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SCIENCE + SOCIETY = POLICY-ADVICE

„...We are deeply convinced that sound, independent scientific advice largely improves the quality of policy-making. We welcome recent global trends for the more pronounced use of science in policy-making and the efforts to bridge the difficulties inherent in the roles of scientists and policy makers...

...We call on all scientists to monitor and assess policy areas and provide, in a pro-active manner, independent and timely science advice even when its application is not guaranteed or not expected...”

*Final Declaration,
World Science Forum 2015, 7 November 2015, Budapest*

Abstract: The paper is a response to the „Final Declaration” issued at the 2015 World Science Forum [1] that assembles some of the World’s most prominent scientists and science advisers every second year. Alas, the comprehensive Declaration generally neglects the role of civil society.

The paper looks in more detail at the assertions by structures that argue to have the capability to provide scientific advice, as well as at the means by which the European Union obtains independent scientific advice. The paper aims to bring science down from its „ivory-tower” and more approachable and relevant to humanity.

Key words: *civil society participation, policy advice, early identification, evidence-based research*

INTRODUCTION

The usefulness of scientific advice to policy-making has been recognised for some time [2].

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It is increasingly evident that, in view of the unprecedented challenges facing humanity and the environment, scientific advisory structures need to be improved – chiefly through strengthened interaction with civil society. This will increase the relevance and value of public research and thereby make it more useful to society in general. By the same token this approach will also strengthen one of the cornerstones of Western democracy: the system independent checks-and-balances of political structures by civil society – especially in the face of rising social instability, fragmentation and even dissolution of societies, values, human rights and dignity.

According to a recent OECD policy paper [3]: *„The scientific community is increasingly being called upon to provide evidence and advice to government policy-makers across a range of issues ... The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies and moves towards more participative democratic decision-making ... What used to be ‘private’ debates between different scientific viewpoints over areas of uncertainty have now become public disputes that can be exploited by different stakeholders to confirm or deny entrenched positions ...”*

Participative, democratic decision-making must include civil society in full. Its voice is indispensable. Particularly in a time when the World is moving towards a new Global Order [4] and the „European way of life” is being questioned from both in- and outside.

Our paper [5] takes a significant look at the foremost structures that claim to have the capability to provide scientific advice, as well as the approach by which the European Union obtains independent scientific advice.

Not included in this assessment are the diverse arrangements of individual government chief scientist who are *„willi ng recipients of the advice and the challenge is to collate the evidence and present it in the most effective way”* to the relevant senior government member (s). [6]

CAPACITY TO FORMULATE ADVICE

There are a wide range of bodies with the potential to formulate scientific advice in Europe, as well as worldwide.

Broadly speaking, these bodies can be classified in three groups depending on the authority of their initiators. Main examples are:

(i) The most perceptible advisory bodies are those that have been formally set-up on the basis of high-level political accord. Their potential influence is unquestionable. These bodies include:

– Under the United Nations and other Inter-Governmental agreements: a multitude of high-level advisory bodies;

– Within the European Union: European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions, European Parliament’s own Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA), European Commission’s newly established High Level Group of Scientific Advisors, etc. In addition, the EU is annually spending many millions of Euros for supporting studies;

— Under National Governments: National Science Academies, governmental- and parliamentary advisory bodies, etc. As a rule, at least one National Science Academy exists in each developed country.

(ii) A second group of formally established bodies includes those that have been set-up by individual political parties, industry associations, societal actors, professional organisations, interest groups, education establishments, etc. Their focus is wide-ranging and they often combine advice formulation and targeted lobbying.

In Europe, a large number of these bodies operate in Brussels in the vicinity of the EU Headquarters; but without any formal link to the European Institutions, or any privileged access to them.

(iii)) The third group includes the bodies that are voluntarily set-up by:

— National Science Academies such as European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC), Federation of All European Academies (ALLEA), etc.;

— Government Science Advisors working together with National Science Academies such as International Network for Government Science Advice (ING-SA), etc.;

— Non-governmental organisation with global membership of national scientific bodies and international scientific unions such as the International Council for Science (ICSU);

And,

— Individual civil society members such as: The Club of Rome, World Academies, European Academies (e. g. Academia Europaea, Académie Européenne des Sciences des Arts et des Lettres, European Academy of Sciences and Arts), scientific networks (e. g. Euroscience), various think tanks, etc. And of course, *The Global Round Table*. The list is long and ever growing.

Individuals determined to be recognised as ‘science adviser’ are often driving them; new structures are popping-up while others are phased-out.

The focus of the voluntary bodies is widespread and often combines formulating advice and targeted lobbying.

Experience has shown that political leaders prefer advice from sources that are recognised as ‘generator of innovative ideas’ that can be realised within their own political agenda and legislative horizon (say 4-5 years).

Therein lays the inherent risk of becoming too close to Party-politics.

As a general trend, both the formally established advisory bodies and the informal ones encompass disturbing shortcomings, in particular insufficient interface to- and representation of civil society, poor gender balance and limited, if at all, participation of youth. Due to these shortcomings, there is a realistic risk that these voluntary bodies are easily becoming self-entertaining ‘academic discussion clubs’ of older men. Indeed, this has- and is happening in numerous cases.

NEED FOR TRUSTWORTHY ADVICE

Formally established bodies have their own inherent quality control: the high-level users (who are usually also funding providers). Redundant and unreliable structures are abolished and closed down.

For *voluntarily established bodies* the situation is somewhat different in that they are often kept alive by a few (if not a single) ambitious individuals. Quality control and feed-back mechanism concerning their usefulness are rarely in place. There are also cases when more academic self-restraint would be helpful by ambitious promoters as they don't possess the necessary relevant international- / EU policy-making experience.

Optimally, trustworthy and useful advice necessitates strict fulfilment of a set of key requirements, viz.:

- Documented methodology to formulate advice: *what to look for and how?*
- Reliable provider: *has the receiver confidence in the provider?* And of course,
- Intellectual and moral openness of the receiver: *is he / she ready- and able to listen?*
- Communication opportunity: *does the provider have direct access to the receiver?* The receiver could be a political leader or his / her science adviser, e. g. government chief scientist.

In the absence of any of the above requirements, there is the likelihood that recommendations remain unexploited or, even worse, misused or misinterpreted.

This is exactly what happened in the recent past when – in spite of the massive advisory potential of various kinds that existed in Europe and Worldwide – the financial crisis took the World community by surprise.

And all the while other important challenges increasingly reared their head on the European political scene, namely large-scale uncontrolled migration into the EUs territory, as well as its main causes, the unstable situation in the Middle-East (war) and Northern-Africa (poverty). In addition, long-term energy supply and global warming are remaining other strategic challenges. The „Sword of Damocles” is hanging above Europe.

Critical observers must raise several thought-provoking questions: How could the recent financial crisis arise almost „un-noticed” and develop to the magnitude it did? Where were the EU's political leaders and key policy advisers? What else could this apparent *laissez-faire* approach lead to? Are we going to let the global situation worsen, until it leads to inevitable disaster? [7]

There is no shortage of dooms-day scenarios. [8] Currently, the most striking ones the authors have identified include:

- The uninhibited migration into the EU territory with the manifest social friction between groups of different cultural origins and the possible resulting collapse of the European social system;
- The emergence of large-scale international terrorism such as the so-called Islamic State (IS) and its spill -over effects into Europe;
- The upheaval of the geo-political status-quo in the EU's neighbourhood, notably strengthened Russian military influence, Ukraine / Russia tension, collapsed Arab Spring, etc.;
- The possibility of a lasting deformation of the current EU structure due to rising nationalist and separatist movements, e. g. the possible UK exit from the EU (Brexit);

And,

— The looming environmental catastrophe. Here, there are promising signals following the recent UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and adoption of the Paris Agreement; [9]

Finally,

— In many experts' opinion, the financial crisis is not yet over. The forecast for 2016 is, „*massive sacrifice of savings and jobs to prop up a 'systemically risky' global banking schemes ... Life savings could be wiped out in a massive derivatives collapse ... Poverty also kill s.*” [10]

Unquestionably, the global situation is – to state it candidly – unclear, turbulent and remains largely unpredictable. And new challenges may soon arise.

European political leaders are well aware of the seriousness of the situation. But they also know that the main concern of 'Mrs. Papanopoulus' in Greece and 'Mr. Gonzales' in Spain, and all other Europeans surviving at close to the existence minimum, is immediate and short-term: simply food and jobs – and prospects for the future. Evidently, it all boils down to jobs – in particular for the very large number of unemployed youth without any prospect for future. Thus, leaders, to state it unambiguously clear, most often prioritize short-term and quick fixes in view of the coming election.

European political leaders have their own inherent operational restrictions: all issues must be addressed within the framework of Western democracy. But Western democracy has its limits [11]: „...*the majority of the people are not qualified to decide – they are unaware of the catastrophic consequences that would ensue if their demands were to be met...*”

The reasoning is not new [12], „...*the problem is encapsulated by the simple fact that this painful passage through the 'valley of tears' lasts longer than the average period between elections, so that the temptation is great to postpone the difficult changes for the short-term electoral gains...*”

As a consequence, it will be necessary to scrutinise EU-level advisory bodies for their compliance with the afore-mentioned requirements. Our advice is to use only the best ones.

EU STRUCTURES FOR OBTAINING ADVICE

The EU has a two-track structure for *formally* obtaining scientific advice via its:

- formally established advisory bodies; and
- open procedures for requesting advice.

Membership in the formally established *scientific advisory bodies* is largely restricted to highly educated individuals, where academic achievement has preference to hands-on life experience. Civil society is kept at an arms-length. More particularly insufficient attention is paid to the interface to- and representation of civil society, including gender balance and age participation.

Yet, individuals who have failed in traditional educational systems could have similar or even more usefulness in forward-looking policy making. A few well-known examples include: Thomas Edison who was called 'addled' by his teacher; Albert Einstein who failed the entrance examination to the Eidgenössische Tech-

nische Hochschule (university) in Zurich; Bill Gates who is a university dropout; and Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA founder) who admitted to be dyslexic; and there are many more.

The *open procedures* to formally request advice from civil society on issues within the Commission's mandate – including scientific research – can happen via one of the following:

- the Commission takes initiative [13]; and
- a group scientists, researchers, etc. take the initiative [14].

In either case the procedures are complex and lengthy. One might easily get the impression that they are designed for 'pro-forma' opinion gathering on issues pre-cooked at the highest political level, rather than obtaining 'grass-root' views of real concern to civil society.

Also, the European Commission is in a position to dismiss a civil society initiative if it considers that the initiative falls outside of the mandate of its power. This has already happened in several cases, including the initiative 'STOP TTIP' (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) [15], where civil society organisations and individuals have expressed concern about the ongoing trade related discussion between the EU and the USA.

It is an example of how political leaders 'bulldozer-through' issues that could deeply influence the life of their constituencies without any public consultation. Another striking example is the German Government's decision to let the bulk of migrants illegally enter into its territory, indeed to Europe, and put extreme pressure on the entire EU to follow suit. A public statement by German Chancellor Angela Merkel has seemingly accelerated the illegal mass migration to the EU. [16]

At EU level, the current structures to formally consult civil society primarily seem to suit political leaders. These often prefer to remain in their ideological shell and are seldom truly interested in a true and necessary interface with civil society.

In particular EU schemes have a critical limitation: they are inadequately equipped as a forward-warning mechanism, viz. to 'ring the bell in time when a storm is brewing on the horizon' and there is an urgent need for high-level political intervention. This could, for example be the case at the onset of disruptive technologies [17].

Of course, individuals and groups may on own initiative be able to convey advice to EU officials. The outcome and usefulness of such partisan initiatives are uncertain. In particular, as it is not always easy to appreciate what constitutes the advice value behind the self-promoting rhetoric.

BRING-IN CIVIL SOCIETY

The authors' main observations are that scientific advisory structures in general and the EU scientific advisory bodies in particular, need to be strengthened with respect to their responsiveness to unexpected development as well as interface with civil society.

Also, the EU's procedures would gain in usefulness if they were simplified and made more easily approachable by lay-persons.

For the EU system, such bold moves would increase the relevance and value of its publicly funded research making it more societally responsible and useful. In particular, it would lead to:

- early identification of scientific challenges and technological threats;
- more relevant evidence-based research, including societal research;
- open new avenues for innovation with societal relevance;
- help test new pioneering ideas for the benefit of humanity; and
- improved confidence in taxpayers' well-spent money on EU supported research.

The capacity to actively recognise at the outset unexpected developments with broader societal significance and better monitor its development – thus assist political leaders to better respond in time – would be a particularly valuable improvement.

The enhanced interface with civil society would also provide an active and democratic quality control of- and feed-back mechanism to current policy actions, and provide forward-looking input to future ones.

We recommend that one way to enhance interaction with civil society is to set-up an *independent civil society* 'letter-box' to which individuals could signal ('vox populi') significant '*deviation from expectation*' they observe / experience. Here, information should be assembled, screened and as relevant directed to the appropriate formally established EU advisory structure.

This, in turn, would assess the need and timing for scientific advice to political leaders, and if so, formulate it. Such a complementary initiative must have a light structure not to increase the already existing jungle of opaque initiatives in the field.

In the authors' opinion the afore development would also have a valuable side effect. Offering citizens the possibility of more involvement in EU matters would boost attention to the *Core Values* adhered to in Europe.

Here the role of younger generation is particularly important now and even more in future, for example when these fundamental values are being questioned, if not directly attacked, from inside and/or outside.

The Core Values adhered to in Europe are practised through the European way of life, viz.:

- Primacy of the individual human being;
- Equality between men and women;
- Dignity and human rights;
- Democracy and secular governance;
- Rule of law and equality under the law; and
- The endeavour to achieve environmental sustainability with full respect for the ecosystem.

More attention to these Core Values would be a most welcome development as the EU is facing an immediate double challenge: how to respond to the emerging new

Global Order, while grappling with an uncontrolled large-scale migration into its territory.

Moral fortitude may well be Europe's ultimate guardian of the European way of life.

It would also reinforce EU's moral responsibility and commitment to:

— Its historic minorities, where following various rounds of international political bargaining during the 20th Century, millions of people in Central-East- and South-East Europe have found themselves in new countries as a consequence of the movement of national borders;

— The newly arriving migrants, where moral responsibility towards migrants must be balanced with moral and political responsibilities towards constituencies; and

— The countries / regions of migrants' origin mustn't become deprived through loss of its youth, best educated individuals and most active entrepreneurs.

All in all, we suggest that our recommendation would strengthen one of the key foundations of Western democracy: the independent checks-and-balances in our political system by civil society.

CONCLUSIONS

The unprecedented challenges facing humanity and the environment necessitates that scientific advisory structures need to be upgraded. In particular, the interaction with civil society must be strengthened.

Such bold decisions will make science more useful to policy-making and more relevant to humanity.

This approach will further strengthens one of the cornerstones of Western democracy: the system independent checks-and-balances of political structures by civil society – especially in the face of rising social instability, fragmentation and even dissolution of societies, values, human rights and dignity.

Eventually, development in this direction will help better identify emerging issues of societal relevance and formulate in time related scientific advice for political- and societal leaders.

Providing advice to political- and societal leaders isn't the privilege of selected elite in an „ivory tower“.

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- (i) The evolution of a multipolar world with superpowers and larger blocks of states rather than the traditional national states that play key roles;
 - (ii) The need to give European values such as the value of the individual resonance in the world insofar as is possible, and to secure their continuance in Europe against threats from within and without;
 - (iii) To stabilize the influence of Europe in the world to the extent that Europe can sit at the negotiating table with equal rights and equal weight when the Americans, Chinese and Russians discuss the future world order;
 - (iv) Increasing and mostly cheaper, economic competition from developing countries. *The statements were made before the onset of the current massive uncontrolled migration into the EU territory.*
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- [14] „The European citizens’ initiative” — Adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, it „*enables 1 million EU citizens from at least seven EU countries to call on the European Commission to propose legislation on matters where the EU has competence to legislate*”. It is a right that is enshrined in the EU treaties. <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome>
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