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Science and policy in times of multicrisis and dissent: Issues of framing, authority, evidence and political-economic decision making

ENSSER discusses 11 recommendations on science - policy relationship with EU Representatives at Round Table in Brussels, 24 March 2026

Many scientists claim that their evidence and conclusions are not heard by policy makers, while policy makers often claim that their policies and actions are "science-based". At the heart of this paradox lies a Gordian knot of relationships between science and politics, in which industrial interests and scientific advisors to policy makers play a crucial role.

In an effort to clear up and untie this knot of relationships, the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER) addressed Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and representatives of the European Commission with the results of its conference "Science and policy: Issues of framing, authority, evidence and political-economic decision making".[1] These results were documented in a nine page report[2] which was presented at a Round Table[3] in the European Parliament in Brussels on 24 March 2026. Eleven recommendations (attached below) for improving the science - policy relationship were presented by ENSSER.

MEPs of three political groups and representatives of the EC Directorates General AGRI, ENVI and SANTE reacted to the report, which was then discussed with the other participants. One of the major scientific advisory institutes of the EU, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), despite multiple requests, neither took part in the Round Table nor reacted to the report.

The discussions in the Round Table included strong criticism regarding the unacceptable abandonment of the Precautionary Principle in ongoing legislative propositions, e.g. the planned deregulation of NGT1[4] plants and the proposal "Food and feed safety simplification omnibus".

[1] The conference was held at the Academy of Athens 15-17 May 2025. The documentation of the conference is available at: https://ensser.org/events/2025/conference-programme-science-and-policy-in-times-of-multicrisis-and-dissent/.
[2] https://ensser.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Report-of-conference-final-draft-w-presentation-date.pdf.
[3] https://ensser.org/events/events_2026/round-table-science-and-policy-issues-of-framing-authority-evidence-and-political-economic-decision-making/
[4] NGT = New Genomic Techniques

Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati, chair of ENSSER, stated:

> "*The current multi-crisis, intensified by the war in the Middle East, clearly demonstrates how closely science, geopolitics, and policy economic decision-making are interconnected.*
>
> *Scientific assessments - from institutions such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Energy Agency - have long warned about the vulnerabilities of fossil-fuel dependence and the urgent need for a green transition toward resilient and renewable energy systems.*
>
> *Yet political decisions are often made under immediate geopolitical and economic pressures, highlighting the ongoing challenge of aligning scientific evidence with real-world policy choices.*
>
> *There is an urgent need to re-evaluate priorities and to focus on multidisciplinary crosscutting approaches that will serve solving complex problems in the era of multi-crisis*".

Em. Prof. Erik Millstone of the Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex (UK) stated:

> "*EU policies that currently regulate industrial technologies are neither scientifically nor democratically legitimate. Instead, the policy-makers hide behind the scientists, and the scientists are covertly taking policy decisions that are misleadingly portrayed as if scientific.*
>
> *The EU's regulatory policy regime won't be legitimate until both the scientific advisors and the risk managers acknowledge that policy judgements always frame scientific advice to regulators.*
>
> *The risk managers should therefore provide their scientific advisors with explicit risk assessment policy guidance, and those advisors should show how their assessments are framed by the guidance.*
>
> *Then policy-makers can take full responsibility for policy decisions and scientists can explain what is known and not known about the consequences of adopting, or failing to adopt, particular regulations. In the light of that scientific advice, policy-makers can select the measures they deem appropriate. Then the resulting policy regime could be both scientifically and democratically legitimate*."

Dr. Irina Castro of Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra (Portugal) highlighted that "*science does not speak on its own; it speaks through institutions, interests, and choices. Those choices must be visible and accountable.*" Further she stated that "*if scientists cannot safely challenge powerful interests, then we are not protecting science—we are protecting private interests*".

Dr. Ephraim Pörtner, Critical Scientists Switzerland, Affiliated Researcher, Political Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland, stated:

> *"The EU could shift the tides by making just a few changes and prove that the concern for people and their wellbeing is greater than the concern for profit-making.*
>
> *For science, the worldview of conviviality means, then, above all, a deep commitment to mutual responsibility towards one another, future generations, and the Earth."*

Martin Häusling, MEP for the Greens/EFA Group and co-host of the meeting, stated:

> *"Scientific advice for policymakers is extremely important. In the future, we must ensure that science operates with significantly greater independence from lobbying influences. The heavy reliance on third-party funding in European science poses a risk.*
>
> *Not every idea needs to become a marketable product immediately. This is why it is important to support particularly independent research into high-risk technologies - with public funding."*

Michal Wiezik, MEP for the Renew Group, stated:

> *"As an ecological scientist, I am deeply concerned about the apparent factual bias that mainstream industry appears to exert on European policymaking, particularly in relation to land management. In too many instances, legislation seems to be shaped by considerations that lack factual accuracy, yet still serve the interests of various industrial sectors. Strategies in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries often contradict nature conservation objectives—not due to a lack of coherence, but because of competing interests that significantly influence the outcomes of the*

decision-making process. Accustomed as I am to a rigorous scientific approach grounded in evidence, detailed methodology, and thorough referencing, I find this deeply troubling."

Manuela Ripa, MEP, EPP Group, stated:

"There is strong and growing scientific evidence across areas ranging from environmental and health policy to cybersecurity - but too often there remains a gap between this evidence and political action. This disconnect is not just a challenge, it is a real risk. Good policymaking can only succeed if independent scientific expertise is systematically and even systemically integrated into decision-making. That is why we need the scientific community not only as advisors, but as active voices in our democratic debate."

Luis Vivas-Alegre, Head of Sector, Research and Innovation Unit, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission, stated:

"The eleven recommendations of the 2025 conference show the key importance of science to underpin EU policymaking in the agri-food system. The new Strategic Approach to R&I in agriculture, forestry and rural areas, announced in the Vision for EU Agriculture and Food and planned for June this year, should provide a long-term framework to foster safe agricultural innovation and support the science needed for risk assessment methodologies."

Alexandra Vakrou, Head of Unit ENV.A.3 – Green Knowledge & Research Hub, LIFE, DG Environment, European Commission, stated:

"As policy makers, we need science, scientific evidence, and research results to build our policies on and we are deeply committed to deliver policies that are science-based and evidence-based. At the time where so many opinions are expressed, so much fake news is circulating, we need science, peer-checked information, reliable conclusions supported by solid methods and reasoning to inform and guide us. DG ENVI has established since a couple of years platforms with stakeholders: one for biodiversity, one for zero pollution and one for circular economy, to discuss and exchange with stakeholders where among others research and science are also discussed.

In DG Environment, we are also working to link science with people's life. Citizens should see how science can help them, in their daily life, or in the future, in the life of the next generations. But science should make efforts to be understandable by citizens. The dialogue between science and citizens should be both ways. It is not easy to translate scientific results to be sizable by citizens, but this is a necessary effort to fight against fake news or non-scientific theories. Communication in science is very important and should not be underestimated by the scientific world."

Klaus Berend, Director for Food Safety, Sustainability, and Innovation, DG Health and Food Safety, European Commission, stated:

"The Commission is committed to science and evidence-based policies. Risk managers need thorough assessments of comprehensive scientific evidence as a basis for decisions. For that we rely on EU agencies, which provide trustworthy advice, anchored in well-documented processes that involve highly qualified scientific experts and are underpinned by strong independence policies ensuring that opinions are unbiased and not influenced by economic or other interests."

The Round Table on "Science and policy: Issues of framing, authority, evidence and political-economic decision making" was attended by 42 participants, including the above-mentioned EU representatives, delegates of science organizations and civil society organizations, and scientists.

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Attachment

Recommendations of the report of the conference "Science and policy: Issues of framing, authority, evidence and political-economic decision making"

1. The EU, particularly the European Commission, should make efforts to comply with its statutory obligation to respect and implement the Precautionary Principle and stop violating it and allowing it to be undermined by industry. The Precautionary Principle is crucial for protecting all the vulnerable who cannot protect themselves.
2. All players in the science-policy relationship, i.e. policy-makers, industrial players, universities and scientists, should not only take responsibility, but also be democratically accountable, each for their own roles and their own values.
3. Policy makers and governments should protect independent science and independent scientists against intimidation and harassment, including those who criticise their policies and offer dissenting perspectives.
4. Science-based policy-making can only achieve and reconcile both scientific and democratic legitimacy if risk assessment policies (RAPs) are made explicit and are accounted for.
5. Policies should be based on "the best available scientific knowledge" and not on biased claims of "sound science".
6. Science has to be freed from the grip of market fundamentalism; a considerable upscaling of public funding for basic and public-good-oriented research is needed to achieve this. One source of this funding could be a small tax on harmful agents as they emerge from research (e.g. at the “possible” carcinogen stage of the IARC evaluations of carcinogenicity), to be devoted just to publicly funded science on the hazards and to less harmful substitutes.
7. Citizens need to be involved in the agenda-setting of the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2028 - 2034) and in projects supported by it, as well as in other major investments in research and development.
8. Firm measures must be taken to prevent corporations from capturing risk assessment policies. The revolving door between politics and corporations, which typically involves vested interests, should be prohibited or severely restricted.
9. All risk assessment panels should include government-independent citizen representatives who are able to ask critical questions and vote.
10. Corporate science must be labelled as such and excluded from risk assessments, as it is usually biased towards corporate interests.
11. Convivial science, i.e. science based on mutual responsibility towards each other, future generations, and the Earth, as well as on civilised disagreement, should be prioritised in any funding scheme.