European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility

ACADEMY OF ATHENS

Research Center for Atmospheric Physics and Climatology

MARIOLOPOULOS - KANAGINIS FOUNDATION FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

THIRD ANNOUNCEMENT

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Science and policy in times of multicrisis and dissent:
Issues of framing, authority, evidence – and policy-economic decision making

Date:	Thursday 15 May - Saturday 17 May 2025 **The conference will be open to both on-site and online participation.**
Location:	Academy of Athens, Athens, Greece
Co-organisers:	European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility Mariolopoulos-Kanaginis Foundation for the Environmental Sciences
Funders:	Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progrès humain Critical Scientists Switzerland Triodos Foundation Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft - GLS Treuhand
Registration:	For online and on-site participation please register https://ensser.org/registration/ or via eventbrite (only on-site participation).
Fee:	We kindly ask all participants to transfer an individually chosen fee to ENSSER via bank transfer or paypal: https://ensser.org/donate/. We do not want to raise a financial threshold for taking part in the conference, but on the other hand, donations are a very important source of income for our work.

CSS Critical Scientists Switzerland

GLS Treuhand Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft

fph Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer Pour le progrès humain

Triodos Foundation

Introductory remarks

This conference is dedicated to the **complex relationships between science and policy** in this age of global multicrisis. The results of the conference will be discussed soon after it in the EU Parliament in Brussels.

Many scientists claim they are not heard by policy makers, while policy makers typically claim that their policies and actions are "science-based". This contradiction deserves further examination. As importantly, we must examine the outright control or rejection of science by autocratic government.

Since the mid-twentieth century, science and policy have developed under the growing influence of increasingly powerful and aggressive economic interests. As "science" has lost much of its earlier public authority and legitimacy, commercial interests – which have for decades been the biggest funders, owners and beneficiaries of 'public', i.e. governmental, including military, scientific R&D – have presented themselves as pursuing only objective, 'public good' knowledge and innovation, thus giving new meaning to "science", while concealing or denying their increasing control of scientific R&D, investments, regulations and innovations.

Scientific advice to policy-makers continues to be hotly contested, especially when policy actors and scientists disagree. However, policy decisions which claim to be justified by reference to scientific advice, often serve short-term industrial and corporate interests rather than, for example, the protection of public and/or environmental health and sustainability. Supposedly open democratic and scientifically informed policy choices are increasingly determined by corporate private choices or presumptions as to what are the main policy issues and challenges anyway, what counts as 'the public interest'.

What are the roles of scientific evidence and advice and of corporate and non-commercial societal interests in decision-making? In what ways do unaccountable economic actors, interests and assumptions shape policy and scientific considerations about what is possible and what is needed? Under what conditions can existing **public problem-definitions**, as well as just *decisions on them*, be made scientifically and democratically legitimate? How should scientific advisors and policy-makers respond to scientific disagreements? And what can responsible scientists do when governments adopt measures intended to shut down or at least control scientific dissent, when it challenges dominant official narratives?

Questions like these will be at the heart of the three days of reflection at this conference. By promoting open debate and reflection, this conference aims to engage with the plurality of perspectives. It will also examine attempts to polarise and over-simplify debates, which often happens by deploying misinformation and opportunistic selections of experts and evidence. How can ENSSER and its members combat repressive actions towards dissenters, and reopen spaces for debate that other forces have attempted to close? Could scientific determination to recognise complexities and ignorance, naturally also encourage precaution in face of hubristic claims of omniscience and control? In particular, how can such an essential and broad initiative give due space for more emphasis on sustainability, with all its dimensions, including environmental, economic and social (justice, equity, inclusion)?

In this conference we shall examine interactions between policy and science in areas that clearly differ in the extent of disagreement among scientists, and we will scrutinise the roles of industry and other interests in these areas. Counter to the conventional media and scientific account, there is only rarely consensus among scientists, and even less so when the topics are policy-sensitive. Disagreements and honest debate are key intellectual and normative influences on healthy scientific openness, and on the direction and pace of technoscientific change and innovations. The degree of

scientific (dis)agreement varies a lot between different areas of science. Industry often distorts the science it provides to policy-makers. Uncertainties and knowledge-gaps are essential elements of science; yet official scientific advisors to public policy-makers typically portray the available evidence as sufficiently robust to support their conclusions and recommendations. We aim more fully to understand the relationships between scientific and policy considerations in the making of policy decisions.

In the current permacrisis, we cannot afford to forego potential social and technological options which have been ignored, marginalised, or excluded due to their lack of commercial self-interest. Therefore, scientific debates need to be broadened again, not reduced. There is a politics as well as a science of uncertainties, in which ENSSER is already engaged. The precautionary principle, and more or less precautionary policy options, are often available for policy-makers, to guide them in their decisions; but good science as well as robust democracy, need to uphold their essential role in principle, independent from particular choices.

The conference will result in a report on different approaches, suggestions and possible solutions discussed at the conference. As a general point, ENSSER will support the standpoint that most societal options are not immediate, but involve long-term commitment to radically more modest and societally self-reflective learning, supporting a science which feeds and is fed by those normative principles in nature and society. The conference report will be the basis for an in-person follow-up workshop with members of the European Parliament and their scientific advisors in Brussels. This will provide us with an opportunity: to discuss the results of the conference at the heart of the EU decision-making, with those that have the responsibility to get us out of this permacrisis; to hear the problems they face; and, hopefully, to find trajectories that we can identify and work on, together.

PROGRAMME
(ALL TIMES ARE CEST + 1 hour)

Thursday 15 May

18:00 – 18:20 Welcoming

- Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati, *Medical School of National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, Chair of ENSSER and Secretary of the Board of Mariolopoulos Kanaginis Foundation for the Environmental Sciences*
- Prof. Christos Zerefos, *Secretary General of the Academy of Athens*

18:20 – 20:00 Round Table: Science in a time of permacrisis – the roles of science in policy decision-making, and of policy in scientific decision-making

Moderation: Dr. Angelika Hilbeck, *retired from Institute of Integrative Biology, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland*

- Prof. Larissa Bombardi, *Department of Geography, University of São Paulo, Brazil (on leave) and Visiting Researcher at CESSMA (Centre d'études en sciences sociales sur les mondes africains, américains et asiatiques), Programme PAUSE, Université de Paris, France*
- Prof. Giuseppe Longo, *Centre Cavaillès (République des Savoirs), CNRS and Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, France*
- Prof. Ignacio Chapela, *Dept. of Environmental Science, University of California Berkeley, USA*
- Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, *EcoNexus, Oxford/Bristol, UK*
- Emeritus Prof. Vyvyan Howard, *Professor of Bioimaging, Biomedical Sciences Institute, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland*
- Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati, *Medical School of National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, Chair of ENSSER and Secretary of the Board of Mariolopoulos Kanaginis Foundation for the Environmental Sciences*

Friday 16 May

10:00 – 10:05 Morning welcome and information

- Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati

10:05 – 13:45 Session 1: Science, Policy and Decision Making
Moderation: Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati

10:05 - 11:00 How has science come to be recognised and institutionalised as a policy resource in the past 80 years?

- Emeritus Prof. Brian Wynne, *Professor of Science Studies, Lancaster University, UK*

11:00 - 11:55 Under what conditions can the interactions of scientific and political considerations in policy-making be both scientifically and democratically legitimate?

- Emeritus Prof. Erik Millstone, *Emeritus Professor of Science Policy in the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU), University of Sussex, UK*

11:55 – 12:10 Coffee Break

12:10 – 13:05 What is the role of the economy in regulating the relationships between science and political decision-making?

- Dr. Irina Castro, *Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal*

13:05 – 13:45 Discussion Round: Knowledge Transfer for Policy in times of crises – who selects knowledge and scientists, and when?

- Speakers of session 1

13:45 – 14:30 Lunch break

14:30 – 18:50 Session 2: Illustrative examples of science - policy interactions

- Moderation: Irina Castro, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal and
- Sanjay Kumar, communication scientist, Bielefeld, Germany

14:30 – 15:40 Three case studies:

- **Ignorant by design: Regulatory science, comitology and the agrochemical industry**
  Dr. Barbara Berardi, *Director of Research and Advocacy, Pollinis, France*
- **Court ruling demands the South African government to apply the precautionary principle in GMO approval requests**
  Dr. Angelika Hilbeck, *Agroecologist, retired from Institute of Integrative Biology, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland* and Mariam Mayet, African *Centre for Biodiversity, South Africa*
- **How Governments and the Agroindustry Obstruct Critical Science: The Bonus Eventus Files**
  Elena DeBre, investigative journalist, *Lighthouse Reports, Athens, Greece*

Discussion

15:40 – 16:40 Long debate, little movement: the case of soil science and policy

- Dr. Andrea Beste, *Agricultural scientist, graduate geographer and soil expert, Institute for Soil Conservation & Sustainable Agriculture, Mainz, Germany*

16:40 – 17:00 Coffee Break

17:00 – 18:00 Disagreements and Disent: The case of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and New Genomic Techniques (NGTs)

- Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, *EcoNexus, Oxford/Bristol, UK*

18:00 – 19:00 Aspiring to consensus: The case of Climate Change
Moderator: Christos Zerefos, Secretary General of the Academy of Athens

- Prof. James Skea, *International Institute for Environment and Development*

19:00 – 20:00 Reception

Saturday 17 May

9:00 – 9:05 Morning welcome and information

- Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati

<u>9:05 – 10:35 Session 3: Roads to follow for a more fruitful science-policy relationship</u>

- Moderation: Diederick Sprangers, *Scientific Coordinator of ENSSER*

9:05 – 9:35 Why we need policies 'based on the best scientific knowledge available' and not 'science based' policies

- Christine von Weizsäcker, *Advisory Board of the Federation of German Scientists and Scientific Committee of the German Society on Human Ecology, Germany*

9:35 – 10:05 Why 'science' as currently conceived is often part of the problem, and how it could become part of the solution

- Dr. Ephraim Pörtner, *Critical Scientists Switzerland*, *Affiliated Researcher, Political Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland*
- Dr. Ulrich Loening, *Centre for Human Ecology, University of Edinburgh, Scotland*

10:05 – 10:35 Reproducible and trustworthy science: challenges and solutions

- Prof. John Ioannidis, *Professor of Medicine, Stanford University, USA*

<u>10:35 – 11:00 Coffee Break</u>

11:00 – 12:45 Round Table: **What roads can be followed?**
Moderation:

- Ephraim Pörtner, *Critical Scientists Switzerland, Affiliated Researcher, Political Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland*
- Irina Castro, *Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal*

Panel:

- Academician Emeritus Prof. George Chrousos, *Professor of Pediatrics and Endocrinology and former chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Athens University*
- Dr. Petros Varelidis*, General Secretary of Ministry of the Environment*
- Dr. Angelika Hilbeck, *Agroecologist, retired from Institute of Integrative Biology, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland*
- Dr. Andrea Beste, *Agricultural scientist, graduate geographer and soil expert, Institute for Soil Conservation & Sustainable Agriculture, Mainz, Germany*
- Prof. John Ioannidis, *Professor of Medicine, Stanford University, USA*
- David Gee, *Centre for Pollution Research and Policy, Brunel University, London*
- Dr. Aude Lapprand, *Physical chemist, Sciences Citoyennes, France*
- Dr. Edward Henry, *National Ecologist with USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, USA*

Including discussion

12:45 – 13:00 Closing

- Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou-Stamati

Round Table, Brussels
Autum 2025

A report will be written with the conclusions and recommendations from the conference about improving the relationship between science and policy. This report will be presented by ENSSER to the EU policy makers, administrators and their scientific advisors in a round table to be held in the European Parliament in Brussels in autumn 2025 to open a discussion about report.

The discussion will focus on how scientific and policy considerations interact in policy-making, and how to improve the relationship between science and policy in decision-making.