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Innosuisse – Schweizerische Agentur
für Innovationsförderung

Communication

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Scientific policy advice in crises

The institutions in the fields of education, research and innovation (ERI) welcome the implementation proposal for the involvement of scientific advisory bodies in crises, which the Federal Council has approved. With this, instruments were created that will enable scientific expertise to be incorporated into the management of future crises as quickly as possible. Processes and a clear division of roles between science and politics were predefined.

Science is to be more closely involved in the Confederation's crisis management. The Federal Council has approved a corresponding implementation proposal. The ERI stakeholders swissuniversities, the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, the ETH Board, Innosuisse, the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Swiss Science Council have worked together with the Confederation to draw up regulations, including a codex that clarifies the division of roles between science and politics in future crises. This ensures clarity about the process of co-operation in the run-up to crises and ensure broad backing in the scientific community.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Swiss scientific institutions were concerned to strengthen scientific policy advice in times of crisis. The scientists, supported by the universities and other research institutions, put their scientific expertise at the service of society, politics, and administration. This promotes exchange between the various stakeholders, particularly regarding major societal challenges such as digitalisation, climate change, energy, health, and economic crises.

With this implementation proposal, ad hoc scientific advisory bodies will be involved in crises if the Federal Council deems this appropriate when activating a cross-departmental crisis organisation. In such a case, swissuniversities will be contacted and serve as an interface to the federal government. The six major scientific organisations in Switzerland will jointly propose experts for participation in an advisory committee. The Confederation then confirms the nominated experts as members of this committee. A framework agreement for scientific advice is signed by the Federal Chancellery (FC), the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) and the six scientific organisations.

To ensure effective scientific policy advice, the BFI institutions have drawn up a code of conduct that clarifies the roles of the members of the advisory body and their clients. In times of crisis, the members of the advisory body position themselves as honest and independent communicators of scientific findings. They provide policymakers and administrators with the relevant foundations, draw

up event scenarios and develop options for action, assessing the respective opportunities and risks. The scientific advisory body is independent in its work and recommendations. The head of the advisory body communicates externally in coordination with the mandataries. The recommendations of the experts in a crisis are made publicly accessible in consultation with the chair of the advisory body.

To ensure that the planned processes and structures effectively work in future crises, a network of researchers must be in dialogue with politicians and administrators even in non-crisis times. If necessary, an ad hoc advisory body on a specific topic can be quickly constituted from this network in a structured process.

The scientific organisations are convinced that both research and politics have drawn their lessons from the pandemic and can integrate them successfully in overcoming future crises.

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