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EUROPEAN ACADEMY
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L'ACADÉMIE EUROPÉENNE
DES SCIENCES ET DES ARTS

SPINOZA LECTURES



Strengthen the Role of Science in European
policy-making to develop efficient policies
which serve the Public Interest



Report of the First Lecture of 19 November 2013

***Guest Speaker Professor Anne Glover, Chief Scientific Adviser
to the President of the European Commission***

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Spinoza Lectures, which will be organized by the European Academy of Arts and Sciences periodically, Anne Glover, Chief Scientific Advisor to the President of the European Commission was invited to deliver the first lecture, entitled *“The Role of Science in Future EU Policy Making”*.

The Representative of the Academy in Brussels, Professor Nada Korac-Kakabadse, opened the symposium and presented the topic of discussion before introducing Ms Glover to the audience. Professor Kakabadse outlined that “global challenges cannot be addressed without giving science a key role in policy making. The appointment of a Chief Scientific Officer in the European Commission is a breakthrough in European policy-making”.

“We are all entitled to our own opinion but not to our own facts”

Professor Glover started the lecture with highlighting that the EU is leading globally in many scientific fields and in many indicators. Something we should bear in mind is that we are overly-modest in the EU when speaking about ourselves.

However, she indicated that it is fundamental to meet global challenges, large and small, to defend our social model. And for this we need a radical change.

Therefore, it is fundamental to develop a key role for science in policy making oriented to economic and social needs and aimed at making a real impact. We need also to better communicate between citizens, business and policy-makers.

Science is currently not in the room when the decisions are made and this cannot continue like this. With the decision to create the position of Chief Scientific Officer, President Barroso has clearly decided to bring science into EU policy-making. This challenge will definitely take longer than Mr. Barroso’s or Mrs. Glover’s mandates, as it will require similar vision across time and within the whole Commission.

Political decisions should be based on science, which require evidence to contrast with politics. In an ideal world in which policies were based on peer reviewed scientific data, policies would evolve but would not change from one government to the other. However, if it is politically acceptable to decide not to base a final policy on data and science, this should be transparent and clear.

On the other hand, science-based policy making also faces its own challenges. Evidence evolves permanently. Does this mean that policy-makers should revise policies on that basis? Agile systems should be required to allow for this to take place. However, what challenges does this pose to legal certainty and to radical changes of direction for regulations affecting business and society? Who provides advice and valid evidence? These are questions who still today lack a clear response.



Transforming science into action in a rapidly changing world

How do we make things happen? We need to know how to translate our unique capacity to transform a knowledge generation into impact to society through legislation even if science and technology evolve much faster than European policy-making.

Stimulating a different attitude on policy-makers in this regard is one of the greatest challenges we face today in EU policy-making as it requires to change the way we do policy-making in Europe. We need a rapidly adaptive policy-making system to achieve this.

Science-based policy-making will likely only increase in time due to ever faster developments in computing and data processing. However, for this it is fundamental to count with the buy-in of society, to which communication plays a fundamental role. This is a shared challenge for policy-makers, scientists and business, especially in Europe, where there are so many different cultures and societal visions sharing the same political system.

Society is not always rational when accepting or denying technology and innovation, especially in some sensitive sectors, but this should not be exploited politically and against the general interest. We need to analyse past errors but also identify earlier opportunities that we let them pass in order to fully benefit from new technologies and communicate this socially.

Debate with participants

The debate among participants focused on the perception in society of science and the risks inherent to it. It is a challenge to business to better communicate, in certain sectors, the way science and innovation can improve citizens life as in certain sectors, scientific developments and innovations are seen in society with scepticism and caution (agro-food for instance).

The current application of the precautionary principle and its negative consequences were also raised. In the early 2000's, this principle was applied in a positive and constructive manner. Over the last decade, this interpretation of the principle has radically changed and has become over restrictive, producing a competitive disadvantage for Europe and its business. There is a need to start challenging this over-stretched interpretation of the precautionary principle by making it valuable for XXIst century governance.

We will keep you informed on the date of the next Spinoza lecture.