

Guest speech by Professor Gilbert Eggermont
General Assembly of NTW - 11th of December 2019

14:00 - 16:00

Mundo-B - 26, Rue d'Edimbourg, 1050 Brussels Room Lotus

Minutes - short version

Biography

Professor Eggermont is an expert in radiation protection and he was president of Belgian IRPA (International Radiation Protection Association). He took part in the crisis management of Mol after the waste scandal in 1988-92 where he carried out the nuclear safety and waste management evaluation. He has been member of the scientific Council of the Federal Agency for Nuclear Control (FANC), the Belgian nuclear regulator. He has chaired the Belgian Health Council working group on nuclear emergency planning after Fukushima. He is a critical expert in the governance of nuclear activities in particular in the power sector. He is in favour of transparency and participation of the public in nuclear decision-making, as NTW does. He worked a lot on technology and risk assessment with precaution in society, as well as on the compliance of the nuclear power with the criteria on sustainable development (he lead the PISA programme for integration of humanities in nuclear research in Mol).

Topic

Professor Eggermont was asked to intervene as a guest during NTW General Assembly, to exchange with NTW members on the main question: **“Transparency and public participation in nuclear decision-making: why is it important, why is the nuclear establishment reluctant and how can this be changed?”**.

Presentation

After having introduced the notion of “crisis” for emergency management (Belgian Health Council report) and the transparency in risk communication using the RISCUM model developed by the late Kjell Anderson for SSI and EC, he presented transparency as a way to reveal values (distributive aspects), interests (hidden agendas), and uncertainties in complexity. He underlined the importance of social dynamics studies (group think) and of the interaction between the experts and the civil society. He depicted governance as a process structuring decision-making with transparency in a sustainable framing.

Questions and answers

Questions were addressed by NTW members to Professor Eggermont prior to the meeting, on transparency and democracy, transparency and security, transparency and the military nuclear complex, and transparency and the civil nuclear complex. He prepared answers and laid them out to the participants.

The main issues that were raised during the session were the following:

- **Secrecy in the nuclear field and need of transparency**

Secrecy is part of the military culture since the 1930s/40s. It comes from a will to keep information secret in order to prevent abuses or to cover them (military experiments on humans in the past) but as well to protect the military aspects and the interest of the growing civil sector. Scientists also fear for sake of interests or cognitive dissonance to see their work corrected by media, social discussions and evaluations. For these reasons some of them as well as lobby groups try to manipulate and delay the discussions, casting a shadow over transparency. This is not acceptable and is sometimes even sponsored by governmental institutions as in the case with CEN (meaning: Centre d'Etude Nucléaire) in Belgium. The authorities should better disclose information on the nuclear field to civil society (eg installation of a storage site, refurbishment of reactors).

- **Manipulation of information and lack of confidence from the citizens**

It has always existed and the techniques developed by Goebbels are now applied much more effectively by IT and social media. President Eisenhower in the UN (**Atoms for Peace**) in 1953 gave access to US fission technology for proliferation control at IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and mandatory national security control by law for people working in sensitive installations. This control culture increased secrecy and hampered transparency increasingly for terrorism threats. In 1986, the Chernobyl accident was used by the American Cold war Intelligence Services (USIA) to manipulate risk estimations. The impact of the accident and Russian political culture and secrecy as well triggered the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, the media and the nuclear waste and regulatory authorities worldwide have lost confidence except in Finland. Trust by the citizens is difficult to reconstruct because they have seen manipulation of public opinion and influence on social organizations like NGOs at different occasions. Spokesmen of nuclear organizations now try to streamline information preventing direct information exchange of critical experts with society. A lot of experts even in regulatory advisory bodies are not yet subjected to CI procedures in their evaluation activity.

- **Necessity to ensure all communities can be involved in the decision making process**

Scientists have a role to play in explaining in a simple way complex things so that anybody can understand, budget is needed for that and for providing counter expertise to citizen groups. The participatory principles and CI procedures must be structured within the law, all through Europe. Progress is made in France thanks to CLIs and ANCCLI. The exchange of ideas points out that in Denmark also, institutional mechanisms ensuring public participation have been identified when in 2016 the Ministry of higher Education and Science, a WMO, NGOs, together with independent experts met and it was asked to the experts to answer on nuclear issues. Public authorities must find alternatives not to present the results of DM to the citizens only when everything is decided, though avoiding the discourse “the decisions are taken over us”. Citizens would involve themselves more in an open transparent frame for decision-making at the relevant level.

- **Action that must be legitimately taken by NGOs, which are trusted by the citizens**

NGOs have a role to play in the promotion of transparency. They are legitimate to take action towards more democracy, sustainability and peace. They should aim at acting not only locally and having a global impact. They must structure themselves at the EU level and make a strategy to allow an open and honest public debate on nuclear matters. NTW should adopt a frame in communication and sustainable development as a guardian of transparency at the European level, for countries with a democratic culture, as well as for countries with a less democratic culture.

- **Interactions between public authorities and scientists**

Regulators must be independent vis a vis the nuclear operators and not been influenced in safety DM by governments (see attached the project led of Marcin Harembki and Christiana Mauro, NTW members), but they should remain under democratic political control which is not the case at IAEA level and not enough at Euratom level. Governments have an obligation to take advice from the transdisciplinary organized scientists into account in their decision making. They should make available the appropriate skills also to citizen groups in order to clarify uncertainties in complexity.

- **Lack of respect for certain rules and procedures**

The European Union at Euratom level often disrespect the rules and procedures set within the broader EU regarding the nuclear field. E.g EIA - SEA - technology assessment of synergistic effects, Espoo, Aarhus.