions and, of course, our own individual circumstances.

This is a clear and an extremely significant insight, for example, from history of science research. And for many years, this has already been a matter of course for the introductory curriculum at colleges and universities. To still work with ideas or presentations of supposedly 'strict' or 'strong' objectivity or 'evidence', or whatever other key word and variant they may be called, may well belong to the classical theory of science. We know from the past where that can often lead; in the worst cast, directly to collective disaster. But that is what is constantly happening in the area of wireless communication technologies and 5G and thus also has a major impact on the debate on exposure limits.

And that is precisely why there is such a thing as technology assessment and we cannot remind ourselves often enough of this precious achievement. This masked performance is either a sign of hopelessly antiquated naivety or nothing more than a will-o'-

the-wisp blown out of proportion, reaching for authority as is its presumptuous and approved habit of supposed 'objectivity' or 'evidence', which it is not and cannot be entitled to.

The treatise is 300 pages long. As it turns out, it also contains many important studies that we have pointed to for many years. Yet, how these studies are presented has very little or almost nothing to do with innovative science practices.

We therefore will not deal with it any longer. We will also not let ourselves be drawn into any verbal battles. That would only be a waste of time and distracts from what is really important. This type of masked performance cannot provide a secure, stable, and reliable foundation for our work because – as is common practice for masked performances – it pretends to be something it clearly is not.

In this context, we would like to quote some sentences of the Institute of Technology (ITA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) from March 2020, which were shared on the occasion of the rollout of 5G technologies:

It requires prudence and a robust framework. ... [Michael Nentwich:] The public discourse should be conducted as openly as possible so that everyone is involved, because one thing is certain: this innovation will affect all of us: the economy, politics, administration and our everyday work and life.¹¹

Here in Germany we are still a long way off from *prudence* and a *robust framework* in the political debate on wireless communication technologies, as this recent masked performance demonstrates. Likewise, from *a public discourse* that is *conducted as openly as possible* because all of us are affected.

We will keep working toward this goal and will now conclude with some sentences regarding the current state of knowledge.

¹¹ 5G and Health as well as comments by the Director of ITA Michael Nentwich https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/ita/detail/news/5g-and-health

Wireless communication technologies and 5G – as has become evident by now – is a technology of risk that requires political and social will now

What do we know about the current state of knowledge and where are we standing?

In view of the dazzling and ambiguous masked performance, we will try to give our statements as much clarity as possible.

The situation is dire.

First some basic information: We live in a period of radical change. For at least three decades, we all have globally lived and worked for and along a path of progress that is unique in the history of civilization. Unique because of its lightning speed. This progress has been advanced and accelerated by dynamics that are constantly shifting as they are reset and implemented and that increasingly develop their own dynamics that mutually reinforce each other. As a result, the entire process has reached its very own complexity, if not sometimes uber-complexity.

We therefore simply state: What we urgently need right now is to stop insofar that this is even still possible and to take our time to put our heads together.

Wireless communication technologies and 5G present us with serious global challenges that are just as crucial and ubiquitous as the issue of climate change.

We are dealing with a technology here that has no rival. It is not comparable – or only to a very limited extent – to well-known historical phenomena such as the industrialization or railroad construction in the 19th century, key words that are repeatedly used in marketing.

The breadth and depth of the effects of this technology are unlike any other. It not only affects our society as a whole, but reaches into the innermost part of our being and also all other living beings. And, to put it in philosophical terms, it even touches questions of our humanity in the present and beyond.

Wireless communication technologies and 5G are technologies of risk. So much is evident.

Ever since their introduction about 30 years ago, we have collected sufficient experience and knowledge. Everybody sees and perceives their effects in different ways. By now international research and science projects have documented such risks in a multitude of review and special studies spanning diverse fields of investigation and designs with meticulous skills of exploration, analysis, and reasoning. Scientific findings are clear: There is evidence of risks to human health and the environment.

This clear knowledge of risk justifies that additional research is urgently needed, especially for already in-use 5G technologies for which there is hardly any research available yet. The overarching objective should be to minimize risks as quickly as possible.

Since this risky technology has so far essentially supported the digital transformation – which is comprehensive and basically encompassing all of society, but has hardly ever been fundamentally questioned – digital transformation and wireless communication technologies are mostly perceived and understood as if they were one and the same movement. Yet this is not the case.

This raises at least two key issues between which we should distinguish: 1) How much digital transformation do we want or need in our living environment and for ourselves? 2) And do less risky alternatives exist as a supplement or replacement for risky wireless communication technologies?

From everything that has been said so far, this is basically about concrete steps of creating healthy and sustainable progress, which takes above all courage and creativity.

In the current situation, we need to take two concrete steps: (a) developing decisive policies that avert danger and promote precaution and (b) developing transparent processes that help us form political and social will.

All of what we just briefly concluded is based on reliable scientific findings and has been known for a long time. And all of that has already been said and demonstrated extensively and in detail by various directions of international research, occasionally also from European public institutions and nongovernmental organizations.

Our very own publications also support this. Up-to-date, concrete ideas and initiatives have already been provided by us, also in compact formats.¹²

Should our German Bundestag finally start putting enormously important processes of forming political will in motion, we would be so happy. Should they reach out and also ask for our support, we are ready for it -

without any masked performances.

For the Management Team of the Kompetenzinitiative e.V. Klaus Buchner, Wilfried Kühling, Peter Ludwig, Klaus Scheidsteger

This year a new book by Wilfried Kühling will be released: Bewertungsdilemma Mobilfunk. Wie wir das Unvermögen staat licher Risikobewertung endlich überwinden [The Assessment Predicament of Wireless Communication Technologies. How We Can Finally Overcome the Failure of the Government's Risk Assessment]. Metropolis-Verlag. Marburg 2023. –

- https://www.metropolis-verlag.de/Bewertungsdilemma-Mobilfunk/1544/book.do

See, for example, Wilfried Kühling: 5G / Mobilfunk durch gesamträumliche Planung steuern - https://kompetenzinitiative.com/5g-mobilfunk-durch-gesamtraeumliche-planung-steuern/ - Wilfried Kühling and Peter Ludwig: Weißbuch "Elektromagnetische Felder' Impulse für die gesundheits- und umweltverträgliche Gestaltung des technologischen Fortschritts im Bereich Mobilfunk/5G
 https://kompetenzinitiative.com/weissbuch-elektromagnetische-felder/ - Wilfried Kühling: Denkschrift Funkwende-https://kompetenzinitiative.com/funkwende-fuer-gesundheit-klima-umwelt-dringend-erforderlich-und-intelligent-gestaltbar/

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