



The Joint Research Centre of the EU Commission: An Ideological *Dispositif* for Whom? A Critical and Positive Discourse Analysis

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Overview

Dispositif and Dispositive: Not a Mere Problem of Translation

Originally, the title of this paper was submitted with the terms ‘tool’ and ‘device’ instead of *dispositif*. Foucault articulated this concept at different times and stages, as his edited papers (Foucault 2001) well document. Larroche (2019, 83) has summarised the concept:

[dispositive] is any of the various institutional, physical, and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body. The links between these elements are said to be heterogeneous since knowledge, practices, techniques, and institutions are established and re-established in every age. It is through these links that power relations are structured.

As a linguist, I am aware of the challenges translations pose, especially when a philosophical argument starts from the basic terms of the problem. The first pair we observe in the French to English translation is *dispositif* ↔ dispositive. This retains the philosophical implications of the original term, but several dictionaries¹ point out that the English translation often collocates with another pair: device ↔ apparatus. ‘Device’ is linked to cognitive sciences and the idea of a tool (*outils* in French). The latter is a broader term referring to equipment or machinery designed for a particular purpose. Devices can be tangible (e.g., a smartphone) or intangible (e.g., a legal device). They serve different functions and may or may not be part of a larger system or network. ‘Apparatus’ implies a system, as seen in the expression “ideological state apparatus,” which reveals its Marxist origins.

Key characteristics of a *dispositif* in Foucault's thought include:

- It encompasses both material and immaterial components, such as physical infrastructure, discourses, norms, and practices.
- It functions to shape and control individual and collective behaviour, often in subtle and indirect ways.

Thus, the concept of *dispositif* in Foucault's work represents a more abstract and comprehensive idea than the English terms 'tool' and 'device.' It is rooted in the analysis of power, knowledge, and societal control, while the English terms refer to more tangible and specific instruments or equipment. Callewaert (2017), in opening his work that reviews a significant number of translations of *dispositif*, states:

I use the French term *dispositif*, even in English, because I feel the usual translations such as 'apparatus' or 'deployment' are misleading when used in connection with Foucault's texts... In a way it does not make sense to write a paper on the concept of *dispositif*, in the writings of Foucault, in isolation; *dispositif* is only meaningful in relation to something. Therefore, one also has to ask: a *dispositif* of what, for what purpose? (Callewaert, 2017-29).

I agree that in Foucault's work, a *dispositif* is a heterogeneous and flexible system or network of various elements, including institutions, discourses, practices, objects, and technologies, that work together to produce and regulate knowledge, power, and social order. Foucault used this concept to analyse how power operates in society and how knowledge is constructed. Since the JRC ostensibly positions itself, as we will see in the section '*The JRC as a Dispositif and its Role: A Multimodal Analysis*,' as an impartial scientific entity supporting EU policy-making, questions arise regarding its true function within the political landscape. This paper contends that the JRC is not merely an objective research body, but operates as a political entity with an agenda that influences decision-making processes in both direct and subtle ways. The research question at the heart of this study is whether the JRC's actions maintain impartiality, especially when decisions pertain to the social sciences. As I will demonstrate, the JRC configures itself as a Foucauldian *dispositif*. This is why the original French term is used, with all its nuances and implications, transforming this case study into a Foucauldian discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

This research stems from the works of Gilbert and Wodak (2000) and Rossetti di Valdalbero (2021). The latter points out that:

the Commission defends the credibility of its political initiatives through independent scientific reports... the Commission legitimizes the merits of its actions on science, on the 'strength of figures (Rossetti di Valdalbero 2021, 148).

Rossetti di Valdalbero reports on several initiatives involving an economic dimension: "Scientist modellers play a key role, sometimes little known, upstream of Community decisions" (2021, p. 149). One of my research questions is: "Does this hold true when decisions must be made in the domain of social sciences?" The issue arises because, as I hypothesize and will demonstrate using corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, the domain of the social sciences is more susceptible to manipulation than that of the hard sciences. Gilbert and Wodak (2000), in their examination of European policy debates, highlight a strong tension in the struggle for power and

voice among the various actors involved in the decision-making process. To document this and support my hypothesis, I start with a multimodal analysis of the JRC's institutional communication and then use an autoethnography case study, based on my 2018 participation in writing a report for the Commission on countering populist communication.

As anticipated, it will be demonstrated that the JRC, while presenting itself as an independent scientific entity supporting the Commission, acts as a political entity—a *dispositif*—that promotes a specific agenda with a predetermined action plan. Thus, the scientific community is 'steered' to align with the JRC's objectives, which are achieved through various steps. One such step is the political negotiation between the 'buyer,' the EU Commission, and the suppliers of labour, *i.e.*, external experts recruited as needed.

Since this *modus operandi* is not universally accepted by all JRC internal staff, and some attempt to counter the eight-step procedure that will be discussed later, they are protected, when necessary, by the Chatham House Rule (CHR):

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

2. The JRC as a *Dispositif* and Its Role: A Multimodal Analysis

Rossetti di Valdalbero (2021) suggests that the JRC is a crucial instrument in safeguarding the credibility of the EU Commission's political initiatives, particularly by producing independent scientific reports. These reports are used to legitimize the Commission's actions, often leveraging quantitative data to reinforce their claims. This strategy is well-documented in economic initiatives. This research investigates whether it also extends to decisions within the social sciences and whether such practices impact the scientific community's independence and integrity. This is important because the dynamics between different actors could influence the narratives prevailing in the European public debate, as well as the ensuing conflicts and negotiations. If this is the case, the JRC's institutional communication and practices reveal a political nature that goes beyond its institutional mission. Rather, it exerts political intent and influence on the environment surrounding its activities. Thus, the JRC would confirm its Foucauldian nature as a *dispositif*, playing a pivotal role in aligning the scientific community with its objectives.

Multimodal analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Norris, 2004) helps us understand the message that the JRC conveys to its potential audiences. A starting point for this analysis is the JRC's institutional communication through its official website. As illustrated in Figure 1, the JRC is positioned within a highly institutionalized framework. In the top left corner of the page, it is prominently stated: "An official website of the European Union." This EU branding serves not only to shape the interpretation of subsequent information but also to enhance the perceived value of the content for those who recognize the EU as a powerful brand and meaningful in-

stitution. The EU acts as an influencer, enabling the JRC to assert its identity in the opening line of the splash page: “The JRC provides independent, evidence-based knowledge and science, supporting EU policies to positively impact society”. In this particular instance of new-given utterance, the JRC communicates: a) a positive image: through the double pre-modification of ‘independent’ and ‘evidence-based,’ the JRC effectively transfers the qualities of knowledge and science to itself. It is noteworthy that these concepts form the foundation of post-Enlightenment positivism²; b) mission alignment: the positive framing is extended to the JRC's mission, which aims to support “EU policies to positively impact society.” In marketing terms, this serves as the ‘reason why’ stakeholders should engage with the JRC as a product.

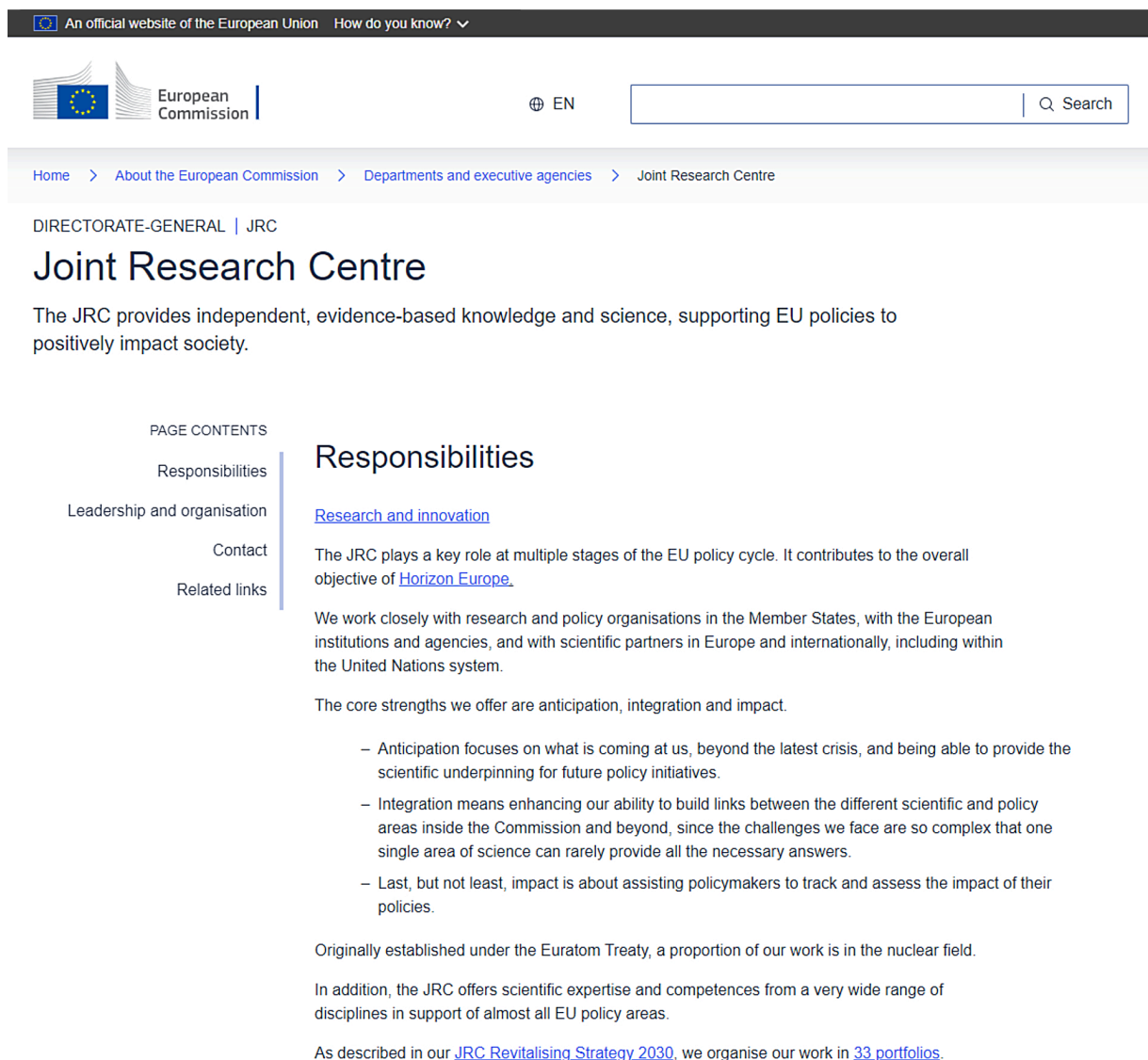


Figure 1: JRC Splash Web Page

The reinforcement of the opening frame is obtained by the following statements (my emphasis):

² The initial working title of the report was *Enlightenment 2.0*.

The JRC plays a *key role* at *multiple stages* of the EU policy cycle... We work *closely* with research and policy organisations in the Member States... The *core strengths* we offer are *anticipation, integration* and *impact*... the JRC offers *scientific expertise and competences* from a *very wide range* of disciplines in support of *almost all* EU policy areas³.

All the terms are positively framed and imply a multi-level capacity, claiming proximation (Cap 2013) with sibling national institutions. Pre-modifications and nouns reinforce the added-value frame that is superimposed on the JRC while, at the same time, echoes of positivistic Enlightenment values (*e.g.*, rationality, universality, linear progress) are reinforced.

JRC mission statement & work programme



A trusted partner for policymakers

As a department of the European Commission, we play a key role at multiple stages of the policy cycle. We work closely with other Commission departments, EU institutions and agencies, as well as with scientific partners and policy organisations in Europe and internationally. We offer scientific expertise and competences from a very wide range of scientific disciplines in support of almost all EU policy areas.



Anticipate

Looking ahead and seeing more clearly what's coming to us to be better prepared and react more efficiently to new challenges.



Integrate

Connecting the dots and disentangling cross-overs thanks to multi-disciplinary and analytical capability.



Impact

Measuring the impact of EU policies, supporting the design and monitoring of policies and performance indicators.

What we offer

- **Scientific excellence:** high-quality research accompanied by high standards of scientific integrity and transparency.
- **Anticipation of new challenges and opportunities** to prepare policymakers for the complex and interlinked challenges faced by society.
- **Capacity to map, review, analyse and synthesise** the best available evidence in support of EU policies.

Figure 2: JRC Mission Statement Webpage

This self-promotion strategy, obtained with hypes, continues in the *JRC Mission Statement and Work Programme* page⁴ which is not hosted on the Commission web-

³ Accessed on July 24, 2024, at https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/joint-research-centre_en.

⁴ Accessed on July 24, 2024, at https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-mission-statement-work-programme_en.

site, but in the JRC domain. As Figure 2 shows, the page reinstates the same language already used in the splash page. The graphic style is coherent with the institutional role, but not particularly user-friendly or glamorous, although in contrast with the written content. They echo an old Italian advertising campaign whose payoff was: “We are science, not science-fiction”. Here, the meaning of *Anticipate*, *Integrate* and *Impact* are better explained, with the positive heading: “A trusted partner for policy-makers”. It is evident, from these first statements, that the JRC is competing with other entities for the support and attention of the Commission while, at the same time, maintaining the consensual pipeline active and filled to reach the potential labour force. As any other company, either public or private, it must sell its products/ services and, at the same time, it must also attract collaborators and suppliers. This is the function of the *What we offer* section of the page:

Scientific excellence: high-quality research accompanied by high standards of scientific integrity and transparency.

Anticipation of new challenges and opportunities to prepare policymakers for the complex and interlinked challenges faced by society.

Capacity to map, review, analyse and synthesise the best available evidence in support of EU policies.

Positive adjectives pre-modify nouns in a way that constructs an involvement strategy, effectively anchoring readers within a framework of excellence and encouraging them to view JRC's capabilities and prestige favourably. Viewing an institutional web page as part of a narrative and thus as a joint action (Clark 1996), a ‘Narrative Arc’ analysis could serve as an effective tool to measure the impact of this language.

AVERAGE SCORE: 26.39

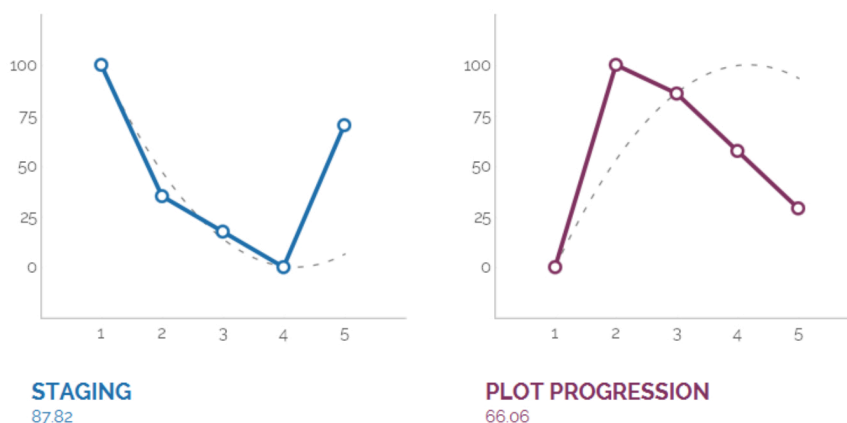


Figure 3: Narrative Arc for JRC's Web Page

Figure 3 illustrates a strong and positive degree of narrativity along the ‘Staging’ and ‘Plot Progression’ dimensions⁵. These two patterns develop in a traditional manner, aligning with the institution's objectives. This confirms the effort to present the JRC with

a marketing strategy aimed at reaching out to potential 'customers' and enhancing

⁵ Data was generated and analysed using the LIWC-22 Case Studies function and report: “Staging is the process in a story/narrative where important information is provided to the readers, such as important characters, concepts, and their relations to each other. Plot Progression is the process in a story/narrative whereby events/ actions transpire and characters are engaging with each other.” Refer to <https://www.liwc.app/help/aon> for further information.

brand awareness and value. This hypothesis is further supported by the JRC Strategy page, which highlights a clear repositioning of the brand. Among the positive attributes discussed previously, the pre-modifier “re-” plays a dominant role⁶.

Our *revitalised* Strategy 2030 aims to bring added value through our work [...] We integrate science and knowledge into legislation. Our work intends to have positive impact for people in Europe (and beyond) [...] in this *revitalised* Strategy 2030, we have sought to *reset, re-imagine* and *re-energise* the JRC with a value proposition rooted in anticipation, integration and impact. We offer *expanded* foresight capacities, a *more systemic* approach in the frame of cross-cutting portfolios, and *support* to policymakers to maximise and measure impact. In the *spirit of trust, collaboration and transparency*, we *signal our increased openness* to engaging with partners to put science at the service of the European project.

By combining my competencies as a discourse analyst with my previous experience as a marketing manager, I can observe an attempt here to offer a new perception of the brand – a repositioning – likely in response to a communicative and institutional crisis that affected the JRC, especially during the 2018–2024 policy cycles. The use of “re-” terms, along with positive language such as *expanded, more systemic, and support*, indicates a new brand positioning. This is further emphasized by a kind of moral suasion and a declaration of goodwill, highlighted by terms like *trust, collaboration, transparency, and increased openness*. It appears that the JRC’s role and existence have been questioned at political and administrative levels, both within and outside the Commission. Consequently, the organization is attempting to regain market share. Referring to a situation from 2018, I note that the web pages remain unchanged in 2024, using the same language. This persistence suggests that the state of crisis has not yet been resolved or that the JRC continues to struggle for its existence. With these potential issues of the *dispositif* in mind, we now turn to the case study analysis.

3. The Case Study: An Analysis of Processes within the JRC

The JRC recruits contributors for its reports through public calls sent to individuals officially listed as the Commission’s Experts. As such, I received a call that piqued my interest, as the *Terms of Reference* clarified⁷:

The present document defines the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the call for Expression of Interest in being part of a pool of experts under H2020 contributing to the JRC’s Enlightenment 2.0 Flagship Report through the provision of advice and State-of-the-Science literature reviews.

Even at this stage, the JRC’s positivistic framing is evident and extends to the forthcoming Flagship Report. The isotopic interpretative framework is maintained, reinforced, and supported by the following statements:

⁶ Accessed on July 26, 2024, at https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-mission-statement-work-programme_en#jrc-strategy.

⁷ The document is available at https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ToR_MEC_vFinal.pdf (accessed July 26, 2024).

2. Aim

Objective: The aim is to provide a State-of-the-Science report and an evidence-based hypothesis for a new model of the drivers of political decision-making and the role of evidence in them...

4. Roles and responsibilities

The Flagship Report will be written by JRC staff based upon State-of-the-Science literature reviews carried out by experts.

The work will be carried out by: The Steering Committee, the Author Teams, the JRC team and the Reviewers. Their work is closely interrelated but still independent.

The repeated use of specific terminology and the undisputed reputation of the Commission and JRC brands serve to frame the task at hand positively. This approach also helps potential authors and contributors identify with the stated idealistic goals, which any academic with European ideals would naturally support. Point 4 creates an overlap of roles and responsibilities in the realm of writing, as the terminology, particularly when linked to authors, overlaps. This ambiguity is further compounded by the other roles available: *Steering Committee Member*, *Lead Author*, *Contributing Author*, and *Reviewer*. The *Terms of Reference* for all these roles imply writing activities and direct involvement in the production of the Report, with the final version written, for logistical reasons, by "JRC staff based upon State-of-the-Science literature reviews carried out by experts." Furthermore, point 4.3 states: "The names of all contributors will be acknowledged." Since, for academics, the term "contributing" is synonymous with "writing," this terminological ambiguity will be discussed in the case study section titled *JRC's Production Processes Through the Lens of Linguistic Analysis*.

The complex and well-structured selection process, with extensive paperwork required from prospective contributors, underscores the seriousness of the endeavour and reinforces the reliability framework imposed by the *dispositif*. Ultimately, I was chosen to serve as a Steering Committee Member, Contributing Author, and Lead Author. Given the amount of work anticipated in the literature review process and the writing phase, I initially opted for the roles of Steering Committee Member and Contributing Author. However, due to unforeseen health issues affecting the Lead Author in my discipline, I eventually assumed that role as well. Following the selection process, participants received a collective message for the first time, revealing the identities of their colleagues. They were now part of a process that could be divided into eight steps:

- 1) Tasks Distribution;
- 2) Negotiations;
- 3) Writing of the Report by Disciplinary Groups;
- 4) Testing of Working Ideas;
- 5) 'Exploitation' of Partial Results;
- 6) Final Versions by Each Disciplinary Group;
- 7) Final Product Version a);
- 8) Final Product Version b).

Step 1) Tasks Distributions and Roles

Eight disciplinary areas were identified, in alphabetical order: 1) Economics, 2) Language, Linguistics, Anthropology, and Culture, 3) Neuroscience, 4) Philosophy, 5) Political Science, 6) Psychology, 7) Public Policy and Administration, 8) Sociology. Friction between experts and the JRC began during this phase. Contrary to expectations, an imbalance in the allocation of human resources among these areas emerged. Areas 7 and 8 were assigned more personnel and consequently, more working days, to carry out their tasks. Other areas contested this, arguing that the imbalance suggested a predetermined outcome towards which the JRC was steering the literature review, thus not reflecting the true nature and ambition of the flagship report. The JRC's counterarguments were perceived as weak and unfounded. Most participants agreed that this imbalance resulted from the Horizon 2030 guidelines, which emphasize these two areas⁸. Dissatisfaction among the experts grew because the two main tasks, which structured the activities, were seen as challenging and time-consuming: these were the literature review and

[...] for this purpose, the experts must analyse the current situation and formulate recommendations on how to better channel research and innovation towards the aims of EU policies and programs⁹.

One might question whether this dissatisfaction was purely emotional and thus considered disrespectful by academics, who sometimes exhibit a tendency toward a *lèse-majesté* complex. However, internal email discussions revealed a genuine concern among experts because the benchmarks set by the JRC were both ambitious and demanding. Given the nature of the *dispositif* and its demands, it could be said that participants collectively exhibited symptoms of anticipatory stress, which can be analytically understood as a manifestation of the *dispositif's* constraining effects. Subsequent phases confirmed that these constraints were structural rather than episodic. These were evident in.

Step 2) Negotiations

Faced with this evident scarcity of resources, both human and financial, the experts strongly reacted to what they perceived as an unfair, neoliberal approach that leads to academic burnout¹⁰. They highlighted the unbalanced ratio between the declared goals, tasks, and resources set by the JRC. The JRC revealed its strategic nature by leveraging the prestige experts would gain from participation. Using a form of moral suasion based on the combined branding of the EU and JRC, it emphasized the

⁸ At this stage, an unofficial mailing list was set up by participants to freely discuss these issues and find a common approach for the next phase: *Negotiations*.

⁹ See note 8.

¹⁰ This trend is common in contemporary academia. Considering that the Commission promotes certain human values, it is alarming to see similar practices at work at the highest European levels. Caimotto (2024) offers a comprehensive review of current literature and trends on this topic, addressing a consequence of the processes discussed here: "Why is academia a workplace with higher than average levels of mental health issues?"

importance of the report on the eve of the 2019 EU elections to counter the risk of populist parties' triumph. The report was intended to support decision-makers in their choices and communication. A personal contribution was then expected from the authors, who were not supposed to count the actual time spent on the tasks. Reluctantly, the experts accepted these conditions, also considering that quitting at this stage would delay the report and cause problems for their colleagues. This led to the reluctant acceptance of disproportionate workload, revealing systemic neoliberal tendencies that emerged in.

Step 3) Writing of the Report by Disciplinary Groups

This multi-level activity is strongly controlled and guided by JRC's pre-prepared formats and templates, designed to compress and standardize output in the name of 'scientific objectivity'¹¹. This multinational private company's *modus operandi* generates highly professional and concise posters¹² suitable for brainstorming activities during interim presentations, where authors share their work-in-progress with members of various DGs. Although this is a fascinating process that leverages the prestige of the *dispositif* and provides a unique professional opportunity to test oneself against European policymakers, another aspect emerges to the critical eye: the significant overlap between a scientific report in progress and the goals of these consensus-building workshops, which follow a regulatory approach. These highly structured workshops aim to identify those, both within the DGs and among the contributors, who might resist emerging ideas or trends, and how these should be adjusted accordingly. This ensures the political intent of the final document is secured. This aspect will be explored in the section on *JRC's Production Processes, Viewed through the Lens of Linguistic Analysis*, which examines the sociolinguistic processes that led to the different versions of the report.

Step 4) Testing of Working Ideas

Draft contributions are presented to the Commission's DG members to test whether the ideas are "sound and scientific/evidence-based" and aligned with their agendas. This official goal supports a regulatory approach and reveals a peculiar power relationship. On one hand, it influences DG members by offering them a preview of the final product and the opportunity to suggest changes. On the other hand, it ensures that authors are in sync with the expected results set by the guidelines. This *modus operandi* contrasts with the standards set by the JRC in its institutional com-

¹¹ The typical instruction was as follows: "For the purpose of preparing the workshop material, please provide a short description of the three key findings from your discipline's perspective for each of the following items (280 characters per items, spaces included). One of the items was: "What are the key drivers of political behaviour agreed on by your discipline?"

¹² *01DRIVELLACPoster.pdf* is a good example. Due to space constraints, tables and files are not published here, but those referenced in the discussion are available at the following public address: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZcD1EzOeDIK4zZbry7vrEyP0R20dCtvA?usp=sharing>. When referring to a file in the discussion, please consult this folder.

munication. To exert this power, each discipline has a champion – I was one – who defends the findings with a presentation that could easily be seen as proselytism. My presentation was titled: “Making EU Citizens Propaganda Aware.”

This step is crucial as fundamental elements emerge. Reports are agenda-driven rather than data-driven. This is due to resource constraints that compress the research process and limit the autonomy and originality of contributors. Following the described procedures, authors feel political pressure and realize that to have their contributions promoted to the next round, they must adjust their content accordingly. This is so, because the JRC and DG members show resistance to change, particularly in the humanities, and prefer ideas that fit their pre-established framework. As Rossetti di Valdalbero (2021) discusses – a concept we were frequently reminded of – the JRC “serves to protect the Commission.” Cynically, one might say, this happens at the NATO level too, that external experts are scapegoats: they are supposed to provide informed knowledge, but if something goes wrong, they can always be blamed. Consequently, internal personnel who disagree with these policies and practices are marginalized. Their ideas are deemed unfit, and their research is downgraded. During one of these activities, a fonctionnaire, CHR applies here, extensively discussed his/her research with me to test if the ideas were acceptable and worthy of publication, as s/he was at a deadlock. The section on *JRC’s Production Processes, Viewed through the Lens of Linguistic Analysis*, will demonstrate the effects of these strategies.

Step 5) “Exploitation” of Partial Results

This step is fundamental to understanding the *dispositif* nature of the JRC, which, it must be remembered, is a DG of the Commission. Part of my duties was to meet regularly with Commission members to update them on this project and discuss policy implications. Although the JRC claimed these were informal meetings, they were highly structured and had a precise agenda. These were unique opportunities to appreciate the Commission's efforts and exchange ideas with high-ranking officers from different DGs. It was also a good opportunity for networking and exploring potential synergies between my research and the DGs’ initiatives. In one of these events, CHR applies here, I was approached by a high-level Advisor from a DG who works in my area of expertise and interested in my role as an academic coordinator for NATO Working Groups on Information Operations and Psychological Operations. S/he mentioned that my work on reframing and counter-disinformation is of great interest to the Commission, which is addressing the same issue. S/he invited me to propose a monitoring body to prevent disinformation. To better draft the concept of this joint project, the Advisor shared confidential documents and encouraged me to informally explore the feasibility of a joint effort between the Commission and NATO. In a relatively short time, I prepared and sent a document¹³ on my department’s official letterhead, entitled “Early Warning Activity to Monitor Attempts to Disinform During the

¹³ Refer to file 02DRIVEConoscentiDCPSProposalEarlyWarningMonitoring.pdf.

2019 European Elections Campaign: A Proposal.” Communications with the Advisor, intense and frequent up to that moment, suddenly interrupted. Attempts to receive feedback fail. More than a month passes and, while I am in Brussels engaged in the workshop on reframing to present my report, the Advisor reaches me in the conference room and tells me that the project proposal I drafted to the Commission that day was part of an official press release: concept and wording. I read the document¹⁴ and realise that the “the creation of a Rapid Alert System and close monitoring of the Code of Practice” is exactly what I had proposed. I ask the Advisor what is the follow-up to this and s/he replies: “That’s all.” Because of my rebuttal on the way my ideas were appropriated, s/he says: “You should be happy; your idea was so good that it was adopted. Ideas are volatile and they migrate quickly from place to place”. From an academic perspective, such practices align with what could be defined as predatory appropriation of intellectual labour within institutional contexts. This episode serves as an illustrative case of how ideas are re-appropriated and rebranded in policy environments that officially claim adherence to integrity and ethical standards.

Step 6) Final Version by Each Disciplinary Group

This step is relatively simple, aside from the time and resource constraints. Each disciplinary group finalizes the literature review and writes its section of the report following the templates and guidelines provided by the JRC. The JRC staff frequently checks in to ensure the content aligns with the now-clear grand design of the report and that feedback from the interim workshops is considered.

Step 7) Final Product Version a)

The first draft of the report, written by JRC staff, has been released. One outcome was the removal of the word “*enlightenment*” from the title. The Steering Committee demonstrated that this word triggered interpretative isotopies contrary to what literature suggests—namely, that political reasoning is far from being rational and positivistic, as the Enlightenment supposed, but is instead a complex mix of emotional processes. To emphasize this, a new title was given:

Political Animals: how the sciences of human behaviour can help us put knowledge and reason at the heart of policymaking.

The negotiations between the experts and the JRC staff reveal the latter's resistance to change and the need to retain keywords familiar to the potential readership. *Knowledge*, *reason*, and *policymaking* are kept to reassure officials that they are still in familiar territory. As previously discussed, the inclusion of *sciences of human behaviour* confirms the favour certain disciplinary areas have within the JRC.

¹⁴ Accessed on July 31, 2024, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_6647, and 03FileDRIVEPREuropedisinformation.pdf.

Step 8) Final Product Version b)

The final report, written by JRC staff, has been released¹⁵. From a product standpoint, this is the result of excellent marketing efforts. The packaging is very appealing: the layout, fonts, size, text boxes, and all other editorial aspects are visually pleasing and inviting to read. After further discussions within the Steering Committee, a slight change in the title was accepted, and it now reads:

Understanding our Political Nature: How to put knowledge and reason at the heart of political decision-making.

As it stands, this report is interesting and serves as a very good summary, rephrasing, and blend of the different interim reports that experts prepared and delivered to the JRC. The authorship, not surprisingly, is now listed as Mair *et al.* (2019). In the final pages, there is a section titled *Expert Contributors*, with the following caption: "Grateful thanks are extended to the core project experts," followed by: "Additionally, the following experts, external to the project, were kind enough to share their thoughts and opinions."

The core project appears to have been successful, well-received, and/or effectively marketed. The report's webpage now lists an Executive Summary and translations of the report in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Ideas generate more ideas, and in 2024, the JRC staff, the same team that supervised our project, published another report: *Trustworthy Public Communication: How Public Communicators Can Strengthen Our Democracies*¹⁶. Reading the ten recommendations in the publication, one cannot help but be pleased to see how most of them have migrated from what was discussed in our 2018 workshops and reports, even though the contribution of psychology is understated. Both publications open with the same statement:

This publication is a Science for Policy report by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service. It aims to provide evidence-based scientific support to the European policymaking process. The scientific output expressed does not imply a policy position of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of this publication.

Once again, claims of evidence-based values are cited, merging scientific integrity with ethical issues. The appropriation of the experts' work is now complete and justified, and standardization has been achieved. This is where a linguistic analysis of the artefacts can shed light on the processes of the *dispositif*.

4. JRC's Production Processes Through the Lens of Linguistic Analysis¹⁷

As anticipated, contributors felt from the project's inception that, despite the de-

¹⁵ Accessed on July 29, 2024, at <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC117161>.

¹⁶ Accessed on July 29, 2024, at <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC137725>.

¹⁷ For this analysis, 31 specific tables were generated. Those referenced in the discussion are available at the following public address: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZcD1EzOeDIK4zZbry7vrEyP0R20dCtvA?usp=sharing>. When referring to a file in the discussion, please consult this folder.

clared intentions, the independence of research and the freedom to develop ideas and concepts were somewhat constrained and directed by JRC's guidelines and templates. Some of these elements have already been discussed, but a sociolinguistic analysis of the processes that led to the different versions of the report, using a combination of Critical and Positive Discourse Analysis (Hughes, 2018) supported by a quantitative corpus linguistics methodology, can help better understand what is at stake.

The 31-specific quantitative/qualitative analyses consider a corpus comprising:

- a) Pre-summaries of all the disciplinary areas (the first draft of the report);
- b) The first draft of our disciplinary area;
- c) The final version of our disciplinary area;
- d) The first version of the report;
- e) The final version of the report.

The corpus size is 115,581 tokens and 8,333 types. Data were analysed using WordSmith Tools 8 and LIWC 2015 and 2022¹⁸. Specific inquiries regarding frequencies, collocations, regular patterns, variance, use of semantic areas, meaning extraction methods, and narrative arc were conducted. These tests were applied to each sub-corpus individually and comparatively to appreciate shifts in authorial complexity, rephrasing, and topic reformulation.

Firstly, the data show a gradual expansion in the length of the product¹⁹. From the first draft of all disciplines to the final version, word count increased by 24.08% and 16.33%. It is as if the JRC staff "adds yeast" to the concepts and arguments. This could be an attempt to better convey certain concepts or to make the contributions more homogeneous. However, a general increase in tokens by 44.35% from the first version to the final one is uncommon. This is combined with significant variance in terminology, especially disciplinary keywords, across different versions. Some terms are downgraded. For example, *communication* ranks 108th with a frequency of 43²⁰, whereas it was 86th/36th with 2/3 of the tokens used in the groups' pre-summaries. Certain themes and key concepts are backgrounded in favour of what could be considered a more political and palatable view for the Commission: *reasoning* (76/60), *collective* (80/55), *emotion* (84/54), *framing* (99/46). The most important words in the report, those that define the JRC on its web pages, are: *political* (11/268), *policy* (18/213), *evidence* (21/183), *science* (23/169), *values* (26/161). The product is more marketable, but the authorial complexity of the original contributions is lost.

Semantic analysis²¹ reveals a remarkable variation in several variables typical of scientific writing, most of which are higher than the benchmarks. This indicates an effort to elaborate cognitive processes from a defensive perspective, increasing the *power*, *certainty*, *tentative*, *causative*, and *insight* semantic areas. An interesting exception is the *affective*, *positive*, and *negative emotions* areas, which are much above

¹⁸ For more information, visit <https://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/> and <https://www.liwc.app/>.

¹⁹ Refer to file 04DRIVEWLTOTALOURFINALvsPREANIMALvsFINAL.xlsx.

²⁰ Hereafter, the format will be *type* (ranking in the wordlist/frequency value). If only a numerical value (#) is shown, it indicates the type's frequency.

²¹ Refer to file 05DRIVELIWC2015EDTCOMPARE5Versions.xlsx.

benchmark averages, counterintuitively given the scientific nature of the product. This reveals the JRC staff's authorial tension to maintain a scientific tone while attempting to satisfy the prospective customer, using reassuring statements that do not deviate much from pre-existing assumptions about political communication.

This is also demonstrated by the keyword analysis²² and meaning extraction procedures. They show that the final product has politically reduced the contributions of different disciplines, for example by prioritising psychology while backgrounding communication and linguistics, despite an increase in word count, in favour of *psychology*, the first discipline to be mentioned, (61/76). Criticism of the flaws in the EU Commission's Communication Strategy is backgrounded. The title and subtitle of the final report completely contradict the groups' work, advice, and scientific evidence offered to the JRC. This is particularly evident when comparing version, a) *Political Animals*, which is still quite balanced, with version b) *Understanding Our Political Nature*, a well-marketed product, as we said²³.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the JRC, despite presenting itself as an independent and impartial scientific institution, acts as a political tool, a *dispositif*, within the EU Commission. It actively shapes narratives and guides the scientific community to fulfil its objectives. This raises important questions about the transparency and accountability of the EU's decision-making processes, especially in the social sciences. Concerns about the fair compensation of report authors have been discussed, along with the potential impact on their work compared to the benchmarks set by the JRC. This research enhances our understanding of the interplay between politics, science, and discourse within the EU and the policymaking landscape. The impact on the integrity and independence of the scientific community should not be underestimated either. Ultimately, it underscores the need for transparency, accountability, and ethical considerations in decision-making processes, especially in the field of social sciences.

The most significant negative outcome of this approach occurred in 2018 when Germany vetoed the creation of a joint Military (NATO)-Civilian (EU Commission) Centre for Resilience against Russian Disinformation (CHR applies here). To counterbalance this misstep, the EUvsDiSiNFO social media pages were created, but they had poor results, becoming a favourite haven for Russian trolls and hoaxes. The situation worsened with the war in Ukraine.

In conclusion, the JRC functions as a *dispositif* to execute the DGs' political agenda, seeking confirmation for pre-designed solutions rather than promoting free, unbiased, independent research, contrary to its institutional claims. They tend to shield DGs, Commissioners, and the Commission itself from unpleasant situations, going far beyond the examples illustrated by Rossetti di Valdalbero (2021) and Weiss

²² The following files were used: 06DRIVEKWFinalreportOURGROUPvsFINAL.xlsx, 07DRIVEKWFINALvsOURGROUP FINAL.xlsx, 08DRIVELIWC-22FinalreportOURGROUPMEM.xlsx and 09DRIVELIWC-22UNDERSTANDINGMEM.xlsx.

²³ Refer to the following files: 10DRIVEKWANIMALSvsFinalReportOURGROUP.xlsx and 11DRIVEKWANIMALS vsPreSUM.xlsx.

and Wodak (2000). As stated in the report, in a section that reads like a disclaimer:

Role of the JRC. As the Commission's knowledge and science service, the JRC plays a central role in creating, managing and making sense of collective scientific knowledge for better EU policies. It has been our role to take the insights from the different scientific disciplines, underpinned by the scientific reviews and translate them for use in policymaking. Throughout the production of this report, we have attempted to apply the lessons learned from the science to our working methodology: • With permission from the authors, the state-of-the-art reviews were shared internally with Commission colleagues, helping them to understand the evolution of this project. • Commission colleagues met regularly and informally to receive updates on this project and to discuss policy implications. They have received early versions of work allowing scope for feedback and comments to be made. • A highly synthesised version of this report was shared with over 100 experts to ensure faithfulness to the original reviews and reduce the risk of groupthink. • Communities of Practice were created for the experts and interested colleagues across the Commission (Mair and alia, 2019: 8-9).

In conclusion, if something goes wrong, "decisions were taken because the experts said so".

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