Academic Freedom Under Pressure? Proposed U.S. Regulation OMB-2026-0034: Implications for International Collaboration.

Report of a hybrid event held in Paris on 9 July 2026.

Organized by the "Science Diplomacy and Academic Freedom" Thematic Entry Point (TEP) of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance, with invited speakers from the Stand Up for Science Foundation



Imprint

Title of the event: Academic Freedom Under Pressure? Proposed U.S. Regulation OMB-2026-0034: Implications for International Collaboration.

Date and time: 9 July 2026, 10:30-12:00 CEST

Format: Hybrid (Live in Paris & Online)

Organizers: The Thematic Entry Point on "Science Diplomacy and Academic Freedom" of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance. The meeting was co-organized by Claire Mays, Institut Symlog de France, and Jean Claude Arditti and Catherine Hodeir, AVRIST, France.

The hybrid event was kindly hosted by a leading research university in Paris, under Chatham House rules at the request of the host.

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The report can also be downloaded from the Thematic Entry Points page of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance website: https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/thematic-entry-points/ ("FREEDOM" paragraph).

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This report was prepared by C. Mays, Institut Symlog de France in August 2026 and checked by C. Hodeir, AVRIST and the invited speakers, Stand Up for Science.

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Event Report

"Academic Freedom Under Pressure? Proposed U.S. Regulation OMB-2026-0034: Implications for International Collaboration."

1. Introduction and Context

The hybrid event *Academic Freedom Under Pressure? Proposed U.S. Regulation OMB-2026-0034: Implications for International Collaboration* was organized on 9 July 2026 by the "Science Diplomacy and Academic Freedom" Thematic Entry Point (TEP) of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance at the occasion of a visit to Paris, France by executives of the Stand Up for Science Foundation.

The event firstly examined the potential effects on international scientific cooperation of a proposed U.S. regulation, and secondly assessed these developments in light of the 29 May 2026 "Council Recommendation on a new EU Framework for Science Diplomacy"[1].

OMB-2026-0034 is a proposed extensive update to the United States "Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance"[2] regarding grants and maintenance of federal support and funding. This government-wide guidance covers not only scientific research (the focus of our event), but also all kinds of human services and infrastructure that benefit now or could potentially benefit in the future from the award of U.S. federal monies. OMB-2026-0034's significant modifications to policy, criteria and process for this "uniform guidance" are put forward by the current U.S. executive (via the Office of Management and Budget, OMB) and are applauded by political allies. However, strong concern has been expressed by a wide variety of stakeholders ranging from local elected officials, educators, and other public administrators in the United States[3], to research and academic organizations public and private, to international entities (see Figure 1). The editor in chief of *Science* wrote that the rule sought to "circumvent the will of Congress and starve American science"[4].

In essence, the modified regulation would diminish the influence of competent professional and peer review of funding applications and project management, instead placing funding decisions in the hands of political operatives. The content, implementation, and outcome of project proposals or funded initiatives (whether they be e.g. nursery school services, health provision, bridges or energy installations, or scientific research and collaborations) would be subjected to political evaluation.

Operatives would be empowered to refuse or to cut off taxpayer funding in cases judged to serve a

[1] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8931-2026-ADD-1/en/pdf.

[2] The numerous U.S. federal agencies involved or affected, and the background to the proposed modifications to existing guidance, can be found here: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/05/29/2026-10817/regulation-for-federal-financial-assistance.

[3] Examples of objections to the proposed rule from such stakeholders include: https://www.usmayors.org/2026/08/08/u-s-mayors-call-on-congress-to-permanently-block-omb-rule-opening-grant-awards-to-political-interference/; https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/NCPH-comment-on-OMB-2026-0034-0001.pdf; https://naeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OMB-Comment-Education-and-Science-Associations.-Docket-No.-OMB-2026-0034.pdf, etc.

[4] Thorp HH (2026) Another red alert for American science. *Science* Vol 392, Issue 6804, p.1219. https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aej3572

so-called "unlawful" "woke" agenda; among others, awards made under the previous presidential administration are openly targeted (see the "Background" text referenced in footnote 2).



Figure 1. ALLEA (European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities) published a statement on 29 June 2026 condemning the proposed OMB rule change (DOI: 10.26356/ALLEA-STATEMENT-ON-OMB-RULE). Slide presented by C. Mays on 9/07/2026.

The proposed updates to the regulation would introduce extensive controls on international scientific collaboration. Scientists and research organizations wishing to partner with the United States would be obliged to abandon concurrent collaboration with countries that are subject to any kind of American restrictions (potentially including several EU Member states, and clearly apt to affect many existing international partnerships). The regulation also would impose limitations on the types of research that may be conducted and how the research may be described. New controls would conflict with requirements commonly found in e.g. European grants such as those supporting gender equality and research into disparate population impacts, instead demanding that research topics, conduct and outputs align with the vision of the present U.S. federal executive administration and in particular reject consideration of diversity. The rule would furthermore restrict the dissemination and exchange of knowledge by limiting scientists' travel to conferences and open-access publishing coverage.

Recent past actions underlying this regulatory initiative have seen political appointees contacting funding recipients to demand that they bring their websites into alignment with controversial administration policies, and federal grants have been rescinded without justification on scientific or managerial grounds[5].

[5] Cf. e.g. Kozlof M et al. (2026) US science after a year of Trump. *Nature*, Vol. 649, pp. 812-815. https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-026-00088-9/index.html

OMB-2026-0034 was published on 29 May 2026 with comments to be submitted by 13 July 2026. By the beginning of August, the official count of submissions was 496,606[6]. These comments, generally limited to 5000 characters, would be submitted by private citizens, public officials, or institutions based in the United States or abroad. A preliminary analysis[7] of the valance and topics of 167,864 comments found that 96% opposed the rule changes.

The hybrid event of 9 July 2026 took advantage of a brief visit to Paris by members of the Stand Up for Science (SUFS) Foundation. They accepted the invitation to present and discuss the foreseeable impacts of such a rule. Like other academic[8] or science organizations (see Figure 2), SUFS has urged concerned parties to submit remarks on the proposed regulation, and has provided resources such as summary overviews[9] and a guide to composing public comments[10].



Figure 2. Call to action by ALLEA (DOI: 10.26356/ALLEA-STATEMENT-ON-OMB-RULE). Slide presented by C. Mays on 9/07/2026.

Under normal procedure draft regulation would be adjusted in light of public comments, a process lasting a year or more, especially in view of the hundreds of thousands of remarks received on this rule. However, Stand Up for Science indicated that federal agencies have already been directed to prepare for 1 October 2026 implementation of the rule as drafted. Nonetheless, broad opposition to

[6] Cf. footnote 2.

[7] https://omb-comments.abigailhaddad.com/ published by TechPolicy.Press; https://www.techpolicy.press/the-public-rejects-ombs-federal-financial-assistance-rule.

[8] E.g. https://www.washington.edu/federalrelations/2026/07/06/proposed-uniform-guidance-changes.

[9] https://www.standupforscience.foundation/policy-and-advocacy/blog-post-title-two-t5my5-k4xmd-4tbkf; https://formernih.substack.com/p/summary-of-key-changes-in-ombs-proposed.

[10] https://www.standupforscience.foundation/policy-and-advocacy/the-sufs-guide-to-writing-public-comments.

the rule from many sectors of society was already clear. SUFS warned that while a low profile might be kept prior to the 3 November 2026 midterm elections, the executive might subsequently hasten implementation before the new Congress is seated in January 2027. Anticipating that the regulation will violate U.S. constitutional First Amendment liberties (protection of free speech), SUFS and others are already designing lawsuits to challenge its application.

Unexpectedly, on 8 August 2026 a bi-partisan continuing resolution by the U.S. Senate responded to the public outcry and advocacy by freezing the OMB reform until at least 11 December.[11]

2. Event Speakers and Participants

Opening Remarks:

Jean-Claude Arditti and Dr. Catherine Hodeir, President and Secretary General, AVRIST; co-chairs of the Thematic Entry Point.

Moderator:

Claire Mays, Program Director, Symlog; former EU Science Diplomacy Alliance co-chair.

Panelists (Figure 3):

Dr. Colette Delawalla, Founder and CEO, Stand Up for Science Foundation; clinical psychology research scientist.

Cole Donovan, Policy Director, Stand Up for Science Foundation; former U.S. State Department Science Officer.

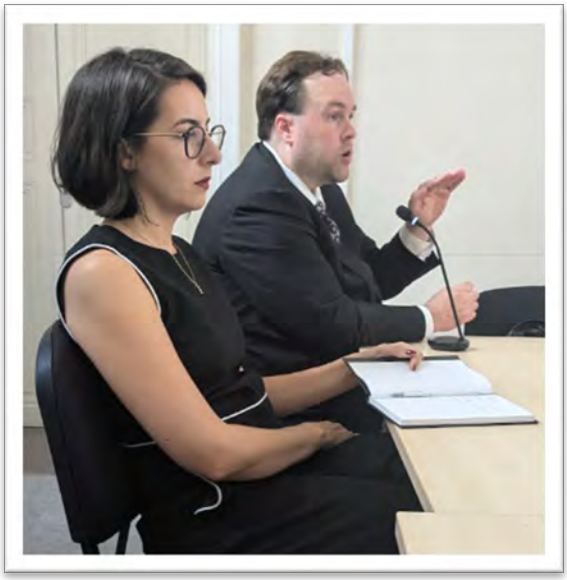


Figure 3. C. Delawalla and C. Donovan photographed at the event (C. Mays, 9 July 2026). Used with permission.

[11] https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2026/08/08/senate-passes-spending-bill-fiscal-2027-continuing-resolution/91226418007.

Registration for the hybrid event was publicized in the preceding 10 days to the AVRIST mailing list, and on LinkedIn by EU Science Diplomacy Alliance and personal announcements garnering 18 reposts. In all some 45 persons attended, including 5 in person from Stand Up for Science.

The event lasted just over 90 minutes, with many inputs from participants present in the room and several from those attending online.

3. Opening remarks: AVRIST and the EU SD Alliance "Science Diplomacy & Academic Freedom" Thematic Entry Point

Jean-Claude Arditti and Catherine Hodeir presented AVRIST and the genesis of the Alliance's "Scientific Diplomacy & Academic Freedom" Thematic Entry Point (TEP). AVRIST (*Association de Valorisation des Relations Internationales Scientifiques et Techniques*) is a Paris-based non-profit science diplomacy network founded in 1982. It connects former and active science counsellors, attachés, and international relations professionals.

AVRIST held the 7th rotating chairship[12] of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance July 2024-June 2025. A dedicated working group on Science Diplomacy and Academic Freedom was established. Three hybrid workshops took place (September 2024, January 2025, May 2025), engaging 20–30 participants per session from organizations such as Scholars at Risk, the Academic Freedom Index, the PAUSE Program, and French social science institutions. Of particular relevance to today's event, during the third workshop on 13 May 2025 Robert Quinn (Founding Executive Director, Scholars at Risk, NYU) addressed the implications of disruptive U.S. executive policy changes for international university and research collaborations.

In June 2025, the working group was formalized as one of eleven Thematic Entry Points (TEPs) on the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance platform, co-led by Jean-Claude Arditti and Catherine Hodeir with Christina Hainzl (University for Continuing Education Krems, Austria). The TEP held an event on 18 March 2026 in Paris, entitled *Academic Freedom in Europe: Assessing initiatives announced in 2025 to attract at-risk academics and researchers to Europe*[13]. This featured case studies and testimonials from U.S. researchers relocating to French institutions. The present event, the second major one hosted by the TEP, focused on the proposed updated U.S. federal regulation affecting scientific and other grant awards.

4. Discussion of Proposed U.S. Regulation OMB-2026-0034

Moderator Claire Mays prefaced the discussion by briefly stating some proposed revisions to the Federal Financial Assistance Rule. As drafted, regulation OMB-2026-0034 would permit the arbitrary termination of federally funded research grants at any point during their duration, and impede international research collaborations. Funding would be denied to research deemed misaligned with the executive branch's political ideology, specifically targeting studies on diversity

[12] https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/about/chairs-and-work-programmes/.
[13] https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/media/Alliance-TEP-Academic-Freedom-26_04_21-Meeting-Report.pdf

and health disparities. Political appointees, rather than peer review or empirical evidence, would become the final arbiters of scientific funding eligibility. Going far beyond scientific endeavors, the "uniform guidance" would in fact apply to all federally funded activities in the United States. Before asking the invited panelists to introduce themselves, Mays recalled past international solidarity actions organized in France to support the Stand Up for Science movement (Figure 4). She highlighted that science functions as a borderless global common good, justifying international engagement with U.S. policy proposals.



Figure 4. Stand Up for Science solidarity events and materials, Paris and Grenoble, France, 2025-2026. Slide presented by C. Mays on 9/07/2026. Photos (gathered online): Alice Carliez and unknown photographers.

The two SUFS panelists then took the floor for over an hour, during which time they engaged with participants in a wide-ranging debate and exchange of experience.

Colette Delawalla expressed gratitude for the international support and shared vision of science as a global common good. She founded Stand Up for Science in response to what she called attacks on research by the Trump administration. Her decision was spurred by federal bans on the use of essential research terms or concepts, such as "woman," "Black," and "LGBTQ+" which directly restricted her own work on alcohol addiction. Identifying such actions as part of an effort to halt the entire scientific ecosystem, in February 2025 she mobilized nationwide and global protests to resist the policies. Stand Up for Science is now a foundation actively resisting continued political attacks while working to rebuild and to preserve scientific knowledge and practice for the future.

Cole Donovan highlighted his background in science diplomacy, noting his work during the Obama administration to organize the US-France Joint Committee Meetings (JCM) on Science and Technology Cooperation[14] in Washington D.C. (March 2015) and in Paris (March 2018). He

[14] Biannual Joint Committee Meetings (JCM) are organized under the Agreement on Science and Technology

greeted an Alliance and AVRIST member present in the room, who as Counsellor for S&T at the French Embassy to the U.S. had been his JCM counterpart at that time. Donovan emphasized the historical depth of the scientific partnership between the U.S. and France, dating back to Thomas Jefferson's academic exchanges in Paris. Early in 2025 Donovan and some 600 other employees of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration were abruptly fired by the "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE). Following his termination, he joined SUFS to advocate for future scientific policy, explain ongoing systemic transformations, and inform on the broader impacts of new U.S. regulations.

SUFS' main objective in visiting Paris, Brussels and Geneva in July 2026 was to assure international partners that American researchers remain committed to open, borderless scientific collaboration despite restrictions on international partnerships imposed by the Trump administration. Donovan stressed that U.S. scientists are eager to maintain global connections and promote science as a common good. The trip also gathered feedback from international partners as to historical shortcomings in U.S. scientific relations, for incorporation into future policy frameworks to rebuild a stronger, more collaborative, and more effective science ecosystem.

A participant pointed to **global implications of national threats to academic freedom**, stating the "American ecosystem is in itself extremely internationalized," meaning that "everything which is happening in the U.S. is also happening here." In their view, the underlying forces driving these shifts, such as the "rise of populism, social networks, [and] post-truth movements," are not uniquely American, but "exist in Europe and worldwide." Consequently, the speaker viewed the situation in the U.S. "as a mirror of what might happen to us," into which Europeans are "lucky" to have "the opportunity to look and learn... in order to prevent it from happening here." Nonetheless, the participant warned that "it will happen," and Europe may only have a brief window "to be slightly more prepared." They suggested that while in the U.S. top "Ivy League institutions... have collapsed in six months' time," European institutions would collapse in "four weeks" because they are "100% dependent on the state." The participant asserted that despite operating on different scales, the two regions "are fighting exactly the same fight." Delawalla agreed that America is merely the "first domino" to fall and called SUFS an "open book" eager to share strategies to help European academics organize effectively. She pointed to the strong cultural tradition of protest by e.g. the French as a key tactical strength placing them in a much better position to resist these trends than Americans, who often view public demonstration as overly radical.

Donovan then deepened analysis of how the proposed OMB regulation could restrict academic freedom and international scientific collaboration:

- **First Amendment Limits & Executive Control:** The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects against speech restrictions levied by government. These protections do not prevent private universities from controlling employee speech. However, building on earlier executive orders and actions to limit diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, the OMB rule creates a contractual framework for funding that allows the government to arbitrarily terminate grants or force institutions to self-censor.

Cooperation between the Government of the USA and the Government of the French Republic signed in October 2008 and entered into force in November 2010. https://www.state.gov/10-1113

- **Research & Speech Restrictions:** Grants can be terminated or restricted if research contradicts executive priorities. Specific provisions bar funded researchers from supporting theories of "disparate impact," risking the post-award suppression of publication if acquired data reveals demographic disparities, and forbid challenging a strict so-called "biological reality of the sex binary," ignoring genetic complexity and threatening study validity.
- **Barriers to International Collaboration:** The rule shifts international cooperation from a standard practice to an exceptional occurrence via a "domestic first" framework. It restricts collaboration with vaguely defined "entities of concern" (the list of which can be augmented overnight without notice) and creates severe regulatory friction with partners like the EU, whose mandatory gender parity plans now directly conflict with U.S. award terms.

Discussion focused for a time on **individual researcher mobility across borders**, and the "Choose Europe for Science" exchange and hosting program (also examined by the TEP event of March 2026; cf. footnote 13). Among the ideas voiced were: the psychological unwillingness for many Americans to emigrate; the need to support PhD and post-doctoral students who are economically more vulnerable than the established academics for whom the hosting program resembles a sabbatical; the structural limits on monitoring actual rates of brain drain from the U.S.

Donovan then drew from his experience as a former White House policy writer to explain how broad legislative intent can create unintended **compliance traps** for international academic programs. When drafting rules for international talent programs, Donovan observed that Congress focused so heavily on countering Chinese recruitment efforts that standard global academic practices - such as offering professorships, titles, or foreign degrees - were categorized as potential threats. To prevent talent program rules from being weaponized against routine scientific exchange, his team explicitly wrote safeguards into the regulation, using examples like French university recruitment and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowships to clarify that standard allied programs remain permissible. Donovan highlighted that without carefully structured exceptions, vague federal definitions threaten normal international academic mobility and degree validation, including routine foreign educational partnerships utilized across both allied nations and U.S. government agencies.

Donovan then reflected on how OMB's tightening U.S. rules on international scientific partnerships will create **disruption in Big Science and global research**[15]. Broad restrictions mean that if a single researcher from a barred country or institution is involved in a project, U.S. scientists might be legally required to walk away and abandon the collaboration entirely. Major international facilities like CERN rely on U.S. National Laboratories staff. If U.S. researchers are forced to pull out simply because of who else is sitting at the table, it undermines the sustainability and multi-year progress of the entire transnational project. Under the OMB rule, Big Science will keep moving forward, but with an absent chair where the U.S. used to sit. Countries are already pivoting to a "post-US" world, building new alliances without U.S. involvement in e.g. ocean monitoring.

A participant argued that **academics are sometimes "stronger than the administrations** on both

[15] Of related interest is Donovan's article on the past performance of the U.S. government as a partner in major international scientific collaborations: Donovan C (2025) What happens when the nuts and bolts of science diplomacy come loose? *Issues in Science and Technology* (National Academy of Sciences and Arizona State University), Vol. XLI, n°4. https://issues.org/science-diplomacy-donovan/

sides" due to the strict diplomatic constraints institutions face. They noted that the "general picture about what is happening" differs from the reality on the ground, which is "slightly more optimistic." The panelists agreed, pointing to the "smaller unit... of resistance" in the face of "institutional collapse" and failures in leadership. SUFS encourages American academics to focus on "maintaining relationships, even if the government tells you that you can't."

Under the OMB rule, federal awards will favor U.S. universities with lower overhead rates; this threatens the **maintenance of knowledge resources**. Diminished support means ongoing scientific subscriptions and activities risk elimination by administrators (a prior example is that of the Duke Herbarium[16]). Institutions abroad are undertaking to archive, reproduce or guarantee access to big data sets (such as climate databases) that the U.S. has started to remove, and Delawalla also advised that scientists across the U.S. ensure that their own research data is backed up[17]. She saluted the significant role to be played by individual partners abroad: U.K. colleagues, for example, offered to mirror PubMed and biomedical data in case she lost access during her research. Such solidarity is "so very powerful and absolutely critical in spanning the gap as our institutions are just lying down."

5. Policy Analysis: OMB-2026-0034 through the lens of the European Union Framework for Science Diplomacy

The final segment of the hybrid event examined OMB-2026-0034 through the lens of the Council of the European Union recommendation on a framework for science diplomacy (adopted 29 May 2026; Doc. 8931/26[18]). The recommendation puts forth principles, strategies, operational and enabling actions. Mays quoted several numbered items of the recommendation that stand in contrast with the U.S. regulation, or which may offer tools to address the situation induced by that rule. Moderator, panelists and participants offered reflections.

Core Principles (Recital 19) states that "the Union's science diplomacy should (…) be based in particular on the principles and values underpinning international cooperation in research and innovation (...), notably academic freedom and freedom of scientific research, scientific excellence, research ethics and integrity, research security, gender equality, equal opportunities for all, diversity and inclusiveness, open science and open data, and evidence-informed policymaking."

- "Those are essentially all the points that the OMB regulation seeks to eliminate."

Strategy (Actions 3, 5, 8, 10) (Figure 5) translates ambitions and pinpoints ways of making sure that European Union science diplomacy will take its full place and gain its full powers to accomplish the missions it might be given. Academic freedom and freedom of research are once again central. The strategy leverages the art of diplomacy, aiming to strengthen ties and build alliances, calling for dialogue to balance goals and interests, and also capitalizing on the soft power resource of European research and technology infrastructure.

[16] https://www.science.org/content/article/tragic-mistake-decision-close-duke-university-s-herbarium-triggers-furor
[17] See also the example of "alternative sources for U.S. government data" like those listed in the University of Southern California Research Guides: https://libguides.usc.edu/altdata
[18] Cf. footnote 1.

- "The framework recommendation, two or three years in the making, already anticipated the need to assess the impacts of restrictions on international scientific cooperation."

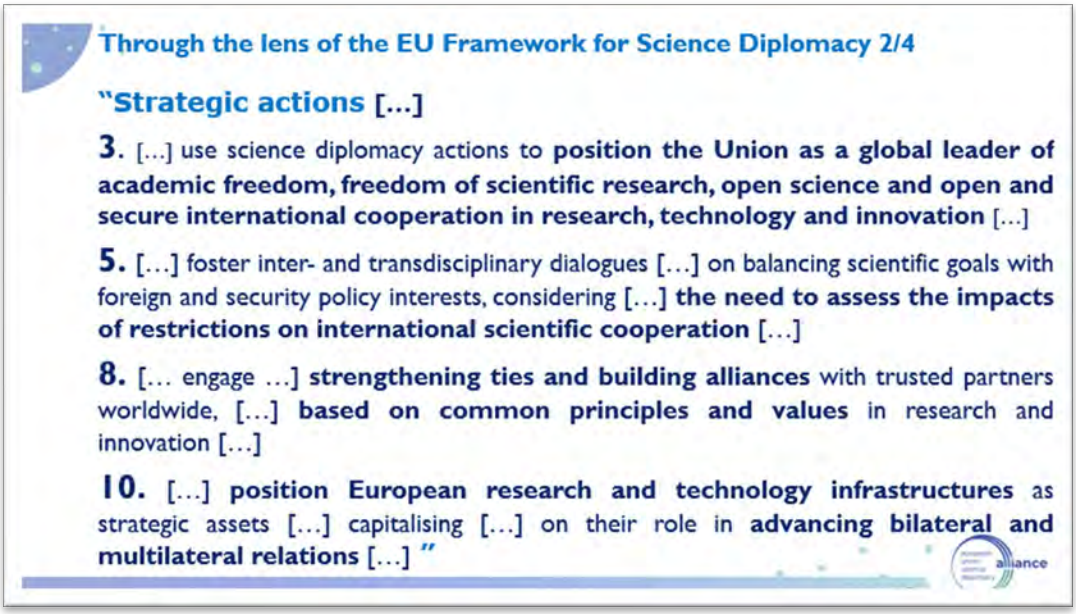


Figure 5. Strategic actions recommended for EU Science Diplomacy, from Council Recommendation Doc. 8931/26. Slide presented by C. Mays, 9 July 2026.

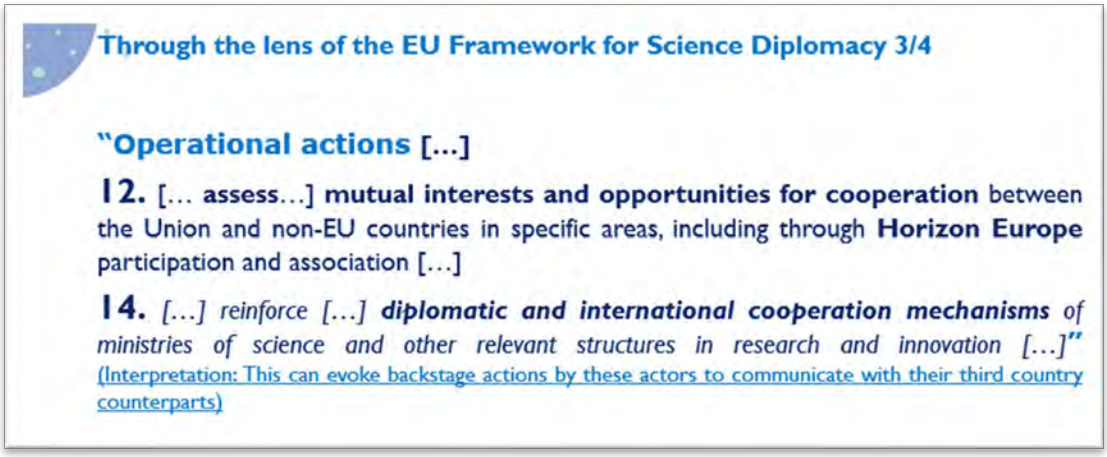


Figure 6. Operational actions recommended for EU Science Diplomacy, from Council Recommendation Doc. 8931/26. Slide presented by C. Mays, 9 July 2026.

Operational actions (12 & 14) (Figure 6) direct the assessment of mutual interests and means of cooperation with non-EU countries, and the reinforcement of mechanisms at the disposal of scientific and diplomatic structures to safeguard international research and innovation. Mays interpreted that these mechanisms can include backstage channels to communicate views on the OMB regulation to U.S. counterparts.

Donovan observed that indeed "**interventions from foreign governments are extremely important in federal rulemaking**," explaining that these don't necessarily have to be timed at the exact period open for submissions. A government can intervene "basically any time up to a formal agency

issuance of a rule." Recalling the construction of Horizon 2020, the EU's key funding program for research and innovation (2014-2020), he said the U.S. counterparts "made sure to put ourselves in front of every opportunity to comment and consult." (He also offered examples of how the EU "masterfully" leveraged the attractions of non-Member state association with the Horizon 2020 framework to influence negotiations post-Brexit or regarding freedom of movement across Swiss borders.) Donovan emphasized that rule makers generally listen when a foreign government steps in to highlight an issue, such as that a rule may hinder the ability of scientists to collaborate. In particular, members of Congress, such as bipartisan members of the House and Senate EU caucus, are known to react strongly to these foreign diplomatic warnings. Foreign governments may thus be encouraged to express concerns, on the principle that "what is good for one party is also good for the other in diplomacy." Donovan saluted the "wonderfully written" Council of the EU recommendation which can be referenced to point out important disparities in research ecology between the United States and the EU and show that actions have consequences.

An online participant reinforced that the European Union's framework for science diplomacy is explicitly "interest-driven" and "values-driven," and warned that current developments in the U.S. harm global democracy, shared values, and the scientific enterprise as a whole. In this period of "**geopolitical disarray**," international partners like Canada, Australia, Japan, and India are increasingly looking to the EU for leadership by joining the Horizon Europe funding programme for research and innovation. Furthermore, the global science diplomacy discourse has gradually shifted from the United States to Europe over the past five years. Nonetheless, the EU must remain realistic: "there's no way we can even get close to plugging the gaps left behind by the United States on the global stage." After decades of benefiting from American support, it is now Europe's turn "to give something back and stand in solidarity with our American friends." Yet Europe is "not immune to these developments," the participant said, citing the immediate past government in Hungary, and forewarning of potential political shifts in the context of e.g. upcoming German regional or French presidential elections. They called on everyone in the field to actively defend scientific integrity; protecting academic freedom is "definitely not just an American fight, but also a European one."

Delawalla responded that a core principle of Stand Up for Science is the belief that **science serves as "a critical pillar of a democracy."** She challenged the audience to consider whether true freedom can exist under state control, asking "if scientists cannot ask questions, if a scientist is barred from asking a specific question by their government, are we free? Is that scientist free?" To tear down this pillar of democracy in the United States is to attack a pillar of democracy in every democratic society in the world and every society that aims to become democratic.

Selected "enabling actions" from the recommendation were also displayed (Figure 7), calling for reinforced relations between diplomacy and academia, and positive science diplomacy narratives. A participant reflected that the narrative of free science as a pillar of democracy is losing traction; **science advocacy arguments are increasingly centered on competition and excellence**. They called China an "extremely frightening counter example." There the dictatorship aggressively invests in science, removing visa restrictions to attract researchers and securing more top-20 universities than

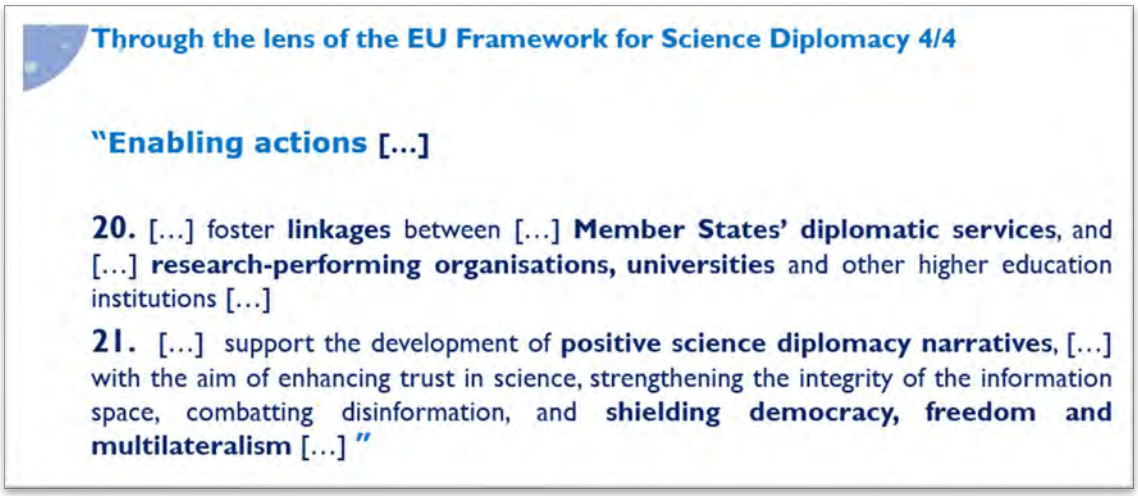


Figure 7. Enabling actions recommended for EU Science Diplomacy, from Council Recommendation Doc. 8931/26. Slide presented by C. Mays, 9 July 2026.

France, while all the time the research agenda is highly controlled and scientists are prevented from thinking "out of the box." The speaker mentioned too the immense economic power of private actors who drive innovation in profitable directions. The narrative to effectively persuade politicians, students, and civil society should thus move beyond democratic idealism and emphasize that state interference and ideological control undermine scientific excellence, global competitiveness, and innovation.

Donovan reflected that the vibrant technological innovation in the U.S. has been enabled by **blue sky research**. "If you want to reap the rewards of a scientific ecosystem from a capitalist perspective, you have to let people just play." Even within academic program constraints, "you have to let scientists ask questions." He cited the Nobel prize obtained by Victor Ambros for his lifework study of the RNA of *C. elegans*, asking whether "if this OMB rule were to be passed or if you have political appointees making the decisions about the grants, would they have allowed a million dollars to be spent on the study of worms?" A participant reinforced the view that science is an open enterprise, in which discoveries and breakthroughs may emerge in a totally unexpected domain. In a democracy, politicians set priorities and consent funding to designated areas, taking advice from scientists and industry. "But once politicians decide on what is allowed and what is not allowed to be researched, it's the end of open science, and that's something that concerns all of us."

Examples then were brought of how standing up for science particularly means **speaking out** for the different communities in need of science diplomatic support. The Afghan Girls Robotics Team and other competitors from predominantly Muslim countries saw their visas twice denied before they finally could attend a 2017 robotics competition in the U.S.[19]; public outcry resulted finally in the U.S. administration adopting a "heroic" performative stance to allow them entry. African mathematicians have drafted an international appeal[20] regarding dozens of selected and funded

[19] https://www.glamour.com/story/afghan-girls-robotics-denied-visas-again

[20] The Executive Committee of the African Mathematical Union calls for future host countries to demonstrate "ability to guarantee effective access for all participants, without discrimination arising from visa procedures." https://www.afrimath.math.cnrs.fr/sites/default/files/2026-07/Letter_Lettre%20UMI_sent.pdf

scientists barred from attending the International Congress of Mathematicians held in Philadelphia, July 2026. Delawalla emphasized that "these moments offer opportunities to advocate on behalf of other scientists and to put pressure on governments in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. Because discomfort is oftentimes the thing that ends up motivating people more than feeling like everything is safe and sound." The seminar ended with a quote from civil rights icon and U.S. Representative John Lewis, who although not speaking specifically to scientists urged in a 2018 tweet:

> *"Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in* ***good trouble, necessary trouble****."*

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