

# EGPA 2021 Conference



## RESILIENCE AND AGILITY OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN TIMES OF CRISES



### Panel 2 | Seeking guidance from experts

September 2021, 9 from 11.00am – 01.00pm

Venue: Auditorium Lafontaine – ULB – K1.105

#### [Zoom Meeting Room](#)

#### *Opening*

**Prof. Marius Gilbert**, Vice-rector for Research and Valorisation  
Spatial Epidemiology Lab, ULB

#### *Invited speakers*

**Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele**

Former vice-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Earth and Life Institute, Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain)

**Prof. Erika Vlieghe**

President of the Expert Group on the Covid-19 Crisis Strategy, Department of General Internal medicine, infectious diseases and tropical medicine, University of Antwerp (UZA)

#### *Moderation*

**Prof. Emilie van Haute**

Researcher at the Centre d'étude de la vie politique (Cevipol), President of SciencePo ULB

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#### THE ROLE OF EXPERTS IN POLICYMAKING

While the climate and health crises have shed light on the role of experts in policymaking, the presence and influence of experts in political and administrative circles have always existed. However, the speed of information dissemination, the new information and communication technologies, and the participatory aspirations of the population have contributed to change how the relationships between experts, politicians and citizens are

perceived, especially from the general public's perspective. In addition, scientific debates, the rise of populism and recent attacks on science have generated doubt and even suspicion about scientific works, fuelled by groups of individuals, politicians and sometimes academics themselves. Therefore, we find it particularly relevant to question the role of expertise in crises from the experts' point of view.

We have the pleasure and honour to welcome Prof. Erika Vlieghe, who is the president of the group of experts in charge of designing the strategy for combatting covid-19 in Belgium; Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, who was a vice-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which recently published a much commented report on climate change; and Prof. Marius Gilbert, our vice-rector for research here at ULB, and a brilliant epidemiologist who frequently appeared in the media during the covid-19 crisis. Prof. Marius Gilbert will welcome our two invited speakers. This will be followed by the interventions from our two invited speakers and thoughts on the role of expertise in crisis in the last few years. Finally, the discussion will be followed by an open session during which the public (both here and online) is invited to ask questions to our invited speakers.

**> *Opening (10 minutes)***

Prof. Marius Gilbert will welcome the speakers as a representative of the host institution + Open the session with comments on the positioning of a university in times of crisis (5 minutes) and his experience as an expert to transition with the next intervention (5 to 10 minutes).

**> *Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele***

Reflection about his experience as an expert involved in decision-making (15 minutes)

**> *Prof. Erika Vlieghe***

Reflection about her experience as an expert involved in decision-making (15 minutes)

**> *Roundtable (approximately 1 hour)***

Questions to guide the discussion of the role of experts in policymaking:

- What is expected from you as an expert when you are solicited by governments?
- What are the main difficulties you are facing when you are involved in policymaking?
- We have often heard that "politics is not applied science": how does science translate into policymaking, and how do you contribute to this process?
- How did you perceive your political legitimacy, were there moments in which you did have the impression to be in a delicate position, what are the guarantees for experts to find their place / have an appropriate and comfortable position in policy/decision-making?
- How do you position yourself in the decision-maker – advisor continuum? How would you describe your exchanges with policymakers in this regard (question of influence)?
- We can already read in a paper from 1980 (*Nowotny: The role of experts in the developing public policy: The Austrian debate on nuclear power*) that "there is a

considerable literature on recent controversies among experts on matters of public policy involving science and technology". Has anything changed in practice in the last few years? Could you mention the most important changes according to your experience?

- The recent participatory movements plea for an inclusive approach, integrating citizens in policymaking. Do you feel that the population is more associated to public policies? If yes, what impact does it have on you as an expert?

- Do you think that the machinery of the state is well-equipped to cope with the challenges ahead (in terms of both climate and public health)? Apart from political willingness, what would be required to improve service delivery in your opinion?

- How do you regard the evolution of public scrutiny, and how do you deal with the "we are all experts" (including politicians) phenomenon?

- What sort of institutional arrangements and processes have you found supportive (or unhelpful) in establishing a successful dialogue with elected representatives or the public?

**> Q&A session with the audience - approximately 20 minutes**