

Strengthening global regulation of emerging nanotechnologies

LSE research into international regulation of novel technologies has highlighted the importance of transparency and mandatory reporting for nanotechnology products

What was the problem?

Manipulating matter at the molecular level to produce novel 'nanomaterials' can bring potential benefits to commerce and to society as a whole. Nanotechnologies typically make it possible to manipulate matter at a scale of 100 nanometres or less, a nanometre being just one billionth of a metre.

Nanomaterials can improve food safety and storage,

Department of International Relations (Nico Jaspers and Carmen Gayoso) and collaborated with LSE experts in related fields.

For one of the studies, the European Union commissioned Dr Falkner to lead the first comparative study of nanotechnologies regulation withiBT1

The Committee's concluding report relied extensively on Dr Falkner's testimony. It explicitly endorsed several of his research findings and policy recommendations, in particular the need to strengthen international coordination and information exchange, and to create a public register of foods containing nanomaterials. This latter recommendation has already fed through to government thinking. According to the UK Government's response to the Lords report, the Food Standards Agency has acknowledged the benefits of setting up a publicly accessible register of food and packaging products containing nanomaterials.

European and international discussions aimed at strengthening the regulation of nanotechnologies remain at an early stage. Active dissemination of Dr Falkner's research to policy audiences worldwide has nonetheless stimulated debate on the issues of transparency and suitable regulatory mechanisms. Several civil societies and science organisations have cited the research in support of calls to introduce mandatory reporting, and in a feasibility study on mandatory reporting, Germany's Environment Ministry has used it as evidence of growing scientific support for a register of nanomaterials.

There is now growing recognition that voluntary reporting is inadequate and the momentum is growing in Europe to introduce formal reporting requirements. In January 2013, France became the first EU country to establish a mandatory register of nanomaterials.

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