

## **EuroScience: “Maintain, formalize and strengthen role of science advice to policies in Europe”**

It is almost three years ago that the President of the European Commission appointed a Chief Science Adviser. Since then Prof. Anne Glover, the first incumbent of this position, has been very active in pointing to the importance of basing policies on scientific evidence, and she has contributed enormously to spread this message both to politicians and to scientists. Their responsibilities are different, so transparency and openness about arguments are essential to arrive at the best possible policies given that not all interests are always aligned.

EuroScience has applauded this development warmly, and we have been happy to underline this by inviting Prof Glover as our Guest of Honour at ESOF2012 in Dublin. This year, at ESOF 2014 in Copenhagen, we were particularly pleased to facilitate the first meeting which Anne Glover had convened with national science advisers to the governments of the EU member states, different though their positions and status are.

At a global level issues on making use of science-based evidence to improve policymaking are a concern of bottom-up, grassroots organizations of scientists everywhere. Many sessions at ESOF2014 addressed evidence-based policies, and EuroScience will continue to press for implementing scientific knowledge into policy making. It has formed a Liaison Group with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Brazilian Society for the Promotion of Science, the Chinese Association for Science and Technology and the Indian Science Congress Association. We aim to issue a joint statement in the early autumn of 2014 when each of us will have addressed this theme in our conferences in 2014.

Today, EuroScience strongly calls on the new European Commission, the Heads of State and Government, and the new European Parliament to maintain the office of Chief Science Adviser (CSA). At the same time improvements must be made which include a formalization and clarification of the role of the CSA vis-à-vis other persons or institutions in the European Union having responsibilities with respect to science, technology and innovation.

The position must remain a central one, and should perhaps be called Chief Science Adviser to the European Commission though the formal reporting should be to the President of the Commission. But the Commission as a whole should make it clear that the officeholder’s scope concerns the whole policy agenda of the Commission. This does not mean that individual Commissioners should not seek scientific advice in their fields of responsibility, but where such advice is formalized, the CSA should have the responsibility to take the initiative to arrive at one agenda of key issues of science advice, related to the policy agenda of the Commission. Through the network of the CSA and the national science advisers, the CSA can try to align this also with national agendas.

Another proposal is to make it mandatory that key policy proposals, whether it is in health, environment, transportation, energy, agriculture or any other topic, contain an explicit section on the scientific evidence, and not just tucked away in bits and pieces in staff background analyses. It is common, also for national policy proposals to contain a (societal) cost-benefit analysis, so why not institutionalize this as well for scientific evidence? The CSA should be given the responsibility of exercising a quality check, not just of a procedural nature, but also substantially if necessary. This implies that the CSA must have extended possibilities: staff and funding to involve outside experts because obviously it is neither desirable nor feasible to build up expertise in all areas.

Indeed, such a position augments the role of all scientific advisory structures in Europe. The European Research and Innovation Area Board (ERIAB) should continue to support the Commission in increasing the impact of its innovation and research policies. The Joint Research Centre (JRC) should continue to play its important role in providing scientific evidence to various policy domains and DG Research and Innovation should continue to focus on the European funding of research and innovation and strengthening the European Research Area. A stronger CSA as outlined above, is a necessary and fine complement to this.

Moving in this direction also may improve the debate with the European Parliament. Currently its' Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Panel (STOA) is not sufficiently connected to the legislative process; a mandatory section on the scientific evidence would give the Parliament a much better opportunity to take scientific evidence into account in its deliberations.

As the first CSA has stressed, scientific evidence may not always overwhelmingly point in one direction, and even if it does political decision making may need to consider other interests. A balance, but a transparent one, needs to be struck. EuroScience believes that four elements are always key, and therefore should not be forgotten in sections on scientific evidence as mentioned. One is the precautionary principle. Another is ways and means of reducing risks and harm. A third one is to allow for innovation, and the fourth and not the least is working actively on public awareness, understanding and support.

Considering such aspects together underlines a final concern EuroScience wants to bring to the attention of the Commission, Member States and the European Parliament. We hear rumours that in the new Commission research and innovation might no longer be the responsibility of one Commissioner. It would in our view be a disastrous development. Horizon 2020 would have to be split up in impossible and arbitrary ways. It would be a source of continuous administrative infighting to the detriment of the programme and the public investment being made. The important insight that all should consider is that researchers should bear in mind that their research may lead to innovation and that innovating companies must realize frontier research and breakthroughs have great value in their own right, and may create greater opportunities for innovation in the long-term. The role of the CSA and a unified research and innovation Commission portfolio is vital to this process and both removing the CSA post and splitting the research and innovation portfolio will seriously jeopardise Horizon 2020 and the European Research Area and create a crisis of confidence within the European research community.

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