

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359024199>

European Commission could play a decisive role in investigations on COVID-19 origins

Research Proposal · March 2022

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.34518.73285

CITATIONS

0

18 authors, including:



Fabien Colombo

Université Bordeaux Montaigne

14 PUBLICATIONS 8 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Etienne Decroly

French National Centre for Scientific Research

171 PUBLICATIONS 8,325 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Andre Goffinet

Université Catholique de Louvain - UCLouvain

210 PUBLICATIONS 12,437 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



François Graner

Paris Diderot University

184 PUBLICATIONS 7,256 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Phase transition in metal oxide thin films [View project](#)



Noncollinear Spin Textures [View project](#)

24 February 2022

To : Ursula von der Leyen,
President of the European Commission,

Copy to : Dr Mariya Gabriel,
European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth,

Dear President von der Leyen,

As scientists and as European citizens, we deeply appreciated the [statement](#) made by the European Commission, under your presidency in March 2021, regarding “the need for further work to study the origins of the virus and its route of introduction to the human population”. It has also been reinforced in July 2021, by the [call](#) made by Dr Mariya Gabriel with other scientific advisers and officials, “on the Chinese government to reconsider its decision to not engage in the World Health Organization’s proposal for the next phase of the COVID-19 origins study”.

For more than a year, some of us have been personally committed to uncovering the origins of this pandemic in a multidisciplinary manner, combining various fields such as molecular virology, evolutionary biology, neurobiology, communication and sociology. Toward this end, we have organized a monthly scientific workshop dedicated to examining pandemic origins; published public letters to open this debate; and received funding to analyze the available sequences of coronaviruses and reconstruct the recent history of SARS-CoV-2. Some of us also contribute to an ongoing analysis of frozen 2019 patient samples from hospitals in France to explore the possibility of earlier COVID-19 cases.

Although we fully agree with you that it is essential to examine all plausible hypotheses regarding the origin of COVID-19, in order to understand how this pandemic started and prevent future pandemics, the unfortunate reality is that this process has been stalled.

The joint study led by the World Health Organization (WHO) and China has been widely questioned and has not led to any definitive conclusion, due in part to Chinese

intransigence. The recent team established by the WHO, called “Scientific Advisory Group for Origins of Novel Pathogens” (SAGO), and the Lancet COVID-19 commission comprise members with significant conflicts of interest due to their link with scientists or research institutions whose funding and reputation would be affected if the pandemic origin was found to be related with research activities. In the United States, a bipartisan group of senators has introduced draft legislation to create an independent panel to investigate the origins of the virus.

We are writing to you today because we believe the European Commission could play a decisive role in addressing this critical issue of European and global concern with transparency and independence.

First, the European Commission could **create a commission on COVID-19 origin**. Europe has been at the forefront of discussions related to new emerging technologies such as the internet, GMOs or personal genome sequencing. Furthermore, human pathogen research is tightly controlled in Europe compared to other parts of the world. European institutions could seize this opportunity to strengthen their leadership position in medical and public biosafety and biosecurity, by studying the question of how the COVID-19 pandemic originated.

Second, the European Commission could establish **a transparency framework** relative to documents and items of information related to the origin of the pandemic within all plausible hypotheses, including research-related and research-unrelated ones. In the United States, several requests under the Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) considerably helped to open the debate on pandemic origins, with the release of important information that was not previously publically available. Answers ([A1](#), [A2](#), [A3](#), [A4](#)) to several parliamentary questions ([Q1](#), [Q2](#), [Q3](#), [Q4](#)) have also helped clarify the relationships between the European Commission and the Wuhan Institute of Virology. These important first steps could be extended by making further documents about this collaboration public.

Third, the European Commission could **encourage research on the first COVID-19 patients in Europe**. Even after two years, it is still not clear how the outbreak originated and how it spread. It is possible that information exists, but is not being shared in a coordinated way. More specifically, it would mean inviting all medical centers and research institutes that have frozen samples from suspected patients to test them, share them, and make the data obtained public. Through this

collective effort, it would be possible to understand how the virus started to infect humans in Europe in the early days of the pandemic.

We hope that you will take the lead in realizing these important next steps. We would be happy to meet with you and your colleagues and to assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Virginie Courtier-Orgogozo, CNRS Director of Research, CNRS Bronze Medal, France Young Woman Scientist Award 2014, Member of the Scientific Council of OPECST (Office parlementaire d'évaluation des choix scientifiques et technologiques), Member of the CNRS National Ethics Committee COMETS, Knight of the National Order of Merit, Recipient of an ERC Starting Grant in 2014-2019, Institut Jacques Monod, Université de Paris, France.

Valentin Bruttel, PhD in Life Sciences/Immunology, University of Würzburg, Germany.

Lounes Chikhi, Population Geneticist, Senior Researcher (DR1) CNRS, Toulouse University, Paul Sabatier, France.

Fabien Colombo, PhD Candidate, Communication and sociology of science, MICA, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France.

Étienne Decroly, CNRS Director of Research, AFMB lab, UMR7257, Aix Marseille Université, Marseille, France. Member of the board of directors of the French Virology society.

Magnus Fiskesjö, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Cornell University, USA, Swedish citizen.

André Goffinet, Professor emeritus, University of Louvain Medical School, Belgium.

François Graner, CNRS Director of Research, MSC, UMR7057, Université de Paris-Diderot, France.

Jacques van Helden, Professor, Aix-Marseille Université, Marseille, France.

Florence Janody, Principal Investigator, i3S - Instituto de Investigação e Inovação em Saúde, Universidade do Porto, Portugal.

Bernd Kaina, Professor i.R. of Toxicology, University Mainz, Germany.

Paul-Antoine Miquel, Professor of Contemporary Philosophy, University Jean Jaurès, Toulouse, France.

Arnaud Pocheville, CNRS Researcher, Laboratoire Évolution et Diversité Biologique, Université Paul Sabatier, France.

Alexandra Soulier, CNRS Researcher, Institut d'Histoire et de Philosophie des Sciences et des Techniques, France.

Christophe Thébaud, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Université Paul Sabatier, Toulouse, France. Member of Academia Europaea.

Günter Theißen, Professor of Genetics, Friedrich Schiller University, Jena, Germany.

Rémi Tournebize, Postdoc, Genetics and Human Evolutionary Biology, Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência, Oeiras, Portugal.

Roland Wiesendanger, Professor, University of Hamburg, Germany. Member of the German National Academies Leopoldina and acadtec, Member of the European Academy of Sciences, Recipient of 3 ERC Advanced Grants in a row.