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<https://www.europeanscientist.com/en/editors-corner/more-debate-on-science-policy-is-needed/>

**More debate on science policy is needed**

*The closure of Fessenheim, transposition of the CJEU ruling on plant biotechnology by the French Council of State, locust invasion in Africa... the news on scientific and technical policy is coming in thick and fast. A good reason to encourage these debates as European Scientist has been doing for two years now.*

**Politicians should talk more about science and scientists talk more about science policy.**

When European Scientist came into being two years ago, it was with the aim of encouraging scientific and technical debate on the basis of this two-fold requirement: on the one hand, scientists need to be involved in explaining, popularising and sometimes defending their sector; on the other hand, politicians need to take a greater interest in science and technology in order to take the right decisions.

For a long time, the scientific community has been confined to its ivory tower, publishing only in peer-reviewed professional journals. Of course, there have always been well-known popularisers of science, just as there have always been pseudo-scientists. But more recently, the debate has shifted. The scientific community, undermined by some critics, has been forced to justify itself to the public. As part of a growing movement, scientists have starting committing themselves and, in some cases, [giving vent](https://www.europeanscientist.com/fr/editors-corner-fr/discours-pro-science-tout-le-monde-se-lache/), to defend rationality under attack from all sides.

On the other side, some politicians have also committed themselves to science. See, for example, French Deputies Bernard Accoyer and Jean-Yves Le Déaut, who, three years ago, tabled a resolution in the National Assembly.[[1]](#footnote-1) But none of this is enough, and as Dr Laurent Alexandre, who does not pull his punches, quite rightly proclaimed, “Politicians are rubbish at science” [[2]](#footnote-2)

The aim of our [“Opinion”](https://www.europeanscientist.com/fr/category/opinion/) section is therefore to encourage submissions from scientists who would like to commit themselves to their sector and also politicians or other opinion leaders who would like to express their views on science and justify their decision making process. And that is what we're doing this week with three opinion pieces from very committed scientists.

**Fessenheim: Should we give up nuclear power?**

Since the beginning of January, the [European Green Deal](https://www.europeanscientist.com/fr/editors-corner-fr/green-deal-europeen-bienvenue-dans-lere-du-neo-planisme-vert/) announced by Ursula Von Der Leyen has made plans to invest one thousand billion Euros in the ecological transition, based on the best available technology. The choice of the latter is a strategic issue. Now, how are politicians going to make their decisions? Which experts will they listen to?

With France shutting down the first reactor at the Fessenheim power plant on 22 February, nuclear experts are getting involved and warning politicians about the mistake they are making. Jean-Pierre Riou, head of the energy wing of Collectif STA, has to this end written “[Fessenheim: the execution of a 10 billion euro promise.](https://www.europeanscientist.com/fr/opinion/fessenheim-lexecution-dune-promesse-a-10-milliards-deuros/)“ This expert makes his protest clear:

“*While the reduction of CO2 emissions is a national priority, the closure of a perfectly functional nuclear power plant is most regrettable. And it is happening despite the construction of a gas-fired power plant in Landivisiau, Brittany: which is nonsense in ecological terms (...) the closure of the Fessenheim power plant is also absurd from the point of view of European energy sovereignty: nuclear power remains a powerful and controllable industry, capable of responding quickly and easily to the needs of European countries.*”

**Biotechnology in Europe: scientific engagement**

Yesterday evening Jean-Baptiste Moreau, French Deputy for the Creuse region, organised a screening of the film [Food Evolution](https://www.europeanscientist.com/fr/editors-corner-fr/food-evolution-ogm/) at the National Assembly. A debate ensued between proponents of GMOs and organic agriculture. Daniel Evain, President of the National Federation of Organic Agriculture finally admitted that the debate in question was an entirely political one!

This is one more reason for scientists who want to defend biotechnology to get more involved in order to keep the European Union in the biotechnology race, and is the purpose of [two pro-Biotech initiatives](https://www.europeanscientist.com/fr/agriculture-fr/initiative-citoyenne-europeenne-signez-la-petition-pour-les-biotech-vertes/), as Catherine Regnault Roger from the French Academy of Agriculture tells us this week:

* That of the Group of Senior Scientific Advisers to the European Commission (the *Scientific Advice Mechanism*) to get out of Directive 2001/18/EC.
* And the [petition](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2019/000012_fr) launched by a group of European students of eight different nationalities from Wageningen University in the Netherlands to “encourage responsible agricultural innovation in the EU”.

**Locust invasion in Africa and European anti-science ideology**

As James Njoroge from Kenya tells us, in “[Europe's anti-science plague descends on Africa](https://www.europeanscientist.com/en/features/europes-anti-science-plague-descends-on-africa/)“, Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and more recently Djibouti, Eritrea, Oman and Yemen have experienced an invasion of fast-breeding locusts. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), “this is the worst situation in 25 years”. Oxfam estimates that 25 million people are beginning to suffer famine because of crop losses. A pesticide such as fenitrothion could play a key role.

Yes, but the problem, as Mr Njoroge explains, is that European NGOs are putting pressure on governments to abandon the use of pesticides:

“Banning safer and more effective modern pesticides, such as fenitrothion, which enable locust pest control, and at the same time allowing copper, is a cowardly way to eliminate the competition in the interest of organic farming. In the meantime, unless the locusts stop, it is the African farmers themselves who will be eliminated. (...) Europe is rich enough to decimate its own agriculture and become an even greater net importer of food than it already is. For Africans who do not enjoy such a luxury, it is a matter of life and death.”

If the advocates of nuclear power had got involved beforehand, perhaps they would have succeeded in swaying opinion on the merits of this energy source and managed to prevent the closure of Fessenheim; if the pro-biotech scientists do not succeed in getting the Commission to change their view, perhaps Europe will have no future in research and will become a colony of the other continents in this field; finally, if African farmers allow themselves to be treated this way, European NGOs will end up imposing their ideologies...

The theme running through these three subjects is that science and politics are more closely linked than ever. Whether it is a question of choosing our energy source of the future, staying in the race for progress in plant biotechnology or even the choice of our agriculture, current events provide us every day with a number of subjects ripe for debate.

Thank you for continuing to read us and please do not hesitate to send us your proposals for opinion pieces.

1. <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/ta/ta0926.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/la-nullite-scientifique-des-politiciens_2043610.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)