

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft · 53170 Bonn, Germany

**Personal / Confidential**

Ms. Claire Francis

– Digital transfer –

**Research Culture**

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**Your notification of a potential case of scientific misconduct**

Dear Ms. Francis,

On 12 June 2022, you notified the DFG Head Office of a potential case of scientific misconduct by Professor Dr Michael Naumann (Otto von Guericke University of Magdeburg). The allegations related to undisclosed gel splicing and concerned an amount of ten publications of Professor Naumann's, also listed on the internet portal *Pubpeer*:

#	Publication by Prof. Naumann: journal and year (authors)	Figures concerned by the allegation(s)
1	FASEB J. 2002 (Wessler, Rapp et al.)	Fig. 10B, 10C
2	Int J Biochem Cell Biol 2014 (Sokolova, Vieth et al.)	Fig. 1B, 2A, 2B, 3B.
3	J Med Microbiol 1991 (Naumann, Hanski et al.)	Fig. 1 & 4
4	EMBO J 1994 (Naumann, Scheidereit)	Fig. 1 & 3
5	EMBO J 1993	Fig. 1B

6	Gastroenterology 1996 (Naumann, Savitskaia et al.)	Fig. 1
7	FASEB J 2004	Fig. 4B
8	Journal of biological chemistry 2008 (Sokolova, Bozko et al.)	Fig. 1B
9	Biochimica et Biophysica Acta 2013	Fig. 5A & 6A
10	EMBO J 2007 (Schweitzer, Bozko et al.)	Fig. 6D, 6E, 5, 3D, 3G, 3A.

We ask you to continue to treat the allegations and especially the fact that the DFG is conducting an investigation as confidential.

The Research Integrity Team conducted a preliminary review procedure to assess your allegations and held a hearing with Mr. Naumann regarding the accusation – though without disclosing its origin. Additional investigations were carried out to enlighten the circumstances of the alleged splicing.

Publication no. 8 could not be reviewed in detail as we found that it does not relate to DFG funding. According to section I of the DFG Rules of Procedure (VerfOWF), publications without a relation to the funding activity of the DFG cannot be checked by the DFG. Please refer to the editors, to the funders of the respective research or to the institutions the authors are employed at.

Publications no. 7 and 9 had already been reviewed in the course of an earlier investigation conducted by the DFG against Professor Naumann. As to publication no. 7, two expert opinions had rejected the suspicion. About publication no. 9, Mr. Naumann had admitted an error in one of the figures (fig. 6A), but the allegations appeared to be of no relevance for the outcome of the research shown in the publication. Also, Mr. Naumann had not created the figures personally and he was neither a first nor corresponding author of this publication. Gross negligence on his side was doubtful.

Publication no. 2 has been reviewed in detail:

*Olga Sokolova, Michael Vieth, Thorsten Gnad, Przemyslaw M. Bozko & Michael Naumann*, *Helicobacter pylori* promotes eukaryotic protein translation by activating phosphatidylinositol 3 kinase/mTOR, in: **International Journal of Biochemistry & Cell Biology (2014)**, DOI: 10.1016/j.biocel.2014.08.023.

Allegations:

- a) Abb. 1B: "some lane splicing",
- b) Abb. 2A: "an unusual-looking band",
- c) Abb. 2B: "possible splicing",

d) Abb. 3B: “possible splicing”.

The remaining publications were published before or in 2010. In autumn 2022, the DFG Committee of Inquiry on Allegations of Scientific Misconduct has held that until the year 2010, undisclosed gel splicing was considered as bad scientific practice within the scientific community, but it could not be classified as sanctionable research misconduct under the DFG Rules of Procedure (“falsification of data”) as it was not vehemently rejected by the community as a whole. In contrast, due to the changed perception in the scientific community, undisclosed splicing can constitute sanctionable research misconduct since 2011.

The entire procedure has now been discontinued considering Mr. Naumann’s statements. At least three of the suspected four figures in publication no. 2 appear to contain undisclosed splicing indeed. However, neither intention nor gross negligence on the side of Mr. Naumann personally could be established. This is – among other aspects – due to Elsevier’s publicly available policy on image splicing, which states that manipulations in gels will not be objected as long as they aim at *clarifying* the scientific results only, and are not intended to *deceive* readers / the scientific community. We have found that this policy was in force already in 2014. Mr. Naumann plausibly stated that any splicing did not happen in order to deceive, and that it does not affect the scientific findings and statements of the publication. We have not concluded otherwise.

Pursuant to section III item 1 (b) para. 4 VerfOwF, we are notifying you of our decision to discontinue the procedure first. Should you not agree with this decision, you have the right to remonstrate with the DFG Head Office within two weeks of receiving this letter. The remonstrations can only be based on new facts. In this case, the Research Integrity Team would then review its decision.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Philip Ridder

This letter was sent electronically and therefore does not have a signature.