

Minutes of the September Plenary Meeting of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies

Brussels, 11-12 September 2019

1. Approval of the agenda and minutes

2. Nature of the meeting: non-public

3. List of points discussed:

- Updates from the Commission and EGE members
- Discussion on Gene Editing Opinion (draft chapter on plants, gene drives, humans, animals, cross-cutting issues)
- Discussion on the EGE draft statement on the role of ethics

DAY 1: 11 September 2019

Updates from the Commission and EGE members

- An overview was provided of the forthcoming changes to the political structure of the European Commission, including the re-organisation of political portfolios under the Commission Presidency of Ursula von der Leyen.
- Updates were given regarding the August 2019 meeting of the WHO expert advisory committee on developing global standards for governance and oversight of Human Genome editing; the forthcoming UN-led Global Ethics and Bioethics Week (14-18 October 2019); the forthcoming meeting between the EGE and the Chinese Academy of Science (24 September 2019) and the EGE's participation (represented by Christiane Woopen) at the European Commission Research and Development days session on Gene Editing (26 September 2019).

The discussion then moved to the draft Opinion on gene editing.

The meeting was chaired and moderated by Christiane Woopen, Chair of the EGE.

Discussion on Gene Editing Opinion

Discussion took place on the draft texts constituting the four 'issue areas' of the Opinion (humans, animals, plants and gene drives). Members focused on distilling the key concerns that the EGE wishes to highlight on each major issue area and identifying the main positions to be taken by the EGE.

➤ **Chapter on gene editing in plants**

- The content and detail of the chapter was welcomed, while allowing scope to adjust the framing to reflect the narrative structure developed at the July working session.
- Specific points were made pertaining to issues of safety, traceability, biodiversity, climate change, food security.
- It was deemed necessary to develop on and strengthen the key ethical concerns, key findings and messages of the EGE (paving the way to recommendations) on safety, traceability, biodiversity, social justice, food security, public engagement.

➤ **Chapter on gene drives**

- The new draft chapter structure was welcomed. The existing draft text is to be reworked within that new structure.
- Several specific points with regard to the gene drives chapter were made on aspects of ecological ‘moral hazard’ and the need for collective, democratically legitimate decision-making processes; on the design of a strict regulatory process distinct to the application of gene drive technology; and on potential recommendations including establishing a register and stock of organisms subject to gene drive intervention and further research into the impacts of gene drives.

➤ **Chapter on gene editing in humans**

- The need for a redraft of the chapter drawing on existing texts and based on the structure devised during the July working session was underlined.
- Specific discussions took place on legal and regulatory framework governing somatic gene editing

DAY 2 – 12 September 2019

➤ **Chapter on gene editing in animals**

- The following guiding lines for the draft chapter were discussed, including the need to focus on those challenges new or distinctive to gene editing technologies; to draw on the revised structure developed at the July working session; and to cover the domains of research, agricultural and the use of animals for leisure.
- The key ethical concerns in this domain were also identified and discussed, including humanisation, the use of NHPs, the ‘3Rs’ (fit for purpose?) and the welfare of animals in agriculture.

➤ Chapter on cross-cutting issues

A list of cross-cutting issues was identified and discussed, comprising:

1. Naturalness / custodianship / demiurgic mastery and commodification / responsibility and intentionality
2. Humanness / Humanisation
3. Diversity / human diversity / biodiversity
4. Genetic exceptionalism
5. Who decides / governance and global governance / geopolitics
6. Safety and proportionality, risk and uncertainty. +Who gets to decide “how safe is safe enough?”
7. Necessity test (do we need this?) / alternatives / promises / time / speed
8. Metaphors / narratives / framings

Discussion on the EGE draft statement on the role of ethics

- The revised draft was welcomed.
- It was suggested to revise the introduction and overall framing to underscore the EGE’s rationale, its major concerns and objectives with the statement. In this context, the following 4 challenges were highlighted:
 - The pace of technological development
 - The global perspective
 - Evolving focus around individual rights and societal good (previous prominence given to individual rights is giving way to a more nuanced understanding that this does not always serve the societal good)
 - Shift from the public to the private sector

4. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

- EGE members to be informed once the programme of the public roundtable is finalised and published online
- A plenary meeting will be organised during the meeting of the National Ethics Councils (NEC) in Zagreb, 14-15 May 2020.

5. Next steps

- EGE Secretariat to work on the draft chapter on human gene editing and to send new text in advance of the EGE plenary meeting on 18 October.
- Anne Cambon-Thomsen to work on the draft chapter on gene editing in animals and to send draft text in advance of the EGE plenary meeting on 18 October.
- Jeroen van den Hoven to produce a revised draft of the statement (with possible collaboration going forward from Christiane and Barbara).
- Christiane Woopen to work on the introduction to the Opinion (with inputs from with Siobhan O’Sullivan and Barbara Prainsack).

6. Next meeting

The back-to-back meetings on 16-17-18 October 2019, with the plenary meeting on 18 October, in Brussels.

7. List of participants

Day 1: Emmanuel Agius, Anne Cambon-Thomsen, Ana Sofia Carvalho, Carlos Casabona, Eugenijus Gefenas, Julian Kinderlerer, Andreas Kurtz, Maija Locane, Herman Nys, Laura Palazzani, Barbara Prainsack, Nils-Eric Sahlin, Siobhan O’Sullivan, Christiane Woopen; Florence Dose, Jim Dratwa, Louiza Kalokairinou, Joanna Parkin.

Day 2: Emmanuel Agius, Anne Cambon-Thomsen, Ana Sofia Carvalho, Carlos Casabona, Eugenijus Gefenas, Andreas Kurtz, Maija Locane, Herman Nys, Laura Palazzani, Barbara Prainsack, Nils-Eric Sahlin, Siobhan O’Sullivan, Jeroen van den Hoven, Christiane Woopen; Florence Dose, Johannes Klumpers, Louiza Kalokairinou, Joanna Parkin.