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Bern, 8. Dezember 2023

Code of Practice for participants in the *Swiss National Science Advice Network*

Preamble

Science, understood in the broad sense of the German term ‘Wissenschaft’, plays a crucial role in informing policymakers by providing the best available evidence to enable decisions to be taken on complex issues. Providing government actors with scientific expertise is particularly important in acute crises, when rapid action is required and the state of knowledge changes rapidly. For this reason, the Confederation, in cooperation with the ERI institutions, is setting up a new system for the rapid activation of scientific expertise in acute crises.

Art. 1: Scope of application

The purpose of this Code is to bring clarity to the practice of providing science-based policy advice and to the roles of scientific experts before, during and after crises. It provides guidelines for participants in the *Swiss National Science Advice Network*. The network consists of large clusters of experts on crisis-relevant topics, each led by three to four coordinators, and of smaller ad-hoc scientific advisory groups during acute crises, led by a chair and vice-chair. If an ad-hoc scientific advisory group is set up at the beginning of an acute crisis and if a cluster exists in this field, the experts in this group may be selected from that cluster. The provisions of this Code of Practice apply to the participants in the ad-hoc scientific advisory groups, while some also apply to experts in clusters.

Art. 2: Institutional responsibilities

Participants in clusters and ad-hoc scientific advisory groups for crises do not act as representatives of their respective institutions, but as recognised experts in the relevant fields from the Swiss higher education and research landscape. The formal nomination of participants in ad-hoc scientific advisory groups for crises is made by the relevant office in

the Federal Administration. The ERI institutions, represented by their presidents, have the right to propose participants in consultation with the Federal Administration. As soon as an ad-hoc scientific advisory group for a crisis is in place, it acts and communicates independently of ERI institutions.

Art. 3: Principles of science-based policy advice

1. Science-based policy advice plays a different role from other forms of policy consultancy. It is expected to follow best scientific practice, be non-partisan, evidence-based and independent and to be given without financial compensation for the experts involved.
2. Science-based policy advice can be given in different formats and settings, including formal hearings, meetings of mandated advisory councils and informal exchanges with policymakers.
3. Policymaking must consider aspects other than just scientific information, in particular societal values and interests. Scientific evidence alone is never sufficient for decision-making.
4. An engaged and open dialogue between policymakers and experts based on trust, mutual interest and understanding is the foundation for good science-based policy advice. The commitment of both sides not to interfere in each other's tasks is key: experts may expect their scientific work and advisory activities to be free of political influence, and policymakers may expect scientific advisors to stay out of policy decision-making.
5. Good science-based policy advice typically requires not only expertise in a particular discipline, but also interdisciplinary perspectives, so that policymakers have as comprehensive a view of the situation as possible.
6. Scientific expertise made available to policymakers should also be explained to the public as clearly and transparently as possible. Therefore, scientific advisory bodies need clear guidance on how to communicate with the public (see Art. 6).

Art. 4: Roles of experts in science-based policy advice

1. Scientists and scholars working with policymakers may take on different roles, depending on the specific policy situation, the demands made by policymakers and their own expectations.
2. As participants in clusters and ad-hoc scientific advisory groups for crises, experts are expected to give advice that is policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive. For this, they act as 'honest brokers', in contrast to the interest-based roles of lobbyists or advocates. Honest brokers advise policymakers about the current state of certainty and uncertainty in their field of expertise, highlight the implications of their findings, develop realistic

scenarios, and outline different policy options, explaining their respective risks and benefits. Honest brokers thus do not recommend one specific course of action.

3. The role of honest broker for scientific policy advisors corresponds to the three-phase model in the communicative mission statement issued by the Federal Council and the Federal Administration.¹ This model divides public communication into ‘problem formulation’, ‘discussion’ and ‘decision’ in order to support ‘the public’s right to understand the decision-making process’. Within this structure, scientific policy advisors – as honest brokers – participate in problem formulation and discussions, but not in the explanation of decisions.
4. The state of scientific knowledge can change rapidly, especially in acute crises. Scientific advisors must therefore continually tell policymakers what they know, what they do not know, what can be done to increase the level of knowledge, what policymakers and the public can do if knowledge is incomplete, and that scenarios and options for policymakers may change with new knowledge.

Art. 5: Responsibilities of experts in clusters and ad-hoc scientific advisory groups for crises

All participants in clusters and ad-hoc scientific advisory groups for crises must

1. adhere to general rules of scientific integrity and standards of good scientific practice²;
2. base their information and advice on the available evidence and be open about uncertainties and incomplete evidence, aiming to provide balanced and transparent assessments;
3. disclose actual and perceived conflicts of interest and commitments, including commercial interests (e.g., businesses owned, contracts awarded), research interests, funding secured and applied for (past and present), as well as previous instances of providing expert opinion and testimony;
4. consider the risks of advising or supporting specific political interest groups, especially the risk of the selective instrumentalisation of scientific results to further political interests.

Art. 6: Communication in normal times

1. Participants in a cluster are in regular exchange with public administrators and political authorities to prepare for possible crises. The content and results of these meetings are normally confidential.

¹ See [‘Information und Kommunikation von Bundesrat und Bundesverwaltung. Leitbild der Konferenz der Informationsdienste’](#), Bern 2015, S.5.

² See [‘Code of conduct for scientific integrity’](#), Bern 2021.

2. The cluster coordinators are responsible for communicating with the public on behalf of a cluster. They consult with the Confederation's crisis preparation units before publication.
3. Participants in a cluster are free to express themselves publicly, but as individuals and not on behalf of their cluster.

Art. 7: Communication in acute crises

1. Participants in an ad-hoc scientific advisory group become part of the crisis unit of the Federal Administration, where the guidelines for crisis communication issued by the Federal Chancellery apply.³ Participants should adhere to these guidelines on condition that their scientific independence is guaranteed. They are free to speak publicly on scientific issues in their field of expertise, but do so in coordination with the chair and do not speak on behalf of the group.
2. The chair or vice-chair is responsible for communicating with the public on behalf of an ad-hoc scientific advisory group. They may involve other participants in the group in communicating with the public or delegate communication tasks to them on topics where their expertise is of particular importance.
3. Policymakers and scientific advisors should jointly ensure in their communication with the public that the scientific independence of the ad-hoc scientific advisory group and its participants is always ensured. For this, it is important that scientific advice is not instrumentalised to justify decisions. Under the conditions of honest brokerage, scientific advice only provides options for action, decisions have to be politically legitimised. Therefore, policymakers cannot claim that they are 'following the science'.
4. Different crises require different forms of communication. The specific communication requirements for an ad-hoc scientific advisory group are defined in its respective crisis guidelines. If experts are given access to classified information, confidentiality applies with respect to this information.
5. The chair, vice-chair and other participants in an ad-hoc advisory group are free to express themselves critically to policymakers in direct exchanges during crises, but they are expected to refrain from commenting in public on political matters relating to their advisory work. This helps to avoid misunderstandings among the public about their role and to maintain mutual trust in the advisory process.
6. The public should be informed whenever possible about scenarios and policy options developed by ad-hoc scientific advisory groups and about the reasons for the political decisions. (see Art. 4.3). Ideally, expert scenarios and policy options are published before

³ See 'Krisenkommunikation. Koordination der politischen Kommunikation durch die Bundeskanzlei bei Ereignissen von nationaler Bedeutung', Bern 2022.

decisions are made. However, in acute crises, time pressure may lead to simultaneous communication. Public announcements by the chair and vice-chair of the ad-hoc scientific advisory group are coordinated with policymakers. 'Coordination' refers to the timing, form and clarity of communication, but not to the content, in order to preserve the independence of scientific advice.

7. If the public announcements made by the crisis unit contain false information with regard to scientific evidence or statements from the ad-hoc scientific advisory group, its chair or vice-chair may ask the head of the crisis unit to correct the information. The crisis unit should keep a written record of such corrections. This helps to maintain public trust in both science and government.
8. After resigning from an existing ad-hoc advisory group, (former) participants are expected to be cautious and responsible when commenting in public on political matters relating to their field of expertise. In all cases, former participants will not share confidential information from their previous work.

Art. 8: Transparency

1. The public has the right to know who is advising politicians, what their field of expertise is, and what they are advising politicians about. Therefore, the names of experts in clusters and scientific advisory groups for crises are published with their respective specialisations and particular research foci. Equally, documents resulting from science-based policy advice activities, specifically policy briefs and policy reports, are published in an open-access manner.
2. If documents may not be published or may only be published after an embargo period, the procedure for this must be agreed in advance between the experts and the authority concerned in the specific contract.
3. Consultations and discussions in clusters and scientific advisory groups must be as free, open and critical as possible in order to ensure that the best possible advice is given. Therefore, the content of internal discussions in clusters and scientific advisory groups should not be communicated to the public and all participants are expected to maintain confidentiality about such discussions.

Glossary

1. 'Policy' in this Code of Practice refers to public policy, i.e., laws, plans, regulations, or guidelines (potentially) adopted by a government, a public institution, or an international organisation in order to address a problem.
2. 'Policymaker' refers to a person responsible for political decision-making, i.e., responsible for or involved in formulating, amending, or enacting public policies. A policymaker can be an employee, advisor, or elected member of the executive or legislative branches. A policymaker can also be a member of an international organisation, or of a political party.
3. 'Crisis Unit' refers to the 'Krisenstab' of the Federal Administration that monitors and assesses the crisis situation, provides guidance to the Federal Council and prepares options for decision-making by the Federal Council.
4. The dialogue between science and policy encompasses two types of activities that should be separated to the extent possible in order to ensure mutual trust:
 - a. **Science for policy:** Activities in which scientific expertise is offered to policymaking. This includes activities such as science-based policy advice, public engagement on policy issues, or engagement as scientific experts in political organisations or advocacy groups.
 - b. **Policy for science:** Activities to achieve favourable framework conditions to conduct scientific research (i.e., 'science-friendly policies'). Such activities do not fall under this code of practice.
5. 'Science-based policy advice' refers to a subcategory of science for policy and encompasses all activities in which scientists advise policymakers on public policy positions and decisions based on their expertise, including in policy design, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Science-based policy advice is the main focus of this code of practice.