

Science-policy high-level event: “Integrating science into the EU Green Deal”



30 September 2020, 15:00-17:00 CEST

Online event

Hosted by MEP Norbert Lins

Chair of AGRI Committee,

Vice-Chair of the EP Intergroup on ‘Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development’

Speakers:

- **Member of the European Parliament Norbert Lins**
- **Alberto Montanari**, President, EGU
- **Roby Biber**, Member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and of Bettembourg Municipal Council
- **Luc Bas**, Director, European Regional Office, IUCN
- **Iris Moeller**, Professor of Geography, Trinity College Dublin
- **Helen Glaves**, Vice-President, EGU
- **Member of the European Parliament Mohammed Chahim**
- **Anna Papagrigroraki**, Sustainability Director, Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI)
- **Erik van Sebille**, Associate Professor in oceanography and climate change at the Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research, Department of Physics, Utrecht University
- **Member of the European Parliament Stelios Kympouropoulos**

Opening Remarks

MEP Norbert Lins

“The EU needs to be innovative, creative, and not restrictive. Instead of banning technology and demonizing certain sectors, it would be better to foster science and enable all actors to use innovations”

To introduce the webinar, Mr. Lins **depicted the European Green Deal as «Europe’s man on the moon»**. Indeed, to realize such a challenge, the **EU needs to listen to science and to integrate the findings into the technology**. Accordingly, Mr. Lins stressed the importance of such an event addressing the integration of science within the EU Green Deal. Mr. Lins also highlighted the need for policymakers and politicians to **base their decisions on science rather than following an ideological pathway**, mentioning that without an integration of science into policies, Europe will never become the first carbon neutral continent in 2050. Finally, Mr. Lins also underlined the **necessity to foster innovation and to aim for a creative rather than a restrictive Europe**.

Introduction

Alberto Montanari, President of the European Geosciences Union (EGU)

“It is important to materialize in actions our ideals and our motivations”

First of all, Professor Montanari started by claiming that, **to be effective, every policy needs to be supported by knowledge, education and communication in order to gain public support**. To illustrate this point, Professor Montanari used the example of the COVID-19, which showed that policies were successful when supported by research and when research was able to gain public trust. Then, Professor Montanari disclosed the main missions of the European Geosciences Union (EGU), an inter-disciplinary and bottom-up non-profit organization with 20,000 members which is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in geoscience research and aims to provide scientific basis for sustainable development. After the description of EGU mission and activities, **Professor Montanari put the accent on basic research which sets the basis for our knowledge**. Moreover, Professor Montanari outlined the **importance of both applied and fundamental research for applying strategies and reaching the targets set by the European Green Deal**. Regarding the issues of biodiversity and pollution, Professor Montanari explained that those are complex policy issues based on science, reiterating that science is the key to finding solutions. To conclude his speech, Professor Montanari also launched the ‘How can the Geosciences support the European Green Deal’ document of EGU. Created by EGU, this document highlights specifically how the geoscience community can offer support within the biodiversity and pollution policy areas, and that may assist

policymakers towards reaching the European Green Deal targets. Finally, Professor Montanari expressed his hope that this event will foster better interaction between policymakers and scientists.

Panel Discussion on Biodiversity

MEP Norbert Lins

“Biodiversity is crucial for the future of our planet and we have to slow down the key ‘drivers’ for its decline.”

To introduce the panel discussion, Mr. Lins **reasserted the necessity to protect biodiversity for the future of our planet** and also thanked Professor Montanari to have pointed out the key role of science in this regard. Then, **three major elements regarding the EU Biodiversity Strategy were underlined**. **First**, Mr. Lins addressed the issue of EU protected areas, with regards to which there is a need for more relevant data in order to choose the right areas to protect in the future. **Secondly**, Mr. Lins addressed the issue of forests, for which he questioned the best future strategies for those specific areas, notably in terms of carbon sinks. The **third** element touched upon the soil management issue; specifically, Mr. Lins raised his concerns regarding the lack of strong science-based alternatives and solutions available with regards to the planned reduction of pesticides as highlighted in the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, which could therefore imply a reduction in agriculture yields. Finally, Mr. Lins addressed the panel, putting forward his question on “what are the solutions to those three issues at stake?”.

Roby Biwer, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and of Bettembourg Municipal Council

“Social sciences should not be forgotten. Many current societal challenges are far too complex for only one scientific discipline to deliver on”

Commencing his intervention, Mr. Biwer highlighted the fact that **local levels are lacking science-based expertise which often prevents the implementation of the right policies**. Mr. Biwer also underlined the Committee of the Regions’ (CoR) commitment to the European Green Deal, which notably attempts to put citizens and regions at its core. According to Mr. Biwer, **science can play a fundamental role for making the Green Deal a reality on the ground, providing innovative solutions, and producing reliable data**. Mr. Biwer explained that the CoR is already including science in its daily policymaking, but that this link between policies and science could even be stronger. Then, Mr. Biwer emphasized the broad scope of research within the CoR, and stressed the fact that all types of territories, without exclusion, should be subject to research. Moreover, Mr. Biwer reminded the audience that **social sciences should not be forgotten, since many current societal challenges need interdisciplinary research**. According to Mr. Biwer, **technology can be a precondition for new policies, but may not be sufficient to produce meaningful**

societal impact. To conclude his speech, Mr. Biber explained that science has few added values without good communication, which is key to increase citizens' awareness and involvement.

Luc Bas, Director, European Regional Office, IUCN

“What we definitely should not do is wait until we have the perfect lens from science and researches to know where to restore nature in Europe. We know already so much (...) so let's act now”

Mr. Bas started his intervention stating that IUCN is by definition an evidence- and science-based organization. Moreover, Mr. Bas underlined the **necessity to find an equilibrium between the political, societal and environmental levels.** Mr. Bas presented some examples of how science is also used within IUCN, notably regarding conservation targets or protected areas management. Furthermore, Mr. Bas emphasized the **promising and strong EU environmental commitments,** explaining that **in order to achieve concrete sustainable ecosystems there is still a lot of work to be done,** especially in the case of land use. Regarding the latter point, Mr. Bas pointed that the full implementation of the EU Biodiversity and Farm-to-Fork Strategies could result in some reduction in absolute production in the agricultural sector, but with more quality and better prices for farmers this should not have a negative effect on the market, especially when looking at the current amount of food waste produced. Finally, Mr. Bas claimed that there is a crucial necessity to bring policymakers and scientists closer. To conclude his speech, regarding the question raised by MEP Mr. Lins on collecting better data for improved protected areas management, Mr. Bas commented that **«we should not wait until we have the perfect picture to act», since there is a critical urgency to restore nature in Europe.**

Iris Moeller, Professor of Geography, Trinity College Dublin

“As scientists, we know that we can't engineer ourselves out of the situation, but we know that we can also turn a threat into an opportunity, because we have learned that biodiversity and landforms are interconnected”

Professor Moeller's intervention focused on **the role of science in improving the knowledge on coastal systems.** The vulnerability of those specific areas to climate change's impacts (such as extreme weather events or sea level rise) was then highlighted. Furthermore, Professor Moeller underlined the fact that **scientists could help turn natural threats into opportunities, since biodiversity and landforms are interconnected and based on dynamism.** The importance of ample space, in order to allow enough room for natural processes to operate, was also emphasized by Professor Moeller, additionally underlining the major role of science in understanding those natural dynamics that are necessary for ecological functioning of the coast and our landscapes more generally. A case study, exemplifying coastal change with dunes' migrating naturally along the shore over decades, was also presented. The latter illustrated the role of sciences in analyzing those phenomena, but also showed **the need for humans' sustainable adaptation and adjustment to those dynamics.**

Discussion with the audience, moderated by EGU President Alberto Montanari

The first question came from Professor Montanari, who asked the panelists how to efficiently strengthen the link between science and policymaking, especially in such particular times of COVID-19. **Mr. Lins then commented that for strengthening the science-policy nexus it is important for the science community to also establish direct contact channels with decision-makers.** The second question, raised by the audience, regarded the fact that some EU countries are not yet part of biodiversity databases. **Professor Montanari argued that there is a long way to go to build trust in science, as well as for the public to recognize the added value of European integration,** which results in some countries overseeing the added-value of participating in supranational programmes such as common databases. The next question was addressed to Mr. Bas who was asked to present **several examples of nature-based solutions.** **Mr. Bas reacted by explaining that there are two nature-based solution pillars: restoration projects and the protection of ecosystems.** According to Mr. Bas, both can have major societal benefits and must aim at important biodiversity gains. The last question concerned the place of science and the potential role of interest groups in the EU Biodiversity and Farm-to-Fork Strategies. In his answer, Mr. Lins highlighted the **lack of impact assessments in those strategies** and Mr. Biber reacted by saying that **there is a strong need to act on the ground.** Professor Moeller also added the **important nuance that her work as a scientist may not be policy-driven, but it is of high policy-relevance.**

Panel Discussion on Pollution

Helen Glaves, Vice-President, EGU

As a moderator of the second panel discussion, Ms. Helen Glaves welcomed the speakers by reiterating the importance of the science-policy nexus for the realization of the EU Green Deal. Moreover, Ms. Glaves praised the timely nature of the discussion on pollution, since the Zero Pollution Action Plan for Air, Water and Soil will be adopted in 2021.

MEP Mohammed Chahim

“Global R&I expenditure directly affects the climate change mitigation cost, by minimizing it.”

Mr. Mohammed Chahim began his intervention by stressing that **promoting and incorporating research and innovation (R&I) in the EU Green Deal is essential,** in order to meet the 2050 climate neutrality targets. Mr. Chahim also highlighted that **global R&I expenditure directly affects the climate change**

mitigation cost, by minimizing it, and in that line expressed his disappointment regarding the European Council's recent decision to cut a big share of R&I funds.

Anna Papagrigoraki, Sustainability Director, Confederation of European Paper Industries

“Policy making, businesses’ decision making and investments require accurate and reliable scientific data.”

Ms. Anna Papagrigoraki showcased during her intervention the importance of science in depicting the **interplay between industrial installations’ production on the one hand and the market and policy landscape on the other hand**. Additionally, Ms. Papagrigoraki stressed that policy-making, businesses’ decision-making and investments require **accurate and reliable scientific data** and highlighted that R&I is essential to achieve further reduction of emissions. Ms. Papagrigoraki concluded her intervention by underlining the **need to identify the areas where science could further clarify policy**, e.g. accurately portraying impact categories, like land use, within the industries’ and policy-makers’ carbon accounting methodologies.

Erik van Sebille, Associate Professor in oceanography and climate change at the Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research, Department of Physics, Utrecht University

“Digital twin environments are a tool that should be promoted, because it enables the scientific community to test mitigation strategies and find solutions, that can turn into policy.”

During his intervention Associate Professor Erik van Sebille focused on plastic pollution and underlined that **plastics in the ocean are widely-spread and very small in size** (microplastics). Therefore, the most effective way of tackling plastic pollution in the ocean, is **removing plastic from areas close to the coastline**, e.g. areas in the Mediterranean Sea and Southeast Asia, before they break down into microplastics and drift into the ocean. Associate Professor van Sebille’s key message was that **digital twin environments**, which are virtual simulations of our planet, are a tool that should be promoted, because it **enables the scientific community to test mitigation strategies and find solutions, that can turn into policy**.

In that line Ms. Helen Glaves took the opportunity to fully support the idea of digital twin environments and highlight that creating a digital Earth model is among the science objectives of the European Green Deal.

Discussion with the audience, moderated by EGU Vice-President Helen Glaves

The first question regarding the European paper industry's stance on the EU target to plant three billion trees by 2030 was answered by Ms. Papagrigroraki, who stressed that while **afforestation is important, regeneration of harvested areas and sustainable use of the raw materials should not be neglected**. Ms. Papagrigroraki also underlined that the target should be in line with circular economy and in that end investment in low carbon forest-based products is needed.

Moreover, in the context of the Q&As session Mr. Chahim and Associate Professor van Seville offered their insight into the potential of circular economy. Mr. Chahim commented on the European Commission's Raw Materials Strategy and highlighted, that while the identification of critical materials is necessary, **it is also essential to identify in which products those materials exist and to lay down a strategy for their sustainable and efficient use**. Mr. Chahim stressed that only then the energy transition will succeed, otherwise the **EU will transition from a fossil fuel- to a raw materials-dependence**. Associate Professor van Seville closed the Q&A session by underlining that the realization of a circular economy system requires not only innovation, but also **circularity-based product design** and **transparent communication** of consumer's expectations.

Reaction by MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos

"Science and innovation will play a central role in accelerating and navigating the necessary transitions."

Mr. Stelios Kypouropoulos began his intervention by mentioning the EU climate targets and highlighted that **science and innovation will play a central role in accelerating and navigating the necessary transitions**. In that line, Mr. Kypouropoulos underlined that one of the **main pillars of the European Green Deal is to stimulate innovation based on competitiveness**. Moreover, it was stressed that the environmental challenges need to be turned into opportunities and the transition needs to be just and inclusive for all. Additionally, Mr. Kypouropoulos pointed out that the European Commission should not only set targets, but also **draw a clear political pathway to achieve them**. Last but not least, Mr. Kypouropoulos highlighted that science will play an integral role in enabling the transition on a local and regional level.

Closing remarks

MEP Norbert Lins

Within his closing remarks, Mr. Norbert Lins reiterated the importance of the discussion on the science-policy nexus and highlighted that the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development” will continue fostering this discussion in the upcoming months.