



Founded by the national science academies of the EU Member States, EASAC acts as an authoritative voice of science in Europe, taking pride in its complete independence from outside funding bodies and its access to outstanding European scientists. **Dr Christiane Diehl**, Executive Director of EASAC, reveals more

How does European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) ensure that it provides an effective and recognised collective voice of science in Europe?

Through EASAC, the EU National Academies of Science bring together Europe's best scientists. Each of these academies already comprises a group of scientific excellence. Together within EASAC, the academies constitute a pan-European, independent and highly effective network of leading European scientists.

The recognition of EASAC as a collective voice of science in Europe is based on its membership. All 24 National Academies of Science that exist within the EU are united in EASAC (there are three Member States that do not have a national science academy). Furthermore, the pan-European academy Academia Europaea and the association of All European

Academies (ALLEA) are part of EASAC. More recently, the representatives of the national science academies of Norway and Switzerland have become members of EASAC's full assembly.

Building science into policy at EU level is a considerably large task. What methods or approaches are you exercising to enable successful implementation of your policy contributions?

EASAC first tries to find the appropriate topics for its reports and recommendations. For this, we have established scientific Steering Panels for the current three wider EASAC programmes: Biosciences, Energy and Environment. The Steering Panels carry out our 'horizon scanning', trying to find new relevant topics from within the European scientific community. We also have contacts within the European Commission and European Parliament to ascertain the demand for science-based



advice on specific questions. Once we have agreed on a topic, we form a working group consisting of widely respected and outstanding experts who together can cover it in some breadth. The formation of a working group is always accompanied by an open call for evidence. At every stage of compiling the scientific analysis and advice we make sure that we have quality-control mechanisms in place. In order to time delivery correctly, we again get in touch with our contacts in Brussels. Lastly, we communicate our findings in a succinct way and often produce so-called 'lay summaries' of our reports which make the topics accessible to a wider audience. These documents are also used by many of our member academies to engage with their national public.

EASAC has access to some of Europe's best scientists, available through an association which brings together 24 National Academies of Science in the EU. What areas of science are being explored by these scientists at present?

The scientists of the EASAC network explore all the natural sciences one can think of! In this sense, EASAC covers all of science in the original meaning of the word. To a certain extent, the organisation covers a little more than the classic natural sciences. Because European academies are not all structured in exactly the same way, EASAC has a number of members that also represent the medical sciences. However, EASAC has an excellent working relationship with Federation of European Academies of Medicine (FEAM), the association of the medical science academies of the EU. Whenever addressing issues that are largely of medical nature we cooperate with FEAM, as we did for our latest report, on 'Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing'.

Are there any areas, challenges and issues you are currently focusing on in the Energy Programme?

At the end of last year, we published our report *Concentrating Solar Power: its potential contribution to a sustainable energy future* and are still doing some follow-up work on that. This year we will finalise our

recommendations on 'Carbon Capture and Storage' and what the EU's policy should be in this area from a science point of view. We have also started a project on the 'Nuclear Fuel Cycle' with special input from our member academy the Royal Society and in collaboration with the JRC. And the first meeting of a new EASAC working group on 'Breakthrough Technologies for a Low Carbon Future' will take place in autumn.

Could you explain your relationship with the National Science Academies of Africa (NASAC)? What are both parties hoping to achieve from this collaboration?

Most science questions with a political dimension of relevance for Europe also have global implications and global relevance. For some of its recent reports, EASAC has worked on topics that resonate strongly with challenges that many African societies are facing today, such as the threat of infectious diseases or the contribution of plant genetics to food and agriculture. Given the growing links between the EU and the African Union (AU), closer contact with the science academies in Africa was of interest to us. Then in 2011, the global network of science academies, IAP, which comprises over 100 members, decided to organise itself through regional networks. EASAC became the affiliated IAP network for Europe and the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) assumed the same role for Africa. Now both networks want to strengthen their contacts and the exchange between European and African scientists. Where appropriate, we would like to present a joint perspective on politically relevant science topics to the policymakers of the EU and AU.

As Executive Director, what are your roles and responsibilities in EASAC? What attracted you to this position initially?

My role comprises discussion about the strategic aims of EASAC, the execution of its goals and the overall coordination of all EASAC's activities. I am involved in the process of identifying topics, setting up

THE PICTURES SHOW THE GERMAN NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES LEOPOLDINA, WHERE THE EASAC SECRETARIAT IS LOCATED
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working groups, being in contact with Brussels policy makers, supporting the completion of reports and recommendations and preparing the public launches of those recommendations. I am also responsible for the six-monthly meetings of EASAC's full assembly and other internal meetings. Furthermore, I am the first point of contact for a number of our partners, such as for the JRC, IAP or NASAC.

What attracted me to the position was the real need that EASAC is fulfilling in Brussels. Put bluntly, the institutions of the EU are constantly bombarded with the opinions of a plethora of different interest groups. There are, however, very few organisations who can claim to present a disinterested scientific view on those science topics that are of crucial political relevance to the EU today.

What are your hopes for EASAC in the near future? Are there any new activities in the pipeline or ideas that you are hoping to develop?

Over the coming months, we hope to further strengthen our links to policy audiences in Brussels, to strategically develop our resources to tackle more issues and to welcome new members to EASAC, as a result of further growth of the EU. We also want to strengthen our links with the JRC, FEAM and those parts of the European institutions for which our work is of most relevance, while maintaining our independence which is a key feature of EASAC.

As mentioned earlier, EASAC has become the affiliated network for Europe of IAP. The other three regional networks are NASAC (Africa), IANAS (the Americas) and AASA (Asia). We plan closer cooperation with these sister networks of science academies. Apart from working together on concrete global questions of science advice for policy making, we engage with them in a debate about how science academies can best communicate their independent policy advice and also make a contribution to informing the wider public. Together with the other networks EASAC seeks to address the most important societal issues that are underpinned by science – the global Grand Challenges that humanity is facing.

Why is the EASAC Secretariat hosted by the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina?

After EASAC was founded in 2001, the Secretariat of the organisation was managed and hosted by the British Royal Society for nine years. As hosting the Secretariat implies considerable staff and other commitments by the host academy, it was agreed that this responsibility should be shared more widely within the group of EASAC members. The German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina has a great interest in European science cooperation. It therefore offered to take on the task of managing the EASAC Secretariat. In April 2010 EASAC's Secretariat therefore moved from London to Halle/Saale, an old university town one hour south-west of Berlin, where the Leopoldina has been based for the past 140 years.

It is important to stress that the physical location of the Secretariat at the Leopoldina in Germany does not detract from the pan-European character of all of EASAC's activities. Most of the meetings of our Steering Panels and Working Groups take place either in Brussels or in other European capitals. For the past two years, through the support of the Royal Belgian Academies, EASAC has also had a small office in Brussels, which has been very useful for showing more presence there.

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