

Final conference on Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe

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Speech by the Secretary-General of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Loes Mulder, on building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking.

Thank you to the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre, DG REFORM and the OECD for this initiative and the roadmaps you delivered for the seven participating countries. I cannot imagine a more urgent time to address this issue.

Let me start with a question: who of the people present here, went to university? I am hoping that some people did not- for science should not be exclusively for what is called “highly educated” people. It is important for the whole of society. In the Netherlands we try to speak of a wide array of types of education -we use the image of a Japanese fan as an illustration for this- instead of the terms “higher” and “lower” education.

We all need science. Especially now that we see that, and I quote Robbert Dijkgraaf, president of the International Science Council:

"Governments and ideological movements increasingly impose their views on scholarship. Verifiable facts are deliberately undermined by 'alternative facts'.

It's an easy prediction that the political and ideological pressures will intensify. Since science pushes society forward, society inevitably pushes back. When scientific findings influence our behavior – dictating what we should eat or how we should travel – it becomes tempting to shoot the messengers bringing uncomfortable news, rather than heed their sensible advice.

The great challenge for the scholarly community will be to preserve and strengthen academic freedom. Push back against the push-back.

This demands more from the scientific community.

Excellent research by itself is not enough."

How, then, do we restore public trust in science? We need scientific help here as well. What communication and action will help us to restore trust?

One thing I know for sure: we as public servants need to combine “science for policy” with “policy for society”. Meaning: we need to co-create our policies with the people and professionals our policies are for.

As Paul 't Hart, Dutch professor of public administration at the University of Utrecht, stated: “we need to work on our competence to listen”. To use science for policy in an effective way, we need to understand the world as our citizens perceive it.

We also need to understand the importance of implementation, and work to co-create with our implementing agencies. If we do not really see who we are working for, and what is needed to make policies work, science alone will make us smarter, but not more effective.

In the Netherlands, many of our government agencies have been struggling to implement European guidelines. Our agencies were not involved enough in creating the guidelines, and there was no central funding for the implementation. This in turn means disappointing European citizens in one way or the other. This will only fuel anti-European feelings. That is why we also need to co-create at the European level.

Regarding the Joint Research Centre report on evidence based policy making in the Netherlands, we recognize the recommendations in the report. Many of the proposed actions are already in the implementation phase. This response is, I am saying jokingly, the most effective way to ignore a report. Just say: "yes, thank you, this supports our policy". But really, we are working on it- and we need to do better. Especially as ministries together.

In The Hague, we have been hearing from our Dutch advisory and scientific councils that they feel that often their reports are not taken seriously. And this is true. Some of the solutions are in the *Joint Research Centre report* on evidence informed policy. However, I think the real key for using science in policy is what civil servants are really for: *a long term approach*.

Recently the Dutch *State Committee Demographic Developments 2050* stated in their report that the Netherlands has to answer the question: what country and economy do we want to be in 2050? I think the real question is: what country CAN we be in 2050? And the same goes for the EU: what CAN we be in 2050, given our values and principles and the current state of the world?

We are sure of certain trends for 2050: scarcity of labour, ongoing technological development, warmer and more extreme weather, ageing population, fragmentation of the world order.

Together with all ministries, we have asked the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy to define the most important benchmarks for 2050 for those trends, based on all available scientific material.

The goal is to establish this for all policy development, whether the new policy measures are regret, no-regret, or beneficial considering the benchmarks for 2050.

Based on the benchmarks, the ministries will co-develop long term agenda's on broad subjects like the physical living environment, safety and security, health, demography and income policy. In this context, the Ministries of Social Affairs, Health, Education and Justice will draft together an agenda for the social domain.

These long term policy and regulation agenda's will help our advisory and scientific bodies to plan their reports in a way that there is a real opportunity to use them. Also we'll invite them to work together with us on these broader themes.

We are in a time where we need science for our major societal transitions. For our national and European defense. For climate change, to promote alternative energy sources, to strengthen

our care systems and deal with our shortage in housing. For technological innovation to boost economic growth, while coping with shortages in labor. To make sure we are less dependent on countries outside the EU. Let alone, less dependent on tech companies outside the EU.

Now I will share some of the actions we are already taking in line with the recommendations of the Joint Research Centre roadmap for the Netherlands.

Nearly two years ago we started in the Netherlands a Science for Policy Team. The team can support policy teams across the civil service to facilitate the relationship between scientists and policy makers. For example, the team is working together with policy colleagues on how to address tensions in the society, or AI and the labour market.

The team also explores options for science fellowships, to bring researchers for a period of time into the Ministries.

We really have loads of reports and insights to use. We need to prepare this information for our policy makers in practical ways, as they do not have the time to read all week. Therefore, we are exploring possibilities to strengthen the knowledge infrastructure across different Ministries.

Furthermore, we are looking into the option of hosting a Chief Science Advisor. Typically this is a full professor who temporarily joins one or more Ministries and is given high-level access to advocate directly for evidence-informed policy making. In short, we do what bureaucrats do, we discuss structures and new forms – but we really want them to work.

I think we all agree science needs to be free. It is not okay to ban words, let alone discard groups in our society like LGBTi and Muslims, or just half of the population... women. You know, the ones that give birth.

But it is also important to stay free in all aspects. For example, the worries of people on migration are not to be dismissed. Now more than ever, we need to think through what it means for the EU to support international human rights. Not from a moral high ground, but as a sincere interest. With our current national asylum systems we spend more money than the UNHCR spends worldwide. Refugees drown, are abused while traffickers grow rich. This is not a matter of good or wrong, politically right or left. We need policymakers and science to have an open mind and truly look into alternatives.

We know from science that people are most happy in societies which uphold democracy and human rights. The question is how we can sustain that in a changing world order. In the

meantime, it is up to all of our institutions to uphold the human rights we sealed into our constitutions, for all European citizens.

These years are crucial for the future of Europe. We need policies that will work in practice. We need to involve European citizens and companies in all we do. We need to stimulate and use scientific insights in all we do.

This report is truly helpful and I hope it will inspire the EU as a whole. We can be so powerful, given the beauty and freedom in ways of living in the EU. We need to invest in a long term agenda using knowledge and science to innovate and successfully make the transitions of our time. With the people and companies we work for. Inclusive for the whole of society.

Thank you.