



**Minutes of the 31st plenary meeting of the
European Commission's Group of
Chief Scientific Advisors**

16 September 2021 (by videoconference)

Brussels, 24 November 2021

Minutes

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Chief Scientific Advisors
16 September 2021 (by videoconference)

1. Approval of the agenda and of the minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the 30th plenary meeting have been adopted by written procedure and published on the [scientific advice mechanism](#) website.

The agenda for the 31st plenary meeting has been approved.

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was held via videoconference and was closed to the public.

3. List of items discussed

Nicole Grobert has been re-elected as chair of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors ('the advisors').

Exchange with Patrick Child, Deputy Director-General of DG RTD – Lessons learnt and outlook for the scientific advice mechanism

Patrick Child praised the impressive track record of the advisors' work and their considerable potential in formulating scientific advice for policymaking. Among the particular strengths of the advisors, he highlighted: their independence; the link with the 'science advice to policy by European academies' consortium (SAPEA); the ability to tap into the best scientific knowledge and objective advice; and its multi-disciplinarity, allowing the advisors to make recommendations on a wide range of topics.

He then outlined some of the challenges they faced, including: how to further enhance the political visibility of the advisors' work; the increasing pressure to deliver scientific advice with short deadlines; the importance to retain the full engagement of the President and the Commissioners; the need for a more flexible delivery of scientific advice; and staff reductions. All agreed on the importance of optimising a European landscape with multiple strands of science-for-policy advice, and the advisors' role therein. In this context, they welcomed in particular the opportunity to meet with Vice-President Šefčovič.

Ongoing and possible future scientific advice

- Nicole Grobert summarised progress on the scientific opinion *Strategic crisis management in the EU*. The SAPEA consortium had started their systematic literature review. The participants discussed the possibility of delivering an intermediate analysis

in advance of the expected delivery of the scientific advice on this topic, which is planned for the second quarter of 2022.

- Éva Kondorosi updated the participants on the topic of *Cancer screening* and reminded participants of the three upcoming expert elicitation workshops that SAPEA will conduct. The advisors' scientific opinion will inform the update of the EU's cancer screening recommendations of 2003 and is expected to be delivered by February 2022.
- The participants discussed a potential future topic related to high-performance computing and information security in Europe.

Exchange with Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight with the participation of Deputy Director-General Patrick Child

In his opening remarks, Patrick Child welcomed the opportunity to exchange ideas on how and where the advisors' work could best help to strengthen the culture of evidence-based policy making, as well as reinforcing synergies and alignment with work on strategic foresight. Mr Child congratulated the Vice-President on the recently published second annual strategic foresight report on open strategic autonomy, entitled 'The EU's capacity and freedom to act'. Nicole Grobert then presented a brief overview of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors and their ongoing work, focusing particularly on the scientific opinion *Strategic crisis management in the EU*.

Maroš Šefčovič shared his views on possible avenues for future cooperation with the advisors on foresight activities under his responsibility. He focused on two categories that are politically relevant, could bring results in a reasonable timeframe, are digestible by the political layer, and are operational/concrete:

- 1) Long-term foresight analysis (similarly to the recent strategic foresight report).

In her State of the Union speech on 15 September, President von der Leyen stated that the COVID pandemic had uncovered the EU's severe dependency on medical supplies and raw materials for future climate-neutral technologies. She called for stronger policies on access to critical raw materials and on developing skills and capacities in the EU to reduce these dependencies and remain a global player in a hypercompetitive world.

- 2) Horizon scanning (e.g., trying to read early signs and anticipate crises).

Vice-President Šefčovič sees particular added value in scientific advice structures across Europe as a possible vehicle for identifying future challenges, making better choices and future-proofing EU actions in the medium to long-term (e.g.: the ongoing work by the advisors on crisis management). To remain politically relevant, he believes it is important to frame the timelines of scientific advice by the political mandate, while ensuring institutional and political continuation. He noted that scientific advice needs to put political systems on alert and must therefore be actionable, and he offered two examples where scientific advice could obtain political attention:

- *How do we see potential implications from the Afghan crisis, for instance in terms of migration pressure?*

- *What will happen in terms of energy prices and what will be the long-term implications?*

The ensuing discussion highlighted the value of every form of scientific advice, provided that one understands the uncertainty behind horizon scanning and the trade-off between the timeframe being considered and accuracy. It confirmed the need for more traditional scientific opinions (such as the upcoming opinion *Strategic crisis management in the EU*) but also for shorter statements that can raise awareness. For complex scientific advice to become executable, it needs to be broken down into smaller bite-sized segments and for it to obtain society's buy-in, it needs a systemic approach involving people.

Concluding, the Vice-President offered to share information on the advisors' work and its relevance with the College and other EU institutions, for instance by integrating it into future foresight newsletters. He offered to explore how the work of the advisors could be linked with the interinstitutional foresight network ESPAS. Finally, he invited the advisors to regularly share their thoughts on future challenges or issues that deserve more political attention and leadership for feedback.

Discussion with SAPEA representatives

The advisors updated SAPEA on progress made. SAPEA informed participants about progress on the topics of *Cancer screening* and *Strategic crisis management in the EU*. The advisors highlighted the importance of maintaining high standards for the peer review of the evidence review on *Cancer screening*. The chair of the SAPEA board, Antonio Loprieno, informed participants that SAPEA had received more than 100 expert nominations for the working group on *Strategic crisis management in the EU*. In addition to scientific experts, it was suggested that expertise from practitioners and possibly military/NATO personnel could also be considered. Participants agreed that publishing the opinion directly before the summer holidays should be avoided.

In their reflection on identifying potential future topics, participants discussed the importance of listening to the Commission's needs, in particular 'next generation' topics for politicians, and receiving feedback on scientific advice that had been delivered.

Finally, SAPEA informed participants about its annual conference in April 2022 related to COVID-19 and crises more broadly, and invited the views of the advisors on the organisation of the conference. It was agreed that SAPEA and the advisors would co-shape the event, entitled 'Science advice under pressure'.

Exchange on outreach

The advisors discussed possible options for engaging with international counterparts.

Next steps and conclusions/recommendations/opinions

- Energy team to continue outreach activities for the scientific opinion on *Energy systems – a systemic approach to energy in Europe* as part of ongoing policy initiatives ('Fit for 55').
- The advisors to contribute to a statement to world leaders on climate change in view of UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) (upon invitation by UK Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance).
- SAPEA to continue work on setting up expert workshops on cancer screening.
- Continue the discussion between the advisors, SAPEA, Young Science Academies and the secretariat on implementing the SAPEA successor grant and arrangements for the efficient functioning of the scientific advice mechanism.
- SAPEA to continue coordination and organisation of the 'Science advice under pressure' event with input from the advisors and the secretariat.

4. Next meeting

The next plenary meeting of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors will take place by videoconference on 2 December 2021.

List of participants

Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

Nicole Grobert, Chair;
Nebojsa Nakicenovic, Deputy Chair;
Éva Kondorosi, Member;
Maarja Kruusmaa, Member;
Alberto Melloni, Member;
Eric Lambin, Member;
Eva Zažimalová, Member.

SAPEA (Science Advice to Policy by European Academies)

Antonio Loprieno (President ALLEA), Chair of SAPEA Board, agenda point 6;
Rudolf Hielscher, SAPEA Coordinator, agenda point 6;
Toby Wardman, SAPEA head of Communications, agenda point 6.

Other participants (invited experts)

Pearl Dykstra, Professor of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, agenda point 3b, 4;
Scira Menoni, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, Politecnico di Milano.

Observers

Jacek Kolanowski, President of YASAS & Vice-chair of Polish Young Academy; agenda point 6;
Moniek Tromp, Vice- Chair of YASAS, agenda point 6.

European Commission

Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight;
Juraj Nociar, Head of Cabinet of VP Šefčovič;
Dimitri Lorenzani, Cabinet of VP Šefčovič;
Patrick Child, Deputy Director-General DG RTD;
Jacques Verraes, DG RTD, (acting) Head of Unit 03 -Science Policy, Advice and Ethics;
Ingrid Zegers, DG RTD, Unit 03 -Science Policy, Advice and Ethics, Scientific advice mechanism team leader;
Annabelle Ascher, DG RTD, Unit 03 -Science Policy, Advice and Ethics, Secretary of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors;
Vita Volante, DG RTD, Unit 03 -Science Policy, Advice and Ethics, Secretariat of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors;

Additional members of the unit depending on topic discussion.