

Translation of the article “Die unbequemen Wahrheiten der Anne Glover”, appeared in Der Tagesspiegel May 15, 2015, written by Astrid Herbold on **Anne Glover**, Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at Robert Bosch Academy and former Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission.

The uncomfortable truths of Anne Glover

Can researchers influence politicians? The Scottish biologist was the first scientific advisor to the EU – until she fell victim to an intrigue.

Cross, disappointed, bitter? No, Anne Glover certainly doesn't seem so. She looks very cheerful sitting in the small library of the Robert Bosch Stiftung in Französische Straße in Berlin-Mitte. Berlin? It's so inspiring! The other fellows at the Robert Bosch Academy? Fascinating people! Anne Glover, 59 years old, a biology professor from Scotland, smiles and talks and crackles with energy.

However, she would have every reason to be dissatisfied and disillusioned. It is just a few months since the scientist was unceremoniously ejected by the European Commission. A brief email, not sent by President Jean-Claude Juncker or his team, but by another member of the Commission, put an abrupt end to her three-year tenure as Chief Scientific Adviser in November 2014. This makes her the first and possibly also the last scientific policy adviser to the President of the European Commission. "It was always clear that my appointment was temporary", she says.

Suddenly she's out – and there is no successor

The lack of all dialogue was nonetheless unexpected. Since September 2014 she had been trying to make contact with Juncker, had put forward proposals outlining what the position could entail in future. But Juncker has no time or no use for a scientific adviser. Glover is ousted from one day to the next and no successor is appointed. The scientific community throughout Europe is outraged; Glover gets the backing of well-known colleagues and research institutes.

What had happened? To understand the story properly, one has to step back a few years. In 2001 Anne Glover, who has a PhD from Cambridge, was appointed Professor for Molecular and Cell Biology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Soon she became interested in the funding of research and scientific policy. She was active in numerous national committees and advisory bodies. Almost by chance, Glover then became the first scientific policy advisor to the Scottish government in 2006. "It was a friend who pointed out the job advertisement", she says.

She brings emergency planning policies up to date

It's jumping in at the deep end. Neither she nor the Scottish government have detailed ideas on how scientific evidence can be integrated into day-to-day government business. Glover virtually has to invent her own role. She laughs, "They didn't exactly know what they wanted, and neither did I." But in retrospect it was probably the best thing I ever did in my life."

For five and a half years, until 2011, Anne Glover works as an adviser in Scotland. The government team is small, decisions are taken quickly, she sets lots of things in motion. She tackles the reorganisation of primary school education, funding models for universities, collaboration between researchers and companies in Scotland – and also the updating of emergency planning measures in the light of modern scientific research. herself she is not enough informed about a special issue, she gets advice from colleagues, and translates their recommendations into a language politicians understand. "I saw my role as to prepare scientific evidence in such a way that the government could draw conclusions from it." The working relationship was fruitful and Glover loved the job. She had "such a good time", she said.

Gathering the evidence

In 2009 José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission at the time, takes notice of Glover. He is looking for a scientific adviser to report to him directly. They have several meetings. Barroso also invites other candidates, but the position is not officially advertised. Today Glover says that was not a good idea, it was "not transparent".

In 2012 she moves to Brussels. It's hard for her to get started. Glover only has a very small team, Barroso doesn't have much time, and nobody else has been sitting waiting for her advice and recommendations either. What are her duties supposed to be, what topics is she responsible for, how is her expertise meant to trickle down? Nobody knows. Glover again has to invent her own role. Relatively quickly she decides to make one thing very clear: "I didn't want to do politics for science, but science for politics." She calls it "gathering the evidence".

Reliable and independent advice for politicians

That is her main concern, that is the subject she keeps returning to: it must be possible to inform political decision-makers reliably and independently about the status of current research; to explain to them what is considered to be scientifically proven, where there is a broad consensus among researchers on the one hand, and what is still disputed or insufficiently researched on the other. If politicians knew these facts they could either base their decisions on them – or deliberately choose to ignore them. But then they could not claim afterwards that they had not been reliably informed.

Take gas production by means of fracking, for instance. Glover observes the arguments brought forward in the European Parliament. States that have gas

reserves deny the scientifically proven risks. "Politis cites scientific evidence when it suits them, and pushes it aside when it disturbs their plans." Anne Glover decides to make her role as chief scientific adviser bigger, more radical, more sweeping. She doesn't only want to provide Barroso with personal briefings, which on the explicit request of his cabinet she is not even allowed to publish. She wants to put the debates in Brussels on a scientific footing. Between 2012 and 2014 she puts together two high-calibre expert groups. Glover's vision is for scientists from different countries and disciplines to compare notes on topics of great political significance for Europe and to work out a joint position. Nothing more. "That is where the role of science ends", she says. What topics could they be? Glover enumerates some of them: "climate change, genetically modified crops, use of pesticides, fracking." The scientists' reports were to be presented to the Commission. And of course the research methods had to be transparent and the sources made public.

Anti-GM activists spread false information

That sounds nice in theory. In practice, Glover's enthusiasm for evidence is put to a tough test. Because she repeatedly expresses her public support for genetically modified crops, because she never tires of pointing out that from a scientific perspective this technology is safe, she quickly becomes a target for Greenpeace and other NGOs in Brussels. Someone spreads false information online, claiming she used to work for the US company Monsanto, which also sells seeds for genetically modified maize.

"That was a lie", she says. "I have never worked for Monsanto, never advised them, never met them, nothing." The only purpose was to discredit her publicly. "They wanted to make me look like a puppet of big business." She was particularly surprised and disappointed that it was precisely the NGOs who refused all dialogue with her, ignoring scientific evidence and not hesitating to use underhand tactics. "That is not something you expect."

No one knows whether the argument, which resulted in an open letter from some NGOs to Juncker last July, had anything to do with the decision not to appoint a successor to Glover's position. Now everything that Glover initiated has come to a standstill. The expert groups no longer meet.

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Despite all this, the biologist is confident. "The genie is out of the bottle", she says. That is one of the reasons why she has been in Berlin as a Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy since spring. Political interest in scientific advice is immense, she says, especially in Germany. Now the EU wants to set up a panel of seven researchers instead of a single person to advise the European Commission, as was announced on Wednesday. Maybe they will be able to pick up the networks created by Glover.

She will no longer be involved in an active capacity. For now she is in Berlin; in June she will resume her professorship at the University of Aberdeen. She is very much looking forward to it, "There's so much to do!"