

Science adviser role in the new European Commission in limbo



BRUSSELS—Anne Glover's mandate as chief scientific adviser (CSA) to the president of the European Commission ended last month, when the entire commission left office—and it is still unclear how and where the new administration will get scientific advice.

Glover's post doesn't exist anymore, and her service's website was archived on 1 November. She remains on the commission's payroll until February and assured *ScienceInsider* she has no intention to stay at the commission after that date. Until then, however, Glover cannot speak publicly as CSA anymore, and she may not be able to attend the second meeting of the European science advisers' forum—an informal group she helped create—at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam on 4 December.

The new commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, who took office on 1 November, has been swift to propose changes to the commission's overall structure, but has dodged specific questions about the adviser's role. "President Juncker believes in independent scientific advice," but has not yet decided how to "institutionalize" that function, says Mina Andreeva, a spokeswoman for the commission. "We simply cannot say what's going to happen," says Jan Marco Müller, Glover's aide. Juncker may keep

the role and even strengthen it, or go for a different structure.

While governments in the United States and the United Kingdom have had science advisers for decades, most European countries don't have similar roles and rely instead on advisory committees or learned societies. Many scientists say the position should return in the new commission, however—including Glover herself. "I hope the role of CSA will be continued as we have made so much progress in just less than 3 years, and there is overwhelming support for the role," she says, adding that she's briefed Juncker about possible options for the future.

Some observers say the delays don't necessarily bode ill for the status of scientific advice. "I'm not surprised this [transition] is taking a bit of time," given the long list of appointments and issues that Juncker's dealt with in the past months, says James Wilsdon, a professor at the Science Policy Research Unit of the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

Alberto Alemanno, a professor of E.U. law at HEC Paris in France, adds that Juncker needs time to come up with a solid plan, after two recent controversies turned scientific advice into a "sensitive issue."

During the summer, Glover's job [prompted a heated debate](#), when several nongovernmental organizations urged Juncker to scrap the single-headed role, which they deem opaque and vulnerable to industry lobbying; in response, many scientists told him to save Glover's post. Later, Juncker sparked outrage when he proposed shifting the oversight of drugs and medical devices from the health commissioner's portfolio to the industry commissioner's helm. Many scientists, consumer organizations, and members of the European Parliament opposed the plan, arguing that public health should take precedence over business concerns—and Juncker relented.

Juncker did announce changes in the policy advice area: He abolished the Bureau of European Policy Advisers, the commission division that housed Glover's office. Instead, he wants to set up a European Political Strategy Centre, starting 1 January 2015, that will focus on economic and social issues, sustainable development, foreign policy, institutional policy, and communications, with a particular emphasis on foresight studies, the president [told reporters here on 5 November](#).

The change of administration and the controversies provide an overdue opportunity to reflect about the design of the commission's science advice system, Alemanno says. In a [paper published last month in the *European Journal of Risk Regulation*](#), Alemanno writes that there was no public debate when Glover's post was created in 2011 after an industry push. "We never really asked what it would bring, but the added value was very limited and the costs were very high in terms of reputational damage" to the commission, Alemanno tells *ScienceInsider*, adding that Glover's job description was both vague and narrow, leaving her "in an institutional black hole."

Alemanno says the role could be filled by a committee instead of a single person. But Wilsdon, for one,

says scrapping the CSA "would be a retrograde step," because the role gives science a privileged, high-level voice.