

7th annual meeting of European Science Advisors Forum ESAF

From local advice to global benefit

30.11–1.12.2021

Hybrid event coordinated from Estonian Academy of Sciences, Tallinn, Estonia.

Notes

30.11.2022, 15:00–15:20 Opening

The chair Tarmo Soomere welcomed participants and noted that representatives from three countries, including Estonia, are physically present whereas representatives from 12 countries and delegates from one more country (Latvia) have joined virtually. This is more than half of the EU countries that have a representative in ESAF. This level of participation is typical in networks that are based on personal membership of people with extensive duties.

The Chair welcomed new members of ESAF since the 2020 Annual Meeting (June, 2020):

Czech Republic: Prof Vladimir Mařík, Vice-Chairman of Research, Development and Innovation Council

Italy: Prof Maria Chiara Carrozza, President, National Research Council of Italy

Latvia: Dr Mīkēlis Grīviņš, Chairperson of the Board, Association of Latvian Young Scientists

Luxembourg: Dr Romain Martin, First Government Adviser (Premier Conseiller de Gouvernement), Ministry of Higher Education and Research

Scotland (Associate member): Prof. Julie Fitzpatrick, Chief Scientific Adviser, Government of Scotland

With these new members, ESAF covers 29 countries and several important regions. ESAF almost totally covers national science advice systems in the EU countries and to a large part of such systems in Europe.

The Chair apologised on behalf of the chairman of the committee on culture of the Parliament of Estonia Riigikogu, Professor of History Aadu Must who was unlucky to catch COVID/19 on the weekend.

Jacques Verraes, the Deputy/Acting head of the EC SAM (European Commission Science Advisory Mechanism) unit in the RTD DG, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the many actors and stakeholders in the process of emerging the European ecosystem of science advice. ESAF was started by the former Director-General of the RTD Robert-Jan Smits. We are happy that this offspring is growing. To-day, only Croatia has not nominated its representative.

The SAM unit provides secretariat to the Group of Chief Scientific Advisers (GCSA) – the main science advice body to the college of European Commissioners at its request. The unit is the representative of the EC in ESAF.

The Chair arranged a short tour de table of physical participants in Tallinn (the names of other participants were visible on screen), welcomed representatives from INGSA (International Network for Government Science Advice), Group of EU Chief Science Advisors, and Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, and informed the participants about organization of two sessions of breakout rooms.

The Chair made a short overview of the basics of ESAF and its functioning. The ESAF members work on the interface between the knowledge accumulated in experts and scientists, and those who have mandate for making decisions. This interface is called science for policy. It works on how knowledge from science can be used strategic and everyday political decisions. It is a complementary link to the system for shaping and implementing policy for science.

ESAF is a piece in the emerging continent-wise ecosystem of science advice. The membership is personal. The members have been invited by the SAM unit of the European Commission. They have to be in a formal and active position in their country to provide advice to their governments.

Membership is based on country representation, but members do not formally represent the position of their country. Participation of non-EU European countries is encouraged.

Technically, ESAF is a non-legal entity, without budget. It is an informal network of European science-based strategic advisers. It is an independent entity but of course communicates and cooperates regularly with SAM, Joint Research Centre (JRC) and other players in the field (e.g., DCA, Danish Centre for Food and Agriculture or the consortium of European academies of sciences SAPEA, Science Advice for Policy by European Academies).

ESAF itself has no formal advisory task. Members of ESAF of course can join forces and provide joint advice. In essence, ESAF is meant to provide a platform for organizations that may function in different systems but share a common ambition to provide the best science based advice.

The primary goal of ESAF is to facilitate sharing and exchange of information, expertise, practices and results. Such exchange does not come natural. The ways of formulations, formats of messages and channels for communication from academics to the policy-making level are greatly different in different countries and regions. This is natural because of difference in the governance systems in different countries. A corner stone of ESAF is that the variety of structures and institutions for such advice across different national governments is of great value. It is not fragmentation. It is an asset.

30.11.2022, 15:20–17:10 Session 1: Emerging science for policy ecosystem

*15:20–15:40 Prof. Nicole Grobert, Chair of GCSA shared her thoughts on *Connecting advice on national and EU level. The role of the EC Group of Chief Scientific Advisors.**

Prof Grobert reminded that scientific evidence is the core of science advice and our activity and presented an overview of the basics of functioning of the SAM.

The presentation relied substantially on slides. As reproduction of text only could be misleading, it is recommended to look at [the recording of the presentation](#) (the page with full recordings is password protected. Password: ESAFmember) to get more detailed insight into the messages of the presentation.

15:40–16:00 Jacques Verraes (JV) sketched how ESAF is placed in the EC advice stream.

He first noted the importance of the GCSA has and will have and science advice in general to policy-making in the European Commission. Also, SAPEA has an important contribution to this system. The EC is currently negotiating a new grant agreement with the SAPEA consortium to continue their input into the work of the GCSA. SAPEA provides evidence and the GCSA members build the science advice based on this evidence. This is the strength that is new, is novel, in the way the EC is producing its policies. It leads to better, stronger, more convincing policies and decisions.

JV presented an insight into the work that the EC has started to develop the science advice ecosystem. It can be divided into four parts. First, the vision that the EC has for the European science advice ecosystem: what is the momentum and what are the opportunities. Secondly, what is the policy context, against which background is the development taking place. Thirdly, what is the process that the EC proposes to develop. Finally, what is the role of ESAF in this context from the point of view of the EC. EC is interested in having an action from ESAF; to hear position and perspective of ESAF on this issue.

(i) The vision of the EC for the science advice ecosystem. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward the importance of scientific knowledge to inform effective, efficient policy- and decision-making in response to complex issues, such as the pandemic. Our societies are becoming more complex, governments have to address multifaceted and multidisciplinary challenges. Science is an inherent ability to take a systemic approach on a given topic. It becomes more and more important to inform policy- and decision-making. It is the perception of the EC that it is time to deepen the role that science can make to policy, to address policy challenges, and to develop appropriate structures to facilitate the contribution of science to policy-making. As Nicole Grobert has mentioned, the GCSA is about 6 years old. It is developing its own momentum and it has its impact on European policy-making, in very distinct and meaningful manner. The Commission is going to continue and develop on that.

The EC is committed to foster a stronger and better connected science advice ecosystem in Europe. The Commissioner for Research and Innovation Maria Gabriel recently gave her approval for the Commission services to develop the vision for science advice ecosystem further, and to take initiatives in 2022 to share this thinking with Member States. As part of this, we try to develop our interaction with ESAF and with Europe at large, within and outside of the EC.

(ii) External and internal policy context. The external is the pandemic, multi-faceted crisis. Another external context is the proposal of INGSA to set the European chapter. We have to take the position. Internally, in the EC, the development of the better regulation agenda of the EC is based on the perception that the evidence and science-informed policy-making leads to better policy-making. This better regulation agenda was updated last year, and is now being used at all Commission services.

Two other internal elements are the pact for research and innovation (PRI) and the strategy of internal cooperation in research and innovation (ICRI). The PRI in the context of the European Research Area provides the long-term strategy for European research and innovation policy, and includes the principles that lead research priority areas and the tools required to drive the implementation at European and national level. The other element is the global approach to research and innovation. It presents the Commission's perspective for Europe's strategy for cooperation in this field. The EU should take the leading role in supporting ICRI partnerships, and in delivering innovative solutions to green, digital, health, and innovative innovation challenges. This is the policy context of the current developments.

(iii) The process that the EC intends to follow in order to develop, deepen and strengthen the science advice ecosystem. The Commission will articulate its vision by means of compiling a staff working document of the services of the EC. It is to be published in the second half (possibly second semester) of 2022. It will provide common vision for the role of science in policy-making across the EU and an overview of the current landscape of science for policy and science advisory mechanisms across Europe. It will also set out the benefits of connecting and strengthening the elements in support of better policy-making at all the levels of policy- and decision-making.

The document will furthermore spell out the objective and means for creating diverse but well-connected ecosystems (in plural) of independent science for policy and science advice institutions. These ecosystems should work across all Member States, including the institutions and bodies in which the ESAF members work. It will also highlight the Commission's current and future work for strengthening and connecting institutions for independent science for policy and science advice at European national and subnational levels.

The relevant work is coordinated across the EC by the SAM unit, and the DG RTD together with colleagues from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) who are present today. In the next year (2022), we will be engaging with you and other stakeholders to co-create this vision. As part of the process, the EC will hold a major international conference, tentatively scheduled to October 2022, with high-level policy-makers from across the Member States.

(iv) ESAF and its members should play a key role in both shaping and being part of this emerging science advice ecosystem. The presented views do not engage the political leadership of the EC. The EC wants to hear from the ESAF how to build a stronger and better connected science advice ecosystem in Europe, and what role ESAF and ESAF members could or should play in this context. Which experiences in the Member States, and collectively as network, could contribute to the ecosystem under development. We think about identifying best practices, bringing them together, and identifying among those practices, which one works best and could contribute to the work in other Member States.

JV invited the ESAF members to continue reflect on this vision. He suggested to set up a dedicated working group, to prepare a short note about the future of ESAF and to present it at the high level conference in October 2022 that the Commission intends to organise. He mentioned that ESAF (and its current chairman) has already played an important role in high-level discussions of science advice in the past year (European R&A days, June 2021). Similarly, CGSA and Nicole Grobert have played an important role in such discussions. It is important to hear the collective voice of ESAF as a network in this context.

Finally, JV proposed some questions for reflection.

The Commission highly values ESAF as a network to connect national science advisers and for exchange of best practices. Yet more could be done to strengthen ESAF and its role in the ecosystem, for example, in the form of a more structured secretariat. It would be interesting to have a reflection how a more structured secretariat of ESAF could be supportive in the building of such science advice ecosystem.

How ESAF as an independent network could like? What activities should be developed for ESAF? What structures would be more suitable to support ESAF? What is the role that ESAF can play as a network? Not just as a gathering of stakeholders, actors, like yourself, but as a network with its own character, its own contribution into the science advice ecosystem. He promised that in the months to come he would be at the table all the time to reach reflections on these questions, which are important to address the multi-faceted and complex challenges that our societies unavoidably and inescapably have to address.

Nicole Grobert commented on the metaphor of "front line" and "second echelon". She pointed out the importance of balance of three entities as three legs of a stable structure where removing any of these would lead to a collapse of the structure. The GCSA, SAPEA and SAM are equal partners. If one of them disappears, SAM does not really work any more. We do need extract best practices and experiences across Europe in order to make Europe a better place based on scientific evidence, and we have to look at this challenge from the collaborative approach.

16:10–16:50 *Mapping and supporting diverse ecosystems within EU Member States* – David Mair, Lene Topp, Lorenzo Melchor Fernandez and Kristian Krieger, Joint Research Centre, European Commission.

The presentation relied substantially on slides. As reproduction of text only could be misleading, it is recommended to use either [slides](#) or the [recording](#) (Password: ESAFmember) to get more detailed insight into the messages of the presentations.

16:50–17:10 *Discussion in break-out groups: ESAF as the connecting link*

[Full recordings of group discussions](#) (Password: ESAFmember)

Breakout room 1: Tarmo Soomere (TS), Ricardas Rotomskis, Frede Blaabjerg (FB), Terje Tuisk, Karin Kjaer Madsen (KKM) (Tallinn), Lene Topp (LT), Lorenzo Melchor (LM), Marileen Dogterom (MD), Sabine Süsstrunk (SS), Enric Banda (EB), Corien Prins (CP)

TS proposed to discuss on which (type of) question you would possibly ask from your fellow chief scientist? Which is question that could be useful to you?

CP: We had some answers before about multidisciplinary. On a national level: do you have a robust method, scheme or instrument to select the specific disciplines that are – most - relevant for a policy advice? We see from the COVID experience that it is crucial to include multiple disciplines – but what disciplines to choose, for what reasons, priorities?

SS: We mentioned several times the category of trust today. Trust is indefinable commodity. It is there or it is not there. How do we as science advisors establish trust? How we get our target audience to trust us?

TS remarked that this aspect is a core constituent of advice. It takes time to create trust. It is asymmetric: you build trust many years and then you can violate it via one comment.

SS added: you build trust years; and then either you leave, or the politician leave. Trust is often based on personal relationships. The question is how to institutionalise this commodity?

TS expressed the opinion that a simple answer is: trust cannot be institutionalised.

MD The analysis provided shows how different we are. You sometimes lack an intermediary or independence is an issue. Also there was a question to Nicole: How direct is the connection between, e.g., science advisor and the government, or the Prime Minister, or the President. in different countries The USA have a group of 30 scientists who play the similar role as our GCSAs and who have direct access even to the President. How is this organised in different countries? Can we learn something from each other from this kind of best practises? Of course we have to understand each other and speak the same language. How that compares in different places, not just in Europe.

EB: We all have different schemes, in Europe and abroad, I chair and advisory council to the government. Our advice has to be formally received, but it is not binding. I find it useful in Spain, but it may not be the case in other countries.

FB: We are dynamic society and have to be forward-looking: what capacity do we need in the future? For what be prepared? Which mechanisms do we need in order to be able to identify that? Is it forecast, risk assessment in order to have necessary science for the future policies?

KKM mentioned the connection between hard-core science advice and culture? What is the responsibility of national science advisers to navigate in the culture of the country in order to communicate with the politicians so that they would listen? Spain is a good example: they are forced to

listen to you. It is probably very much cultural-based feature. In Denmark, it would be harmful if politicians would be forced to listen or follow science advice. Politicians would react very strongly to this demand. We have seen this, e.g., in Austria where a law is forcing people to get vaccinated now. It might be very good scientific advice to do that as it might be very helpful. Can you succeed differently in different countries? Comparing the culture and the level of how politics are done. It is a very delicate matter to be a science advisor as you need to know and navigate quite well in the culture when you are giving advice.

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TS thanked the participants for inspiring comments and opens discussion on questions posed by the SAM unit. Which kind of support, if any at all, national advice systems could reach from experts of JRC or SAM unit? What kind of help we could possibly positively absorb or digest?

EB: In Spain, to the best of my knowledge, the SAM structure is not really considered on the national decisions for science and innovation policy.

TS remarks that it is of course hard to implement part of suggestions and reminds that there are no wrong of right answers.

CP: The Netherlands has different advisory bodies in specific domains, e.g., education, health care, etc. I chair a two-yearly meeting of these different bodies. A frequently discussed topic is: what does independence imply when it comes to issues such as the topics on our agenda, whom to consult and content of advice?. Independence is of course understood in the relationship with science and policy but it also relates to choosing your methodology, experts you approach, how to react to communication after you have published your report. I would be very much interested (referring to LM) whether among the competences is an attitude in being independent. What exactly does it mean? How is the culture of independence cultivated in different Member States? What are lessons learned, best practices etc.

SS remarked that we all seem to have the same problems.

LM: The keywords highlighted: trust, independence, formality, lack of traction of scientific evidence in the policy-making at the decision-making table. All of that requires an ecosystem with diverse figures and structures in place. We cannot rely only on a scientific advisory council or on the SAM mechanism, or the biggest research centre to provide evidence on demand. We require all those in place, and many other items in the system. Some of the organisations attract lot of attention. For example, the network of science advisers appointed in each ministry (as Estonia has run for a few some years) has attracted a lot of attention from other Baltic countries, Belgium and other Member States. It is not obvious whether this can be replicated. The fact of having a science advisor allocated to each ministry helps build more interconnection, more coordination between ministries, around policies. It also helps run more research projects within one ministry. It provides room for building trust not only of the politicians, but, more importantly, of civil servants who will remain when that politician is no longer in office.

These three lessons are something that is explained through this mechanism – which is not the only formula. We require other actors. The Netherlands has such a diverse ecosystem that we really like it. It is also part of our multi-country project where we would like to see how to develop a similar science policy ecosystem, what kind of challenges do they have, and see how we can improve them.

Independency is one of our trades in the capacity framework. Maybe Lene (LT) is more skilled to answer that question. She is designing and piloting this capacity framework.

TS mentioned another aspect of useful communication with JRC – appearing science about science advice. We definitely need this field. JRC is gathering evidence for this kind of science.

17:25–17:45 *Time to take stock: lessons for science advice in future crises.* – Prof. Corien Prins, The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy. To start with, CP mentions that it is really important to see faces behind names, and offering contacts is a great service of ESAF.

The presentation relied substantially on slides. As reproduction of text only could be misleading, it is recommended to use either [slides](#) or the the [recording](#) to get more detailed insight into the messages of the presentations.

17:45–18:00 *Towards connectivity of national advice systems: experience from ESAF* – Prof. Tarmo Soomere, President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, ESAF Chair (Full text included)

The recent developments and challenges in the science advice ecosystem for policy include several unexpected aspects such as success of *ad hoc* groups in many occasions over existing institutional frameworks (as just discussed by Corien Prins). Some issues to be address are basically expected, such as the importance of links to sectorial and EU-level science advice. Some aspects that have emerged from the operation of ESAF members and partners could, however, be termed as either inconvenient (such as bottlenecks of sharing of operational advice between countries) or even politically sensitive. As Corien and others have mentioned, they are framed and interpreted differently in different countries and/or levels. These involve inter alia issues of legislation, mandate, and openness or embargo of provided advice. In this sense it is good to recognise that science about science advice is appearing.

The experience from ESAF and much more massively from the experience gathered by the JRC about science advice and sectorial advice systems tells us that in spite of differences in organization of advice in different countries, sectors or levels, several ground principles are still the same. The two most important keywords are quality and trustworthiness.

The message from the GCSA to the EC last year was: to be trusted, the advice should (i) be made public, (ii) based on the best knowledge and (iii) come from a body with a clear mandate.

It was probably Prof David Budtz Pedersen, Professor of Science Communication, who formulated an expanded set of 8 principles, 3 main: independence, transparency, responsibility, 5 others: accountability, diversity (social sciences and the humanities must be also in), timeliness, rigor, and last but not least demarcation (shaping policy but not taking decisions).

The last aspect should have some comments in the light of what David Mair showed: how many of people think that scientists should be more involved in or even intervene into policy-making. It is also indirectly reflected in the message of chief scientists to COP26 about which Nicole mentioned. It is questionable whether or not this message crossed the demarcation line and reached the level of decision-making.

Science advice as such and the advice provided is just one (albeit important) component of decision-making. In the light of these developments it is important to think over how we can or should distinguish the mandate for providing advice (which in hands of experts and academics) from the mandate of making decisions (which is in hands of elected policy-makers). Some say: Stay as detached from the policy making decisions as possible (otherwise you are not independent). Provide the analysis but try

not to favour any particular option. Clarify what options need to be analysed. Publish the advice where possible (transparency).

Two major topics based on experience from different countries shortly: (i) the meaning of “public” advice (or publishing where possible), (ii) the meaning of mandate – which have been solved very clearly for the European Commission system but is quite unstructured on the national level.

The meaning and mandate for national science advice have been built very differently in different countries. They include not so much decisions about who has the right to provide advice. It is more important to describe how the mandate should be given and how to specify whom to ask.

This situation has caused concerns from experts in legislation. For example the national COVID-19 advisory board functions based on a decree of the government and not based on a law. The top layers in Estonia (Leon Glikman, among others) have commented that this is not compliant with the Constitution. This situation is favourable for different protests and law suits, which could render the use of the given advice difficult.

A natural conjecture is that successful science advice needs a proper legislation. This legislation may be different in different countries but it should still follow (or enforce) the major principles.

The demarcation between policy and science should be regulated. Doing so would also solve to some extent another (closely linked) problem: How to handle conflicting views from scientists. There should be no informational cacophony. Both the national government and the EC usually wish to hear one voice. The policy-makers have no competence to evaluate the “weight” of advised scenarios or options. It is good if they have large enough listening capacity. They apply completely different filters. It is therefore desirable to migrate discussions between scientists beyond the mandated body.

Framing national legislations according to the main principles of science advice is apparently an important step towards better connectivity of national systems. It at least partially ensures that built and given advice is technically transferable. This framing would be to some extent similar to the peer-review system or rules of writing of research papers.

Further steps towards connecting with systems of science advice of different countries could help in a situation like COVID-19, or beyond. Such connections already partially work on the level of academies of science that are involved in the advice routine on different levels and who provide multi-language versions of their advice. The exchange of the basic advice between countries has been intense and successful between Germany, Estonia and Finland. A very good player is WRR in The Netherlands who channels their output into international monographs.

Operational advice is complicated because it is given in national language. Written communication of draft material may lead to complications and people with a national commitment usually will not do so. Even though many ESAF members aim at translating the most important documents, it would be complicated to build an operational system. Automatic translation might be unable to catch differences in the meaning of words in different languages and countries.

A connection between national systems, even if not operational, is fundamental in terms of providing foresight. In case of COVID it is targeted to recommendations on how to proceed on somewhat longer time scale and/or how to build exit strategy.

A feasible way forward is to know better each other personally via ESAF or similar network so that the help or advice is just one phone call away. This is what we develop now. Doing so still requires clear

incentives, not only arguments. Such network building requires time and efforts. Different from operational advice, it seems doable.

The meaning of “public” advice might be different in different countries and occasions. Unlike the EC advice system, many countries do not open government meetings to public. In Estonia this is written in the Constitution: The government meetings are closed. This means that material, including science advice, cannot be made public until discussed through and decided upon.

This is not a simple thing to live with. The government typically picks up only a part of the given advice at each instant. The question is: what about the advice that was not used at a particular time instant? Not all recommendations can be used immediately even though they are perfect in long-term run. This is the way in which EC also functions.

This issue needs to be addressed. People have, in principle, indisputable right to know what is recommended to the government but it is not obvious how to implement this right. This is a fundamental rather than communication problem. The Danish system of advice in food and agriculture sector has implemented embargo of one month before the advice given to government could be made public.

Handling of operational advice is also a nontrivial problem. The COVID pandemic has taught us that the operational component of advice often contains massive uncertainties and is sometimes based on early or controversial information. It is not cacophony of information. As mentioned by Karin, it is the question of culture and meaning of words in different countries. These subtle differences may be not translatable. These things also need to be discussed in the science advice ecosystem in Europe.

Lucian Brujan remarked in discussion that we need to make a fundamental distinction between communication and scientific advice in crisis and in urgency situations (like the one we have right now with the COVID pandemic) and the rest of the business. This is part of the Germany experience where we have seen and felt the consequences of this difference. In crisis situations we need to react very fast depending on how the all situation evolves. An example is the fourth wave of COVID-19. Politicians and the public request and need different communication in such situations. The other thing is scientific advice that addresses long-term processes. The two things should not be mixed up.

18:00–18:20 *International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) in European ecosystem of science advice*, Kristiann Allen, Executive Secretary, INGSA. Details see in [the presentation file](#) or the [recording](#) (Password: ESAFmember)

18:20–18:55 Discussion in three pre-designated break-out groups: The future of ESAF in the science advice ecosystem.

[The recordings of all group discussions](#) (Password: ESAFmember)

(As an example of discussions, detailed notes of Group 1 are presented here while for the other groups only the overview of the rapporteur is included here)

Group 1: Tarmo Soomere (TS), Ricardas Rotomskis, Frede Blaabjerg, Terje Tuisk, Karin Kjaer Madsen (Tallinn), Lene Topp, Lorenzo Melchor (LM), Marileen Dogterom, Sabine Süsstrunk, Enric Banda, Corien Prins, Gerald Haug, Janusz Bujnicki

TS invited Lorenzo Melchor to chair the discussion within 15–20 minutes to address the JRC topics.

LM mentioned that the JRC was willing to merge “their” slot with discussion about the future of ESAF. There is a selection of questions for participants in this breakout group. The first question: Which role should take ESAF in the science advice ecosystem. The second question: considering that INGSA Europe will become reality sooner or later, how would you see ESAF cooperating with INGSA, being part of it, or being equal partners – what are your opinions in this regard.

(The comments to this question are anonymised)

- ESAF has been very informal, at least since I am part of it. It should continue to be informal. I like the way it is. A mixture of different models would take a lot of bureaucracy to structure ESAF. We can offer our collaboration to INGSA. ESAF should not become the INGSA European chapter.
- I support this. We have ways too many platforms and I don’t think we have seen one that is good enough. I am sceptical of SAPEA and many others. As a scientist, professor and director of institute, I haven’t heard about a single one of them. I think we should eventually sit down and think of something useful, high quality and fast. I don’t think any of these platforms are good enough. We need to be able to provide high quality papers/interventions within a week or two. We don’t have that in Europe. So, no new platforms, please [until the existing ones are not really working]. Eventually, we should make a strong one, the one we can listen to. This is not happening right now.
- The informal structure is of great value. The only reason why Croatia is the only one [from the EU countries] formally not participating [in ESAF] today is in the informal structure of ESAF. This enables direct contacts, the mutual use of professional capacity. The only thing I would like to add: I am afraid that you destroy ESAF and the broadness of its participants when you make it too formal, also, too formal scheme of something bigger.
- I haven’t been to too many ESAF meetings yet, but I have heard from Wim van Saarloos how much he valued ESAF when he was the KNAW president. It sounds to me also that this informal aspect is actually what makes it unique.
Should we have a secretary? If yes, it starts to become formal again, and you become one on a long list. This informal way of discussing out-of-the-box is important as already suggested. If we think how to start from scratch in Europe, then SAPEA is a good attempt. It is not easy to have one system in Europe with so many Member States. However, I think it is a big asset to be able to think out of the box and not be bound by formal structures.
- Every advice to be given is to a certain point local. We have to know our local system. Transformation of advice from one system to another is a challenge because we have to translate this to all kind of local language that is understood by the current system. Thus I truly like this informal [system] as we can exchange ideas, we can take good ideas from other countries, even though we have to “translate” this locally. So why making ESAF more formal when this formality is already given in our country? Formal would imply “one size fits all” and this is not the case in none of our countries.
- ESAF is about networking, exchange of experiences, and then also a kind of independency in the European domain. One possible ambition: we may think on our meetings about statements that reach out across Europe. It could be done after the meeting. There might be a need from time to time to make an ESAF workshop or one-day conference to highlight a common issue on the

European scale. Listening to INGSA is not a bad idea. As a summary: this informal way of working and independency – I like it and I support this way of working.

TS commented that some aspects of the work of ESAF are motivated by some biases in science. Scientific publications are often biased towards positive results. Publishing negative or neutral results is not easy. But the society has the right to know how many studies have been done and how large percentage of these hasn't had clearly defined results. The parallel is: we all like success stories. If there is a formal network, it may easily be biased towards success stories. But even more important is spreading of information about failures. To his understanding, this can only be done informally – so that those who are sharing this information will not be attacked and will not have any ramifications. The role of informal networks seems to be growing. We see that from the functioning of social media and from various groups in society. The component of being informal has been one of the corner stones of ESAF, and it seems that all ESAF members in this group wish this component to be continued.

LM resumes that in the frame of the first question the group is supporting informality, keeping an informal network, perhaps a little bit more active in terms of some publications or short conferences.

The second question: how do you see cooperation or collaboration with INGSA?

TS expresses the formal point of view: The Estonian Academy of Sciences is now chairing the International Science Council (ISC) European members – European chapter of ICS. We shall cooperate with INGSA which is in some sense the daughter organisation of ICS. Through this cooperation we can motivate and inspire more academies of sciences to be engaged into giving high-level advice. This kind of cooperation of INGSA, ICS European chapter and ESAF has bright perspectives – if kept on informal level. There are of course too many organisations of science academies. We are trying to follow the example in which ICSU and ISSC merged a few years ago. We are trying to make ALLEA and EASAC to be one organisation. We have also raised the question about merging of ISC and IAP (Inter-Academy Partnership). Our understanding is: less institutions but with better quality.

EB: We should collaborate with INGSA but we should not be their European chapter. One possibility would be to ask JRC to be the sister organisation or the European chapter.

MD: The topic looks a bit like a mirror of talking of IAP and the European academies, just on a more global level. Whenever they have a workshop or other activity that is of use to us, I am ready to cooperate. We should not be a formal European part of it. Of course, if there is content, why not to collaborate. We can help each other with sharing experiences.

SS: If we become a European chapter, we have to have a structure to define how we interact. Maybe in the future it is a good idea but probably not right now. Let's advertise reports, workshops etc. to each other.

LT summarises the general feeling of the working group: kind of being in touch, keeping each other informed, and then collaborate occasionally on various workshops, when there is a specific need.

TS mentions that there are important cooperation points. INGSA is a network of people whose duty is giving advice. ESAF is designed as network of people who can (or have to) shape the national systems (or run, or organise, or are responsible for them). These two are different extremes of the spectra of advising. The ability of many of our members to impact on national science advice systems is why ESAF exists. In this sense cooperation with INGSA is absolutely natural. The people in INGSA are working in systems that we are running. We should know what happens on their level. They normally do not have power to change things in the country. Some of us have. We should very carefully handle this asset and

responsibility. In this sense a tight connection with INGSA at different levels is an important input for our brainstorming. This will possibly not work for decisions at the network level but most probably on decisions at the country and representative level.

LT asked whether this is an agreement in this group: that ESAF should be in (formal) collaboration with INGSA when beneficial. (Everybody on screen nods.)

TS mentioned that around this table everybody is either for [the cooperation] or staying formally silent but not silenced.

TS took over the chairmanship and introduced the question: what kind of existing information from other ESAF members may bring benefit to you.

The WRR in The Netherlands is doing excellent work by converting their advice into international monographs and distributing of their reports. The same is done by Leopoldina and by the Finnish system. Sending something somewhere to a long address list often does not work. It is important to know what kind of information ESAF members intend to read, use, or forward further.

CP: One of the reasons why I value ESAF and its informal nature is that I can approach on the one-to-one basis any colleague in any country, given a certain need for information on certain topic. The one-to-one opportunity is for me crucial.

SS followed up this theme by mentioning that all ESAF e-mails or reports (even if she personally not always reads them) go into their secretariat. They thus know what is happening on the European level. She expressed hope that we will have one-to-one counterpart very soon. But this is the knowledge base that helps us to do our job and that keeps coming. This is perfect. It is not always immediate reaction to it but it is used.

TS made an attempt to frame the point as follows: whatever the national science advice system finds valuable enough to translate into English or German or a third language of partners, it is worth of sending to partners. This was strongly agreed by SS.

TS mentioned that the ESAF secretariat has intentionally minimized the number of outgoing e-mails and there is no plan to make this communication more frequent. Still, the plan is to share the recommendations or documents which have been translated by national members into different languages.

FB added an observation about the events similar to the ESAF events. Often members see documents online, on-the-fly. It is encouraged that the participants share the relevant knowledge for and during the meetings. The people who are attending can see that something is interesting, and share it locally if it has enough interest.

EB noted that the most popular document he has used and distributed in Spain from ESAF was the one compiling how different advice systems function in different countries. This has been read by several policy-makers in Spain. This sort of information is good for us in general and also for policy-makers in our countries.

TS mentioned that Anne-Greet Keizer and Terje Tuisk have put it together. It was intentionally kept on a draft level. We did not wish to have a glossy paper publication. We wished to spread information.

GH: We would have travelled to Tallinn in COVID-free situation. These informal gatherings, both in one-to-one mode and in a group, would be beneficial in the future. It doesn't work so well online. I am very

much looking forward to meeting you all. The exchange during in-person meetings, with possibly glass of wine, will be very beneficial.

FB: noted that next summer is probably more safe time to meet. There is a higher probability that we can meet face to face in summertime. We may have the 5th or 6th COVID-19 waves in the autumn. Let's try to do our meeting 1–2 months before the next waves.

TS proposed to discuss a crazy idea that to some extent follows one of the recommendations of Jacques Verraes. What about coming sometimes together the second time a year, perhaps in a smaller circle and/or possibly regionally? Of course not organising another travel from Spain or Portugal to Estonia and back. Say, five to ten ESAF members locally and very informally talking about something serious. Perhaps an 1/3 day meeting, e.g., some later afternoon, discussing something in the office and then having a nice dinner together? Learning more about each other, style of thinking? To ensure that a good advice would be just one phone call away. Would that be rational?

SS expressed opinion that it would be complicated for all to get together and we all had to allow for hybrid meetings. We should always have a set-up that allows for hybrid meetings. Then it does not matter how far away some people are. Maybe not everybody is coming but at least part of it. Perhaps next time they will when it's in their corner of Europe, to be there in person. Otherwise we can create a sort of knowledge barrier.

GH was also in favour of one meeting per year when we meet each other.

FB supported the view of having one meeting per year where all are together. Another way to facilitate more networking is that some work could be done before an ESAF meeting. Some subgroups of 5–7 countries could prepare some view of ESAF that could be used for other things.

TS referred to the statutes of ESAF. It says: ESAF meets at least once a year where “at least” is in brackets. He added that he had in mind occasions where some ESAF members anyway visit some forum of conference, and then organise their meeting, and perhaps make it slightly larger by inviting the members from the neighbourhood.

CP added an opportunity or possibility: We advise our Dutch government on artificial intelligence and public values. As responsible for this research, I contacted a few colleagues around Europe. I would like to organise a short meeting with a few colleagues on this particular topic. We do such things preferably online on a short notice. But it could be that, say, three of us join in person and the others are online. We could express then explicitly that we contact a person in a country, and we broaden the meeting.

TS endorsed this idea that gave another option for meeting in person.

(Overview of discussions is presented in the order of their physical sequence)

Overview of discussions of Group 2 – Rapporteur Anne-Greet Keizer: In the first run we discussed ESAF in connection with other European players such as JRC, SAM, GCSA. ESAF is a very good platform to share best practices on metaquestions and challenges that we all deal with. There are questions like: How do you create an audience for your advice or how do you battle fake news. We also discussed how we can help each other best as ESAF, and on the other side, the EC and its institutions, such as JRC, SAM and the GCSA.

Then we had some concrete ideas. One is: a contact person in every country who can help you to find the right expert or expertise. Second: organise events to connect people both on a national and

international level. We can use the convening power of European institutions for that. They can also help on a national level to get processes started.

Some people from smaller countries added that sometimes they may need hand-holding from outside. To get the national process going, it is good to get some help from the European level to organise things.

It is always good to share your scientific expertise as Leopoldina has done the last year via its publications on COVID-19 and as the European institutions do. No problems for countries that produce staff in English, so use the products from countries that can do that. We can help each other in this.

The further discussion was very interesting because we were lucky to have Kristiann Allen from INGSA in the group. So we could brainstorm.

We concluded that if it concerns the future of ESAF, then in the end it is something that ESAF members have to discuss among each other.

We also concluded that the field of science advice in Europe at the moment is different from that it was in 2016–2017 when we initiated ESAF. One of the big differences is that now we have a very active JRC, which is organising workshops on national ecosystems. It is one of the ambitions that ESAF at the beginning also had. JRC has more capacity to organise this. Another difference is that SAM and GCSA have grown in their role as institutional bodies. They have more experience now. These are the reasons to text up the new situation.

Then, we agreed, also with Kristiann Allen, that we do not want to be fragmented as the science advice community in Europe or in the world. We want to look for added value. We should not get stuck in debate about the difference, or in organisational aspects (can we connect and in which sense, who can join a certain relation or group). Instead, we should but to pick a work in a common project, joint projects to get a joint focus, to get good energy. And we concluded that it is better to talk in terms of connecting than in terms of fusion.

We agreed on that in the Europe there are few very important players. ESAF is one but we also have the JRC, SAM, GCSA, and some other bodies. It is important to connect these on the European level. It would be great if the European community is also connected to the international community.

Overview of discussions of Group 3 – Rapporteur Alessandro Allegra: The discussion very much addressed the strength of ESAF, which is in (i) being close to the EU institutions and (ii) having some degree of formal mandate from the Member States. If the goal of ESAF is only exchanging best practices among existing mechanisms and help to build capacity and strength scientific advice on the level of Member States, it should play on these existing strengths. Closeness to the EU institutions and to the EU level is a key aspect of ESAF. It should be leveraged and valued. At the same time there can be forms of collaboration with other organisations and networks.

We discussed briefly what forms of support of a secretariat would work. It is important to have a rotation of chairmanship of ESAF but this could perhaps be separated from the administrative support (secretariat who coordinates that work) that could be organised in some other way.

Interactions with the European Parliament, SAM structure were also pointed out as an important aspect. There was a proposal to get together once a year with the Commission side with the SAM and JRC, the Parliament side represented by STOA, and ESAF as representing the Member States. These are three main institutions at the EU level, with the idea that ESAF could configure itself to some degree, in scientific advisory structure to support the EC. This was the original idea when ESAF was first set up. Still,

ESAF is a relatively young organisation and there is space to evolve and find its mandate and place, playing on its strong sides, and developing its less strong points.

Overview of discussions of Group 1 – Rapporteur Lene Topp: Much of discussions in our group addressed the same topics as the other groups and reflected the same points. It was considered important to keep the informality, to keep the exchange of information. It was stressed that even if some partners do not immediately react, the e-mails are being read and the information is being used. It is important to keep the exchange going.

We had a discussion about an option of having regional meetings or chapters, more informally, in addition to the annual meeting. The consensus was that it would be good to meet always together in order to avoid some information being limited to only some partners.

We also had a suggestion to inform the partners about being engaged in science advice locally or in other bodies, with the goal to share the lessons learned. The topics may also be interesting for other partners and/or in other countries.

The main conclusion was: keep continuing collaboration informally as it is now. Also, build collaboration with INGSA whenever it is beneficial for ESAF

TS opened the floor for questions and comments.

Jacques Verraes thanked the rapporteurs and noted that the basic paradigm is: what ESAF stands for? That is to promote science advice to policy-making. This is the way to improve the service that we can provide to society and that governments can provide to society. Would it be an idea to adopt a statement as ESAF to call on the Member States that we all represent, to ask ESAF to promote this introduction of operational functioning of science advice mechanisms in all European states?

DAY 2, 1 December:

[*The recording of entire Day 2*](#) (Password: ESAFmember)

Links to the slides of presenters can be found on the same page

(From the timetable)

10:00–12:30 Session 3: Steps into future

10:00–10:20 Experimental development of national science advice: The case of SOFI (Science Advice Initiative of Finland). Jaakko Kuosmanen, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters

10:20–10:40 The potential benefits of Trans-European collaboration in a network of experienced national science advisors within specific knowledge areas. Niels Halberg, Director of Danish Centre for Food and Agriculture

10:40–11:00 Central challenges to evidence informed policy making: The role of values and identities. David Mair & Mario Scharfbillig, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

11:00–11:10 Convenience break

11:10–11:30 Scientific advice during Covid-19 pandemic in Estonia: combining local data with global knowledge, Prof. Krista Fischer, COVID-19 science advisory board of Estonia

11:30–11:50 Developing the system of scientific advisers in Estonian ministries. Liina Eek, Estonian Research Council

11:50–12:10 European missions: how to integrate national research and science-based innovation programs to realize the expectations and challenges on the European and National level. Prof. Ričardas Rotomskis, Research Council of Lithuania

12:10–12:20 AOB and Conclusions

The chairman TS asked the participants whether they have some urgent aspects to discuss. This was not the case.

He also noted that ESAF members and other participants welcome questions and remarks via e-mail about their presentations. The Tallinn team would be happy to present the contacts.

TS formulated the three AOB topic: two routine items of the network and one more deep aspect.

(1) *Next annual meeting*. The ESAF Terms of Reference say that ESAF meets (at least) once a year. We have to agree soon about our next annual meeting. We cannot say now whether it will be a physical or hybrid event. The preference for many is a physical meeting. A feasible time slot is the very end of June. Hopefully it will not clash with the Research and Innovation Days. We ask the SAM unit to clarify whether there could be a clash with this or any other European-wide event.

Note added later: As there was some mismatch with the plans of EC/SAM unit and, more importantly, because of uncertainties caused by the aggression of Russia against Ukraine, the ESAF annual meeting was postponed to the autumn semester.

We also have to agree about which level of messages we provide to the annual meeting. Normally (at the first six meetings) the messages from the EC have been presented either at the Commissioner level or at the DG leadership level. We would like to continue at the same level.

The Terms of Reference say that every year the ESAF meeting is hosted and chaired by another ESAF member. Volunteers wishing to host and chair the next annual meeting are very much appreciated.

(2) *Chairmanship*. The Terms of Reference say that “Coordination and secretariat will be provided by an ESAF member for a period of three years”. It is a good tradition in such networks that the next chairman and coordinator is selected at least one year before he or she enters into the duty. Estonia was selected already two years ago in Dublin. Thus, next year (2022) we should think about the next coordinator and chairman of ESAF. Again, volunteers are very much appreciated.

(3) A very strong message was presented on the previous day by representatives of the SAM unit. They addressed *the future of ESAF*. (See pages 2–4 of the notes). It is a fundamental question for the network. We used to be an informal, non-legal entity, a loose network, representing views rather than formal positions; basically independent of the EC.

Jack Verraes suggested on the previous day an option to become a part of a large plan of the EC. This option was repeated in some other discussion elements. The point is to become a more organised entity and to take some more commitments.

As was noted on the previous day, the level of commitments [in the view of representatives of SAM] is close those that provide service to the EC. This is neither good nor bad per se. We just should think about the demarcation line between advice and lobby, and about another line between advice and decision-making.

The offer (or suggestion) includes combination of the rotation of ESAF chairmanship with a more permanent secretary financed by the EC. This would mean creation of a semi-legal entity.

TS mentioned that it was probably clear from the discussions on the previous day that Estonia [as a member of ESAF] was strongly biased towards informal actions. They work nicely even though this might be a feature of a small country.

There are some aspects which have to be clarified before we can make decisions about [this recommended] future of ESAF.

Technically, the question is whether ESAF members are happy with this kind of transition. We don't need to have consensus. If the clear majority wishes a transition, it is natural to undertake it. If the clear majority says "no", we have to continue thinking how we should shape the future.

There is another, much more fundamental issue that has to be clarified before we can accept to be a part of the big plan of the EC. Namely: whether this transition is compliant with the mandate from our governments to the ESAF members.

The ground principle of the EU is that member states make decisions. Some of us are civil servants. They have to consult their employers and/or their governments. Please do so. Please specify how large is your mandate in terms of decisions made in the ESAF that possibly impact back the Member States.

This is a fundamental governance question. We are invited, technically, by the EC and nominated by our governments (or government authorities). Our mandate has been designed against the existing ESAF Terms of Reference. If we take the offer by the EC, we have to change the Terms of Reference. This means that we have to check with our nominators whether what we do is compliant with our mandate. It is relatively urgent. The offer is interesting. There is a big plan but we are in a complicated situation in the light of the Terms of Reference.

Matteo Pardo asked whether the transition mentioned above to change the model of ESAF was proposed by a letter from the EC.

TS replied that the idea was proposed on the previous day by Jacques Verraes. He added that, from the viewpoint of the chairman as a bureaucrat, it cannot be done without changing the Terms of Reference.

Alessandro Allegra wished to clarify the idea/offer on behalf of Jacques Verraes. There is no request from the EC to ESAF. ESAF is an independent network. We are part of it and work with it. We made an offer. We think ESAF has reached a point of maturity now. It is time to start thinking what could be done more and how ESAF can fill its ambitions. Our offer was that we can look into ways of providing support in the form of funding of more structured secretariat. This is not a promise but an option. For us it would be important if ESAF could set up a working or operational group, to look what ESAF sees as its goals and the means to achieve these goals.

There was a lot of discussion about these aspects on the previous day. We all agree that meeting once a year is important but doing so would be hardly achieving the goal of strengthening the science advice ecosystem in Europe – to which the EC has strong interest. We want science advice to be strong in member states and in the EU, so that we can all work together. Thus, take our message as an offer to work together. As you have seen in these days, there is a lot happening. We would be happy to hear a proposal from you. For example, what do you see as concrete objectives of ESAF and how do you plan to achieve them. You can reflect whether you want to change your terms of reference.

SAM is holding a large conference "Science advice under pressure" in April in Brussels. On the margins of this conference there would be an opportunity to organise satellite meetings. One thing ESAF could consider is to convene your own meeting on the margins of this conference, to take advantage from the

presence of several high-level people on these days. The presence of the Commissioner does not depend on us.

There are several events planned to the end of June.

TS remarked that, to his knowledge, he did not use the word “request”, and if somebody did so, then it was meant to be a synonym of “offer”. He repeated that in order to take the offer, the mandates of ESAF members should be clarified.

The meeting was closed by TS with many thanks for all participants for the time they have invested.