

## EE meets EP 2025

### Helmholtz Earth and Environment meets the European Parliament and Stakeholders in Brussels

*A report written by Anna Jegen, Dr. Nivedita Sairam, Dr. Jeewanthi Sirisena, Prof. Dr. Christian Geiss, and further delegation members*

Between February 17-19, 2025, Helmholtz SynCom representatives Marie Heidenreich and Dr. Katharina Sielemann, along with the nominated seven scientists from all Helmholtz Earth and Environment Centers and one scientist from German Aerospace Centre engaged in discussions with members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and various other stakeholders in Brussels. The goal was to network among the Helmholtz Center representatives, gain insights into the European perspective, and engage with European stakeholders on our focus topic ‘record-shattering (weather) extremes’.

The Helmholtz delegation brought expertise from:

- Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI) – on Arctic Sea ice and extreme weather links
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) – on troposphere research and severe convective storms
- GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel – on seismic risks and deep ocean and climate interactions
- Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research (UFZ) – on computational hydrosystems and climate adaptation strategies
- German Aerospace Center (DLR) – on AI-powered forecasting and remote sensing
- Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ) – on supercomputing and high-resolution flood modeling
- Helmholtz Centre for Geosciences (GFZ) – on flood risk and climate adaptation
- Helmholtz-Zentrum Hereon/GERICS – on climate services and risk assessment

With invitation from Hildegard Bentele, MEP, of the European People's Party (EPP) and member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), our program included several other meetings and activities such as meetings with European Research Council (ERC) members, the delegate for the research field Earth and Environment at Helmholtz Brussels Office, European Space Agency (ESA) representatives, Dr Juha-Pekka Japola from the Directorate-

General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), MEP Jutta Paulus (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance), the Interim Executive Director from the Institute of European Environmental Policy (IEEP), and an interactive science communication activity with Dr. Samuel Gregson (particle physicist). In the following subsections, we summarize key highlights of our successful trip to Brussels.

Our delegation trip was kicked off with an ice-breaker session in the Hotel lobby to get to know each-other and share different responsibilities for the entire excursion. For further networking among the Helmholtz Center representatives, we headed to Place de Jourdan, Maison d'Antoine, for a classic Belgian evening with Belgian french fries and beers.

The [Helmholtz Earth & Environment research delegation](#) was being hosted by [Hildegard Bentele, MEP](#). During the exchange, MEP Bentele offered insights as a rapporteur on key topics such as water resilience, biotechnology, and critical raw materials.

For the meetings with the stakeholders in Brussels, the Helmholtz researchers of the delegation presented compelling pitches on [record-shattering weather extremes](#), setting the stage for a dynamic discussion on

- operationalizing flash flood impact-based predictions
- strengthening the recovery-preparedness nexus in extreme weather risk
- financing climate protection initiatives



Meeting with Hildegard Bentele, MEP, at the European Parliament. © Helmholtz/SynCom

As the lead of the European Parliament's intergroup on water, MEP Bentele highlighted the broader yet practical aspects of climate actions such the division of responsibilities across

local, state, national, and European levels, and the evolving political landscape and its impact on environmental policies. She greatly valued the researchers' expertise, proposed actions, and recommendations – reinforcing the critical role of science in shaping policy.

Next, the delegation was offered a tour of the European Parliament by Gregor Nägeli (Accredited Parliamentary Assistant). As a special highlight, the delegation was invited to attend an EU Parliament committee meeting, where [Barry Andrews, MEP](#) (Fianna Fáil, Renew Europe), Chair of the Development Committee (DEVE), welcomed us with a powerful statement:

*“We are very grateful for what you do. We need research to inform policies”*

In addition to the formal meetings, it was fascinating to see the MEP mailboxes, the cutting-edge media broadcasting stations, and important political meetings going on in the cafeteria.



The Helmholtz delegation during their tour of the European Parliament. © Helmholtz/SynCom

Our 3rd day in Brussels started with insightful discussions with ERC members at the Helmholtz Brussels Office. Noémie Auvergne (Policy Analyst) informed us about the science to policy activities, especially, in the context of ERC projects informing policy. Julie Oppenheimer (Project

Advisor) gave a presentation on ERC funding opportunities for early- and mid-career researchers. In each year, the most funded topic has changed depending on the current demand for the research field. This discussion motivated many of us for thinking/applying for next ERC calls in the future.



The delegation during the meeting with ERC members at the Helmholtz Brussels Office. © Helmholtz/SynCom

After the ERC meeting, we had a great discussion with Dr Andreas Krell (Delegate for the Research Field Earth and Environment) about Helmholtz's activities in the Research Field related to the European context: The Helmholtz Brussels Office provides access to and information on research funding, strategic alliances, more visibility, and political dialogue.

Next, we headed to the European Space Agency (ESA). After a warm welcome, Mathilde Reumaux (EU Programme Coordinator) gave us a detailed overview of ESA's work. Among 23 member states of ESA, main budget contributions for ESA are from Germany and France and the highest portion of budget allocation is for earth observation. Further, Stefanie Lumnitz (Policy Officer) added more detail on the EC-ESA Earth System Science initiative of the Research and Innovation Directorate of the European Commission (DG-RTD) and the European Space Agency. Dr Karim Douch (Research Fellow) gave insights on hydrology and weather extremes projects and initiatives at the ESA Science Hub. He highlighted that it is required to make the most of earth observation data to advance earth science in order to improve operational activities.





ESA welcomed an EE meets EP Helmholtz delegation for the second time after our first trip in 2023. © Helmholtz/SynCom

After the insightful meeting with ESA, we had a great exchange with the EU Commission DG ECHO on natural hazards and extreme weather events. This visit was further enriched by gaining more insights into the EU Civil Protection Mechanism/the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) and its role in disaster response.



Auriane Denis-Loupot presented the activities of the Emergency Response Coordination Centre. © Helmholtz/SynCom

Particularly, in 2024, 40-50% of disaster responses were related to climate. It is clear that more actions are required for climate resilient development. Furthermore, Dr Juha-Pekka highlighted the need for collaborative projects with strong practice partners and showed possibilities to work together with the ERCC.

In the late afternoon, we headed back to the European Parliament for an exchange with Jutta Paulus, MEP. We discussed current EU water regulations, emphasizing the missing regulation for wastewater. Furthermore, Jutta Paulus mentioned the requirement for improving water efficiency in urban areas and water reuse. She highlighted the benefits of nature-based solutions for water resilient strategies.



Discussion with Jutta Paulus, MEP, at the European Parliament. © Helmholtz/SynCom

Our day ended with a fascinating science-communication talk by Dr. Samuel Gregson on particle physics. We had a relaxing time discovering the Higgs Boson through engaging digital games.

On the last day of our trip to Brussels, we learned how independent think-tanks, such as the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) work to nudge stakeholders towards science-based policy making and how this environmental lobbying relies heavily on philanthropist's donations. Along with this introduction, the IEEP Interim Executive Director Antoine Oger gave a summary of how policy making has changed, now that the focus of the European Parliament has shifted from environmental protection towards European competitiveness. In this context, we discussed options for science-policy engagement on national and local level and were encouraged to become active on this regional scale, which is especially relevant for climate adaptation measures.

## 'EE Meets EP' Summary

During the SynCom initiative 'EE meets EP 2025', we got first insights into the fast-paced environment of Brussels, a city seemingly laced with buildings associated with the European Union. On our race from one meeting to another, we were introduced to a range of different subjects, spanning from how voting lists are built in the European Parliament to how European aid supplies are distributed by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre - the common denominator of those very different meetings usually being that we found the last meeting even more interesting than the previous.

Multiple things stood out to us. Just as in science, time and trust appear to be the two dominant currencies in politics. For instance, if a third-party such as think-tanks or companies want to reach the European Commission to influence budgeting or current policy papers, individual networks and thus established trust is crucial. Part of the trust's importance is undoubtedly directly related to the scarcity and thus value of time. Since, due to the range and sheer amount of policy files, both parliamentarians and commissioners rely on reports and the objectivity of those compiling them.

When Johann Goethe said "Every second is of infinite value" he must have had a premonition of what an EU parliamentarian's schedule will look like. We believe we didn't see a single

person walking the halls of the parliament who wasn't power-walking, reading something on their phones or both. This general restlessness was also apparent in both our meetings with MEPs, which while both genuinely interested, were continually focused on what information could relate back to current strategy papers they were involved in.

That presentations have to be tailored to the addressed target group is a concept so established, that you are already tired of hearing it as an Early Career Researcher. This EE meets EP initiative has further reinforced the importance of this statement for many of us — not because its truth wasn't already apparent enough, but because it demonstrated just how strongly political agendas are shaped by issues that receive strong representation in mainstream media.