

SCIENCE FOR POLICY IN AUSTRIA – A SURVEY OF EXPERT COUNCILS AND THEIR AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of “science for policy” in Austria and provides a systematic mapping of institutionalised, science-based expert councils with a legal basis. It starts from the observation that, although evidence-based policymaking has become a guiding principle, the practical organisation of scientific policy advice remains fragmented. Rather than relying on large think tanks, the Austrian system is characterised by a plurality of advisory bodies, research institutions, and individual actors. Based on a systematic screening of federal ministry websites, 62 advisory bodies were identified and assessed in terms of their legal foundation and scientific orientation. The intersection of these criteria results in 12 permanent expert councils with a clear scientific basis.

The findings reveal a concentration of such councils in policy areas characterised by high complexity, such as economic, health, and integration policy. They also indicate that scientific advice is particularly in demand in contexts marked by uncertainty and information asymmetries. The article concludes by identifying key conditions for effective science for policy in Austria: institutional autonomy combined with a clearly defined mandate, trust-based interaction with policymakers, adequate resources, and targeted capacity-building for advisory roles. In doing so, the article combines an empirical mapping with conceptual reflections on strengthening evidence-informed policymaking.

Keywords: *Science for Policy, Expert Councils, Evidence-Based Policymaking, Science-Policy Interface, Institutional Autonomy*

1. INTRODUCTION

“Political decisions should be made based on evidence” (Austrian Parliament, 2023). This is the opening sentence of a report on evidence-based legislation by the Austrian Parliament and reflects the desire to improve the quality of political decisions through scientific research and analysis. In this regard, “evidence-based policy-making” has become a guiding principle of modern governance and is often associated with the expectation that political decision-making processes are more closely aligned with systematic evidence.¹

Politics draw on scientific analyses and findings to benefit from the public’s trust in science (see OeAW, 2025). When a scientific study has established empirical evidence, it could help legitimise political measures as well as increase public acceptance of them. Scientific expertise is often regarded as a particularly valid form of knowledge generation in political processes and is consulted as such. Consequently, it is also used as a colloquial “protective shield” against partisan criticism. Even if the relationship between science and policy is not always conflict-free and does not proceed smoothly for all parties involved, information and legitimation are the two essential functions of science in political advisory work.

In Austria, scientific policy advice is provided less through large, well-established think tanks known in the U.S. sense. Here scientific policy advice is provided through numerous advisory bodies (i.e., advisory boards, councils, commissions, expert groups, etc.), science-oriented institutions, and individuals with a concentration in specific policy fields (see Kevenhörster, 2021). This article attempts to provide an overview of the Austrian landscape of these scientific policy bodies. In particular, it focuses on those expert councils that are institutionalised, have a legal basis as well as a clear scientific base. It is preceded by conceptual considerations for classifying advisory structures, as well as a general overview of the advisory landscape in Austria.

1 It should be noted that the terms “evidence-based policy,” “evidence-informed policy,” and “science-based policy” are all in use, and each reflects a different degree of separation between science and policy. Since, “evidence-informed” implies a weak relationship and “science-based” conceptually excludes sources of knowledge that do not lie within the realm of science. The term “evidence-based” seems the most appropriate to the author.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW

Consulting structures in science and politics interface are diverse – Austria is no exception – and, therefore, a structured framework for analysis is necessary. Presented in Figure 1 is a drafted suggestion of the Austrian institutional organisational diversity. On the “supply side” for science-based policy advice are at least three areas that can be distinguished.

Firstly, counselling structures are an embedded activity at Austrian universities and non-university research institutions, including the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW), the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO), and the Institute of Advanced Studies (IHS). In universities, science-for-policy activities are carried out by staff under a third mission output alongside their core missions of research and teaching. Additionally, in the non-university research institutions, policy advice is notably stated to be one of the central tasks.² Accordingly, this interaction between policymakers and institutional policy counselling takes place in three different ways:

- (1) Individual members of institutions advise policymakers on an individual basis, either informally or in an official capacity as advisors. In this role, they speak out publicly, issue recommendations, and are explicitly consulted by policymakers. The degree of proximity to or distance from politics and the level of involvement in political decision-making processes can vary. Currently, generally accepted procedures or guidelines set by the employer are not in place; however, they would be desirable.
- (2) Policy advisory work is not conducted on an individual basis, but rather within the framework of commissioned projects or studies. For example, policymakers issue a call for proposals, and members

2 The Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) explicitly includes policy advice among its tasks; its patron is the current Federal President, and the chair of the senate—a body designed to strengthen the link between science and politics—is held by the current President of the National Council. The Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO) is legally classified as an association, with the social partners serving as its governing members. WIFO serves as a key advisory body to the federal government, and its economic forecasts form the basis for the preparation of the federal budget. The Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is also legally classified as an association. Its members include ministries, the Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB), and the City of Vienna. Its economic forecasts also serve as essential tools for political decision-making.

of universities or non-university research institutions respond to that call. The projects or studies are carried out, and interim and final reports are submitted to policymakers and discussed with them. In contrast to individual advisors, guidelines exist for this type of third-party externally funded research (e.g., AIT, IHS, JR, WIFO, 2022).

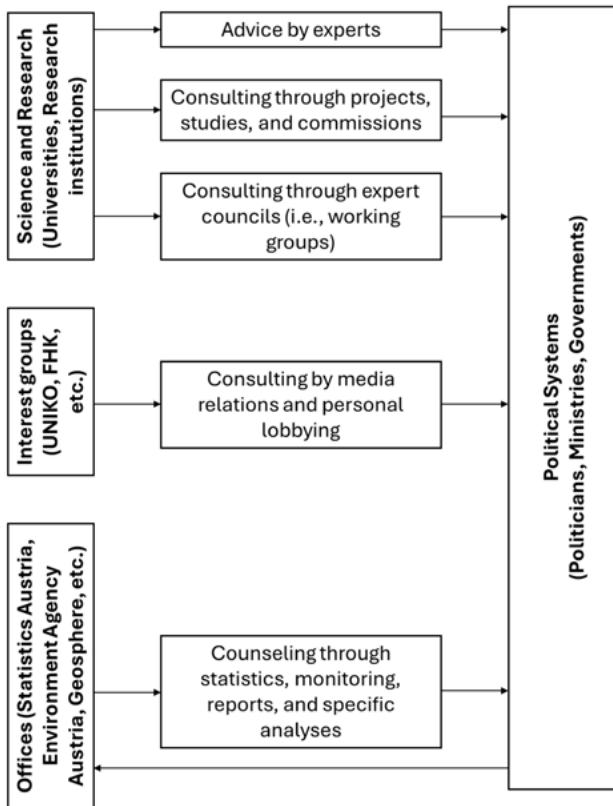


Figure 1: Providers and recipients of science-based advice

Source: Compiled by the author

- (3) Finally, it is worth mentioning institutionalised advisory bodies (committees, commissions, councils, working groups) that are established either on a temporary or permanent basis and are composed primarily or exclusively of researchers. These advisory

groups may have a legal basis or be established based on a political mandate. Interaction with the politically mandated side –that is, the government, individual ministers, or political parties – is not unidirectional; rather, there are feedback loops, dialogue, and sometimes joint public relations work. Many advisory groups establish their own rules of procedure and possess human resources.

The second area on the “supply side” for science-based policy advice is interest groups representing an institutional sphere of policy advice. Interaction with the political sphere here is less about consultation and more about presenting demands. The exchange, therefore, is mostly unidirectional: driven by press releases, lists of demands, and lobbying. In accordance, feedback from the political sphere is limited. The missions of interest groups are clear: higher education, research, and education policy should be shaped in their interest; “Science for Policy” (S4P) becomes an influence on “Policy for Science” (P4S). Examples of such interest group representations include the Universities Austria (UNIKO), as the voice of Austria’s public universities, the Austrian University of Applied Sciences Conference (FHK) for all 21 Austrian universities of applied sciences, the Austrian Conference of Private Universities (ÖPUK), and the Rectors’ Conference of Austrian University Colleges of Teacher Education (RÖPH).

Lastly, the third area for policy advice involves statistical offices, as well as specific agencies controlled by the public sector. These offices and agencies provide science-based answers for specific questions in the form of statistics, reports, and special surveys. Typical examples include agencies and offices dealing with the environment, climate and weather, geology and natural resources, and population trends. The degree of autonomy of the office itself is lower than that of universities and research institutions. Their areas of focus are predetermined, and their governing bodies are appointed by the public authorities. Nevertheless, they employ scientific methodologies, and the results are derived using scientific methods and are based on established professional standards. Examples for this area of science-based policy advice include the Environment Agency Austria (UBA-GmbH), a 100% state-owned entity and former department of the ministry; the Austrian Agency for Health

and Food Safety GmbH (AGES), state-owned and controlled by two ministries; GeoSphere Austria, a federal institute for geology, geophysics, climatology, and meteorology; and, Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG), which is legally separated from the ministry but whose board of trustees is chaired by the respective federal minister. Moreover, the direct political proximity of smaller and privately organised economic research institutes is even more pronounced. For example, the Momentum Institute is primarily funded by the Chamber of Labour, Agenda Austria by Austrian companies, and ECO-Austria through membership fees from the business sector as well as by civil society.

3. ANALYSIS OF EXPERT COUNCILS: RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

The diversity of institutions and forms of interaction has become clear from the overview of providers of science-based advisory services in Figure 1. However, a more narrow focus is necessary. This article specifically focuses on expert councils, commissions, and working groups. Scientific advisory work by individuals is certainly important, but empirically difficult to track. The advisory work through studies or projects is also relevant, but extremely extensive and similarly difficult to survey. And the recommendations of statistical offices, federal agencies, or meteorological institutes have mandates that extend far beyond immediate policy advice and are thus not fitting the scope of this article.

In analysing these expert councils, the following questions take centre stage:

- Which expert councils (commissions, working groups) can be documented, and which of these are science-based and permanently established? Does “policy” tend toward ad hoc flexibility, or do they consider S4P as permanent?
- In which policy areas do these advisory groups operate, and what arguments explain this distribution pattern?

- What structural characteristics do these advisory groups exhibit in terms of their size, appointment process, and resource allocation?

To address these questions, the following steps were taken:

First, the websites of all federal ministries were screened, and the advisory groups listed there were entered into an SPSS-compatible file. In total, and after critical review, there were 62 relevant advisory groups selected. The critical review consisted of contacting the corresponding federal ministries to verify whether the advisory groups still existed and whether the information provided online was accurate.³ It is possible that one or more advisory groups have not been identified, as they were not mentioned on the ministries' websites or they were overlooked even after personal inquiries to the ministries. Overall, this is considered unlikely to have been a frequent occurrence.

In the second step, the available documentation on the advisory groups (primarily their corresponding websites) was used to determine whether there was a legal basis for their establishment. This revealed that of the 62 publicly announced advisory groups, 43 advisory groups have a legal basis and 19 advisory groups are based on ministerial decisions. A legal basis did not always prove necessary. The "Expert Council for Integration", for example, is defined in § 17 of the Integration Act (IntG), while the "Development Policy Advisory Board" (Entwicklungspolitische Beirat) is defined in § 21 of the Development Cooperation Act (Entwicklungszusammenarbeitsgesetz (EZA-G)). On the contrary, the "Consulting Board for Inclusion and Special Education" (Consultingboard für Inklusion und Sonderpädagogik) was established solely as an initiative of the Ministry responsible for Education without a premeditated legal basis. In conclusion, in the analysis, 69% of the advisory groups have a legal basis and therefore are considered to have a longer-term perspective.

In the third step, the scientific basis was assessed in relation to the legal mandate and its members. This turned out to be a difficult decision when

3 One point to note: If one includes the additional advisory groups at the state and municipal levels (very often planning, design, and building committees), one very quickly arrives at several hundred advisory groups that operate at the intersection of science and politics to varying degrees.

the legal mandate lacked clarity. While many advisory groups include members from universities or research institutions, if they remain in the minority or science has no direct connection to the advisory group's mandate, the approach taken was to classify them as having no scientific basis, or only a weak one. For example, the Ministry responsible for Transport established an "Advisory Board for Historic Vehicles" (Beirat für historische Fahrzeuge) in accordance with the Motor Vehicle Act (Kraftfahrgezet (KFG)), but its members include social partners, insurance companies, and automotive experts. There has been no apparent connection to science. By contrast, scientific expertise and practical relevant experience in the medical field are mandatory for the members of the "National Vaccination Board". Here, the scientific basis has clearly been established. Overall, around 19% of advisory groups are constituted to have a clear scientific basis, and a further 21% have a partial one.

This classification of advisory groups having a scientific basis inherently involves a certain degree of ambiguity. The Climate Assembly, for example, is designed in such a way that representatives of the population express and consolidate their interests and opinions. However, the scientists who support and guide the Climate Assembly possess an important role. Is the Climate Assembly science-based or not? Not in theory, but very much in practice, which is why it is also presented below.

Conversely, advisory groups may have a scientific focus, but they were established without a statutory mandate and are consequently temporary by nature. Particularly during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of advisory groups were established – often comprising individuals with high scientific standing – that are not permanent in nature. These temporary advisory groups, although science-based, have therefore not been included in the analysis.

Overall, the intersection of the criteria "duration based on a statutory mandate" and "clear scientific orientation through the mandate and membership structure" yields a total of 12 expert councils (see Tables 1-7), which will be listed and described further below by policy area.

4. ECONOMIC AND FISCAL POLICY

The Fiscal Advisory Council⁴ is an independent advisory body that analyses budget implementation and, in particular, the development of public debt in the context of national and international capital markets. The chairmanship is held by a scientifically distinguished individual. The Fiscal Advisory Council emerged in 2013 from the former Government Debt Committee and is presented as the “independent body for monitoring compliance with budgetary rules,” as required by the European Union (EU). The members of the Fiscal Advisory Council are not necessarily actively engaged in academic research, but they are nonetheless recognised experts in the field. As the Fiscal Advisory Council maintains a public presence, it can publicise its findings in the media, thereby also building political pressures.

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Fiscal Advisory Council	Monitoring the public budget, in particular, financial debt; analyses, reports, and political advice.	15	6	Federal government, social partners
Austrian Productivity Board	Analysis of the competitiveness of the Austrian economy; analyses, reports, policy advice	5	6	Federal government, social partners (employers and employees)

Table 1: Institutionalised advisory groups (Science for Policy) in the field of economic and financial policy
Source: Compiled by the author

Additionally, the Austrian Productivity Board⁵ is another advisory body in the field of economic and fiscal policy. The establishment of

4 www.fiskalrat.at/en/

5 www.produktivitaetsrat.at/en/

the Productivity Board followed the EU Council Recommendation 2016/C 349/01. It is an independent advisory body composed of five members who are not bound by instructions from the government and who come from the so-called fields of economics, productivity, and competitiveness. These members are appointed by the federal government and its social partners. The Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB) and the Parliamentary Budget Office participate in the meetings in an advisory capacity only, as do other individuals with expertise and research experience. The central task of the Productivity Board is to analyse Austria's competitiveness against the backdrop of an ageing society, economic transformation, and in a global context. The Productivity Board advises policymakers directly and indirectly through intensive public outreach.

5. SOCIAL AND HEALTH POLICY

One advisory body to be highlighted in the field of social and health policy is the Commission on the Long-Term Financing of Pension Systems, also known as the "Pension Security Commission".⁶ It is a body established by law (BGBl. I Nr. 29/2017)) with 20 members and a chairperson. Members are appointed by the social partners, the trade union, the Senior Citizens' Council (Seniorenrat) and the Youth Council (Jugendrat), as well as by selected ministries. In the Pension Security Commission consultation, independent members from the science community are in the clear minority. The Pension Security Commission task is to prepare expert opinions and reports on the medium- and long-term development of the statutory pension insurance system and to make proposals to ensure its financial sustainability. However, the Commission's political context ensures that its proposals are cautious and effective only in the long term. Furthermore, the body – and particularly its chair – is bound by confidentiality, which does not facilitate a political implementation of proposals.

6 www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Soziales/Sozialversicherung/Alterssicherungskommission

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Pension Security Commission (Alterssicherungskommission)	Preparation of expert opinions and reports on the medium and long-term development of the statutory pension insurance system; to make proposals to ensure its financial viability	20	5	Ministries, trade unions, social partners, senior citizens' council (Seniorenrat), youth representatives (Jugendrat), science
Supreme Medical Council (Oberster Sanitätsrat)	Advising the respective Federal Minister of Health on all matters relating to the health care system	44	3	Ministry or Minister
Gen Technology Commission (Gentechnikkommission)	Advising the relevant ministries on fundamental issues relating to the application of genetic engineering and the enforcement of the Austrian Genetic Engineering Act (GTG)	25	5	Ministries, social partners, OeAW, universities and others
Bioethics Commission (Bioethikkommission)	Advising the Federal Chancellor on all social, scientific and legal issues from an ethical perspective that arise in connection with the development of science in the field of human medicine and biology	15	3	Federal Chancellery or Federal Chancellor
National Vaccination Board (Nationales Impfgremium)	Technical advice to the Minister responsible for health regarding vaccinations	Minimum 8 (currently 17)	3	Ministry or Minister

Table 2: Institutionalised advisory groups (Science for Policy) in the field of social and health policy
Source: Compiled by the author

In the field of health policy, the Supreme Medical Council⁷ should also be mentioned. It too is established by law and serves as an important advisory body to the minister on matters relating to the health care system. This council issues recommendations and expert opinions that provide a technical basis for health policy decisions. The Supreme Medical Council currently comprises 44 members, and the chairmanship has been entrusted to the current rector of the Medical University of Vienna. The range of issues addressed by the Supreme Medical Council is very broad, as its role is to advise the respective Federal Minister of Health. The legislature has not limited the council's scope, which tends to be a disadvantage. The argument of this article is that if policymakers do not clearly state what they want, "Science for Policy" becomes a difficult undertaking, because the committee must identify the issues on its own without knowing whether there is an audience for the answers. In addition, the Supreme Medical Council is bound by confidentiality, restricting its option to approach the media on its own initiative.

Other important advisory bodies in the field of health include the National Vaccination Board⁸ and the Genetic Engineering Commission (Gentechnikkommission). The National Vaccination Board – internationally comparable to the Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) in Germany – is an independent expert body that issues vaccination recommendations for policymakers. The Vaccination Board determines which vaccinations should be administered, at what age, and in which health policy-relevant situations. The National Vaccination Board is composed of experts with scientific knowledge and practical experience; it operates independently and played a key role in supporting health policy decision-making, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Genetic Engineering Commission (Gentechnikkommission (GTK)) advises the competent authorities on the enforcement of the Austrian Gentechnik-Gesetz (GTG) as well as on fundamental issues regarding the applications of genetic engineering (e.g., field trials or placing products on

7 www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Oberster-Sanitaetsrat

8 www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Impfen/Nationales-Impfgremium

the market). The Commission consists of representatives from ministries dealing with genetic engineering, social partners, and scientific experts (from the natural sciences, medicine, and ethics). The latter are publicly recruited by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) and selected by the General Assembly of the OeAW. Genetic Engineering Commission (Gentechnikkommission) is independent and issues recommendations that are submitted to the respective ministries and, in the form of a report, to the Austrian parliament as well.

The Bioethics Commission⁹ is an advisory body based in the Austrian Federal Chancellery that advises the Federal Chancellor on all matters related to the further development of human medicine and human biology. Its composition is highly interdisciplinary. The legislation stipulates representation from the fields of medicine, molecular biology, genetics, law, social sciences, philosophy, theology, and psychology. Contextually, the commission is concerned with issues such as cryopreservation (freezing and storage of egg cells or embryos), compulsory vaccination and the handling of scarce resources in healthcare. Notably, there exist some personnel overlaps with other advisory bodies in the health sector, which have been observed and are legally allowed. The position of the commission includes ethical and sensitive questions, which are also considered by legislative policymakers.

6. MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION POLICY

An interesting advisory structure was established in early 2010 around migration and integration policy, partly as a response to social problems and the failure of policymakers to address them over many decades prior. The Federal Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for this topic at the time, initiated the development of a National Action Plan for integration and established two advisory bodies. One of these bodies, the Advisory Committee on Integration¹⁰, was and remains an institutionalised forum bringing together officials responsible for

9 www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/en/topics/bioethics-commission

10 www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/integration/advisory-committee-on-integration

integration at the federal and state levels, with the participation of social partners and several NGOs.

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Expert Council for Integration	Evaluation, prioritisation, and development of integration policy measures	13	5	Federal Chancellery

Table 3: Institutionalised advisory groups (Science for Policy) in the field of migration and integration policy
Source: Compiled by the author

The other body, established by law, is the Expert Council for Integration. The Expert Council for Integration¹¹ comprises 12 experts, primarily from the academic community. This independent expert council evaluates the politically agreed-upon proposals of the National Action Plan for Integration, prioritises them, and makes recommendations for their concrete implementation. In addition, it independently addresses issues and develops policy measures for the areas relevant to integration policy: education, language, employment, housing, the rule of law, and values. The Expert Council is credited with helping to shape the debate on integration policy and providing impetus for the development of an integration monitoring system.

7. EDUCATION POLICY

In the field of education policy, there is a legally established advisory body known as the Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education (QSR)¹² (Qualitätssicherungsrat für Pädagoginnen- und Pädagogenbildung). It was established to ensure that teacher education programmes are quality-

11 www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/integration/expert-council
12 www.qsr.or.at

oriented and demand-based. The legislature deemed this necessary because it wanted to ensure that the curricula developed autonomously by providers of teacher education programmes adhere to these specific goals and principles. Ultimately, universities and colleges of education train students in the field of teacher education for a single labour market; therefore, significant differences would not be beneficial. Accordingly, the QSR issues standardisation assessments during the review process of all teacher education curricula, which must be taken into account. In addition, the QSR monitors and analyses teacher education as a whole, compares national developments with international ones, and develops proposals for further development for the concerned ministry responsible for education.

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education (Qualitätssicherungsrat für Pädagoginnen- und Pädagogenbildung)	Observation and Analysis of the Development of Teacher Education in Austria	6	5	Ministry or Minister

Table 4: Institutionalised advisory groups (Science for Policy) in the field of education policy
Source: Compiled by the author

The six members of QSR are appointed for a term of five years. They act independently in the performance of their duties and are not bound by any further instructions. The QSR is supported in its work by an administrative office and reports annually to Austria’s Parliament.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE POLICY

The former Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology took a different approach to developing policy measures. These were not proposed by experts, but by a randomly selected panel of about 100 people. Statistics Austria

selected these individuals from the population of people aged 16 and older who had their primary residence in Austria for at least five years.¹³ The members were guided, informed, and supported by a 15-member interdisciplinary team of scientists, which in turn turned out to play a very important role in setting the agenda for the assessment. Ultimately, 80 recommendations were put forward by the members of the Climate Assembly; these were prepared by the expert team but adopted by the Climate Council through a vote.

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Climate Assembly	Discussion and development of proposals for the measures required to achieve climate neutrality by 2040	100+15 (Experts)	Project-specific	Ministry or Minister

Table 5: Institutionalised advisory groups (Science for Policy) in the field of environmental and climate policy

Source: Compiled by the author

Importantly, the Climate Assembly¹⁴ does not fit into the “Science for Policy” framework, as science had to take a back seat when the idea of citizen participation was implemented. This is a deliberative participatory format whose design has been described as innovative, yet it is also the subject of critical debate regarding its representativeness and openness to different outcomes. Potential members had to actively fill out a questionnaire and commit to serving on the Climate Assembly. This resulted in a self-selection process for those who were

13 The process is considered complex and problematic. Statistics Austria contacted a total of 2,003 people selected at random from the population register in two rounds and asked if they would like to participate in the Climate Assembly. In addition, all participants were required to be vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19 and to have undergone a PCR test, as pandemic control measures were in effect. Furthermore, a questionnaire on the topic of climate change had to be completed. Of the 2,003 people contacted, only 145 met all the requirements, and 128 ultimately agreed to participate in the Climate Assembly.

14 www.klimarat.org/english/

particularly interested in the topic. Thus, the questionnaire conflicted with principles of random selection. This may be one reason why the 80 recommendations were adopted almost unanimously. Moreover, the framing had been predetermined, as climate protection measures were the focus, and not the socio-political consequences.

9. SECURITY POLICY

Unlike the Climate Council, the Science Commission at the Federal Ministry of Defence (BMLV) does not deal with political decisions, but rather with autonomously defined topics relevant to security policy. The advisory group was established in 1992 as a commission¹⁵ pursuant to Section 8 of the Federal Ministries Act (BMG). The commission’s term of office is five years and consists of sixteen core members with executive functions. Additionally, six sub-advisory boards and their members are invited to contribute their expertise in military history, military medicine, the social sciences, security policy, defence technology, the natural sciences, and economics. One of its central tasks is to advise the relevant minister on issues pertaining to the ministry’s portfolio based on scientific research findings. Thus, the Science Commission serves as a link between the ministry and scientific institutions.

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Science Commission of the Ministry of Defence (BMLV) (Wissenschaftskommission beim BMLV)	Scientifically sound advice to the department on broadly defined security policy issues	16 (Executives)	5	Ministry or Minister

Table 6: Institutionalised advisory groups (Science for Policy) in the field of security policy
Source: Compiled by the author

15 www.bmlv.gv.at/wissen-forschung/wisskomm

In 2024, the Federal Crisis Security Act (B-KSG) came into force in Austria. The act established a new framework for the government-wide coordination of national security and crisis management in order to better address challenges such as natural disasters, infrastructure failures, or pandemics. Accordingly, an Office of Crisis Management was established within the Federal Chancellery, headed by a National Security Advisor. It remains unclear whether science will play a role in the prediction and management of crises in the spirit of S4P, or whether a new and permanent advisory structure will emerge as a result.

10. RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION POLICY

Following a political reform, various advisory groups in the area of “Policy for Science” were dissolved and replaced by an overarching advisory body, the Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology and Innovation (FORWIT)¹⁶. It is a legally established committee that submits proposals to the federal government for the further development of research, science, innovation, and technology development. FORWIT comprises twelve members whose qualifications are precisely defined by law and who are appointed by the ministries with research responsibilities. Additionally, the Federal Chancellery appoints the chair, which underscores the importance of this committee.

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership (in years)	Nomination by
Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology and Innovation	Advising the Federal Government on research, science, innovation, and technological development	12	4	Federal ministries with research responsibilities, Federal Chancellery

Table 7: Institutionalised advisory group (Policy for Science) in the field of research, technology, and innovation policy
Source: Compiled by the author

16 www.forwit.at/en/

The FORWIT committee itself operates independently of any directives, has its own administrative office, and acts autonomously. FORWIT is organised as a legal entity under public law with full legal capacity and is funded by the federal government and submitted statements that can influence political decision-making processes.

In the field of “Science for Policy,” other institutions also make public statements and recommendations, as has already been noted (see Figure 1), but these are not advisory committees in the strict sense, rather interest groups such as previously listed UNIKO or the FHK. The degree of consistency and political effectiveness of these public recommendations also depends on coordination within the sector.

11. SCIENCE FOR POLICY – IS IT EFFECTIVE?

The above compilation of advisory institutions and committees has documented the diversity and complexity of those bodies. However, it also suggests that scientific advice is in demand, particularly in policy areas characterised by high complexity and significant information asymmetries. Economic policy is a good example of this, as economic policy is complex, and the achievable goals are contradictory. Those who pursue an expenditure-oriented policy may accelerate inflation, those who invest too little risk a potential economic downturn. In such situations, there is often a demand for scientific expertise, particularly in the form of economic analyses, as has also been the case in the health sector. In questions regarding the approval of vaccines, the control of epidemics, or the use of genetic engineering, policymakers justifiably rely on scientifically advisory bodies.

Is “Science for Policy” successfully implemented in Austria? This question cannot be answered easily and continues to be a subject of further analysis (see OECD, 2020). Not only have the criteria for successful advisory work yet to be uniformly developed (see König, 2024). But also, based on the author’s own observations and experience – as a scientist, head of an advisory group, and minister in charge – several recurring dimensions can be identified.

1. **Autonomy.** A high degree of autonomy is considered conducive to an active and, indeed, successful consulting work. Those who dictate everything and leave no leeway for advisory bodies will only receive the answers that were ordered. On the one hand, scientific expertise can only flourish if it is not overly restricted thematically. On the other hand, too much autonomy is detrimental because, at the end of the advisory process, the interests of policymakers may be missed. If policymakers only specify broad subject areas (health, education, and economy), the committee may lose its way. Conclusion? The greatest possible autonomy within a clearly defined subject area is necessary.
2. **Trust.** Trust-based relationships are considered a key prerequisite for the effectiveness of consultation processes. Firstly, a resilient relationship of trust is based, on the one hand, on careful handling of the media. If politicians learn from the media which policy measures their advisors recommend (or oppose), it seriously jeopardises trust. On the other hand, a resilient relationship of trust is based on careful interaction with one another. It requires political engagement on the part of the academic community. It is important to consider what is reasonable and what is not for a politician to be advised in a specific situation. This also includes concrete expertise regarding what is politically feasible and what is not. An advisory body must accept this limitation on its scope of thought if it wishes to be heard (see König 2024, p. 7). Those who do not accept this should not take on the specific task. Secondly, politics should accept science, not misuse it for political purposes, and not shy away from strong personalities as chairs of advisory bodies. Independent and professionally qualified leadership can enhance the visibility and impact of advisory bodies. Politicians should also accept the findings of science and not alter, omit, or otherwise manipulate them to suit their own purposes. Reports should always be published, as anything else jeopardises trust within an advisory body, as well as public trust in the advisory process.

3. **Resources.** The availability of human and organisational resources is considered an essential prerequisite for ongoing consulting activities. Members of advisory bodies usually have full-time jobs that are amply demanding. Therefore, it is important to facilitate advisory work as much as possible. This can be done by providing a secretariat to aid in literature research, schedule meetings, and ensure that resources are available to address knowledge gaps. Active advisory bodies have a secretariat, meeting spaces, and staff that provide academic support.
4. **Training.** Strategic institutional support and capacity-building for evidence-based policy advice are becoming increasingly important for institutions at the intersection of science, research, and policy (advice). Members of these institutions should be trained for the task of policy advising; they should practice dealing with the media, and they should also learn to cope with attacks from social media or political opponents. Meanwhile, institutions should make their members aware that the line between scientific advice and political enforcement must not be crossed. Particularly, the Vienna Theses on Policy Advice, developed by the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the OeAW, have clearly established this (see OeAW, Leopoldina, 2023).

Science for policy can contribute to evidence-based policy-making. When Science for Policy is done well, both politics and science benefit equally. Politics gain in quality, and science learn what drives political action. The “epistemisation of the political” can therefore entail potential risks, particularly with regard to possible tensions with democratic negotiation processes. But under suitable conditions, scientific evidence can serve as a resource for improving political decisions, and this originally critical formula can thus also be a normative demand (see Bogner, 2021).

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Biography

Heinz Faßmann was a professor at the TU München and University of Vienna, Vice-Rector at the University of Vienna, the Chair of the Expert Council for Integration at the Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, a founding member of the Expert Council of German Foundations for Integration and Migration in Berlin and member of the Commission on Migration of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior. He has been serving as Austrian Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research between January 2020 to December 2021 and served in the same capacity from December 2017 to June 2019. He is a permanent member and President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Academia Europaea and his achievements have been recognized with a number of awards.