

# EGPA 2023 CONFERENCE

**Zagreb, Croatia 5-8 September**

**Steering the European Union through poly-crises storms:  
The role of Public Administration**

## CALL FOR PAPERS

PSG XVII: Sociology of State: Reforms and Resilience

***Questioning the Reign of the Entourages.  
Ministerial cabinets, policy advisers, and other collaborators  
of the Executive within the European Union***

In 2023, during the EGPA Conference in Zagreb, the PSG n° 17 participants want to go on questioning the policy coordination activity within the Core Executive by focusing on the role of the Entourages of our political leaders in steering the EU institutions and EU Member States governments, at all levels of governance (national or federal, regional, meso-local, and local). Therefore, we intend to bring together in our panels Public Administration and public policy specialized researchers as well as practitioners (public servants, elected officials, policy experts) who are willing to share their research, ideas and experience about the major contemporary question of the existence, building and strengthening of the institutional capacities and related human resources necessary to support and assist the political masters of our turbulent times in their ambition to govern, steer and control ordinarily fragmented and silo public policies while navigating through more global and sudden 'poly-crises' – in a nutshell to maintain their governing capacities.

PSG n° 17, since the 2018 EGPA Annual Conference in Lausanne, has dedicated its successive panels, until the ones at our the 2022 EGPA Annual Conference in Lisbon, to exploring the organs, processes, and issues of 'Policy coordination at the Top' from a comparative perspective. The editorial outcome of our fruitful exchanges, in which colleagues from our sister organization in Central and Eastern European States, NISPAcee, are contributing in a decisive manner, is under finalization: Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans, Marie Goransson, Hussein Kassim (Eds.), *Coordination at the Core? Executive decision-making in international organizations and the EU*, Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming, end 2023.

Exploring the coordination activity within the Core Executive (in the sense of Rhodes and Dunleavy, 1995) of our Western democracies affected by a global trend towards more 'presidentialization' (Poguntke, Webb, 2005) – of which the French Fifth Republic was a precursor in Europe, as early as the 1960s – brings researchers to address the major question of the governing capacity, or 'force de gouverner' (Rousselier, 2015). To assist and empower them to 'successfully claim their chances of power' (Weber, 1919) in more and more complex postmodern polities, the political masters of today can and do rely – as their predecessors since the Romano-Byzantine emperors' eunuques or the clerks surrounding medieval European monarchs, 'court politics' (in the sense of Dexter, 1977, or R.A.W. Rhodes, 2013) being nothing new (see Elias, *The Court Society*, 1969-1983) – on (more or less direct) collaborators. In these 'marches' (and not on the 'border', Eymeri-Douzans, 2003) where high politics and policymaking deeply interrelate, where top politicians and senior bureaucrats constantly interact, the activity of two distinct yet intimately related organs or institutions can usually be observed.

On the one hand, there are central administrative bodies whose names, size and organization vary substantially (Secretariat-General of the European Commission and of the Council of Ministers of the EU, *Bundeskanzleramt* in Berlin, *Secrétariat général du Gouvernement* in Paris, *Presidencia del Gobierno* in Madrid, Cabinet Office in London, etc.) but can be referred to, generically, as 'Secretariats-Generals of the Executive' (SGEs). These SGEs, usually of administrative nature by their legal status, and populated by career public servants who are not dismissed when a new government arrives (with the exception of the secretary-general him/herself, who is often a *politischer beamte*), assist the President/Prime Minister and the ministers in their governing activity, in a way comparable to what the staff of a general does at the headquarters: that is why Jean-Louis Quermonne qualified them as '*administrations d'état-major*' (Quermonne, 1991)..

Their main role is to organize and handle the inter-ministerial/inter-institutional coordination of policymaking, including law and by-law writing and adoption process, and sometimes to also monitor law enforcement and policy implementation by line ministries. Such a complex and multidimensional coordination activity, in which political and policy issues are intertwined, requires the SGE's more stable administrative staff to constantly interact with the direct entourages of those in power.

Precisely, and on the other hand, the political masters are surrounded and supported by staffs of personal collaborators, special advisors (SPADs, as they are called in the UK), '*conseillers de cabinet*', 'spin doctors', and more *ad hoc* policy advisors (consultants in strategy, think-tankers, "evening visitors", etc.). The former are politically appointed, on various bases (party creatures, campaign supporters, ministers' friends or even relatives, ...), and are non-tenured contractual agents, often subject to a rapid turn-over. In many states (and also at other layers of governance, such as international organizations or EU institutions, and more and more at the service of regional, meso-local and large municipal executives), these political cabinets or staff members are not only focusing on policy advice but truly assist their political masters in all the dimensions of their role, from the handling of their huge correspondence and their overloaded schedules, the writing of discourses (dedicated mission of the 'ghost writer'), the travel management, the relations with the media and the lobbies, or the production of tweets and posts for the minister, to much more policymaking activities: e.g. representing the minister in interdepartmental meetings, counter-expertizing policy options prepared by the senior bureaucrats/technocrats of the department, negotiating the content of draft legislations with their counterparts from other ministerial cabinets. A prominent role is played by the chief-of-staff, who tends to become in many cases a sort of shadow *alter ego* of the political master. Based on empirical observation, it is not exaggerated to assert that 'a minister is not a physical person anymore' but proves to be a sort of collective being of undetermined nature (Eymeri-Douzans, 2015) – this statement being accurate as well for heads of State, regional presidents, or mayors of big metropolises.

Having explored, in the chapters collected for the abovementioned book – *Coordination at the Core?* –, the ecosystems and processes of central policy coordination with a special light shed on the activities of the administrative organs of coordination – the Secretariats-General of the Executive –, it makes sense now to focus the investigations and reflections of our PSG n° 17 on their associates-rivals: **the more political and mobile entourages of the Executive**. As a matter of fact, we have already been following this avenue of research for about ten years, since the long production process of a multidisciplinary collective opus (30 contributors from six disciplines) edited by Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans, Xavier Bioy, Stéphane Mouton (Eds.), *Le règne des entourages. Cabinets et conseillers de l'Exécutif*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2015. This opus mainly focused on France, yet already included chapters by invited co-authors on the cases of the European Commission, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the UK, and the United States. The undertaking was followed by Panel CS07.01 'Cabinets ministériels', SPADs & other collaborators of the Executive: the Reign of the Entourages? (co-chairs: Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans & Mauro Calise), held at the IPSA 24<sup>th</sup> Congress in Poznań, Poland, July 23-28, 2016; then by the series of panels 'Between politics and public administration: the reign of the entourages?' (organizer: Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans) at the 2017 IIAS congress, in Aix-en-Provence, May-June 2017, where a rich collection of 17 case studies (European Commission, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Romania, UK, Norway, Switzerland, USA, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, Madagascar) was presented by a group of international scholars.



We want to push that research agenda a step forward, within the frame of the European Union considered both as an institutional space in which the production in common of public policies involves more and more the political entourages of the EU and national Executives (e.g. the intense activity of the respective diplomatic sherpas and European advisors of our heads of state or government prior to much more frequent and decisional European Councils than before in the new era of 'poly-crises'), as well as a valid space for scholarly comparison of the common features and differences of the political entourages and policy advice systems between our 27 Member States, and between their various layers of territorial governance (federated states, regions, provinces and metropolitan/municipal governments).

Such a collective endeavour seems meaningful given the state of the existing scientific literature in English. Indeed, the growing scientific interest, in the Anglophone world, for the study of ministerial advisers started in the 2000's with colleagues from the Antipodes, Chris Eichbaum and Richard Shaw in particular (Eichbaum, Shaw, 2007, 2008, 2010, etc.), but also John Halligan (1995, etc.), who especially underlined the novelty brought into Westminster models of parliamentary democracies (the UK and its former dominions) by the irrepressible advent – combining increased numbers and growing influence – of these political creatures who have installed as a 'third element interposing itself into Westminster's bilateral monopoly' (Eichbaum, Shaw, 2007), elegantly typified as 'minders' between 'ministers' and (administrative) 'mandarins' (Shaw, Eichbaum, 2018). Such a rise of SPADs (special advisers) was observed in the United Kingdom since first appointments made under Margaret Thatcher (see Yong, Hazell, 2014), and is also well documented in Canada (Craft, 2015). Even though the latest publications in that vein include chapters on Nordic countries, and sometimes the Netherlands or Germany, they remain mainly driven by research questions which relate to Westminster model (and cousin) political contexts and policy styles (Craft and Halligan, 2017, 2020).

Yet, the European Union is a laboratory where diversity flourishes, and continental Europe is characterized by other trajectories of state-building or rebuilding (Linz and Stepan, 1996), other political games, other legal and administrative traditions (Painter and Peters, 2010), other post-NPM and Neo-Weberian State reform trends (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). To say it in a simplified and stylized way, while the UK and other Westminster regimes stuck for centuries to the system of tiny 'minister's private offices' supporting ministers in their political duties but providing little-to-no policy advice (traditional role devoted to the Permanent Secretary of each department) and have evolved in the recent decades towards a new advisory system, many Western continental European countries (Italy, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Austria, etc.) have for long adopted the French model, established in Paris as early as the 1800's and constantly developed and refined since then: a system of oversized, internally differentiated and specialized, powerful ministerial cabinets whose members do politics and make policies at the same time, in a constant attempt to take and maintain political control over the State bureaucracy. Thus, the 'reign of the entourages' is nothing new in Western continental Europe, including the European commissioners' cabinets in Brussels, established as early as the 1960s according to the French model. As far as Central and Eastern European Member States are concerned, the post-communist context is also very different from the one of Westminster democracies. The blurring, during the communist period, of the distinction between the Party and the State apparatus, then the collapse of the Party-State, the great difficulty to invent on such a *tabula rasa* a neo-Weberian bureaucracy in a context of instable multi-party systems and fragile coalition governments, combined with huge corruption and party patronage have paved the way for the establishment of ministerial cabinets in all countries, whose members (often very young) are less concerned with policy advice than with their own career promotion and access to public prebends or private lucrative positions thanks to 'revolving doors'. Context does matter in that matter as in so many others, and the EU is a rich space for fruitful comparisons between the entourages of the Executive.

If we pose the hypothesis of reigning entourages, meaning that the Prince (whatever his/her title and level are: President, Prime Minister, minister or secretary), who is not a physical person anymore, does not reign alone but reigns with, through and thanks to his/her entourage, it is as crucial for the social sciences to study them thoroughly, as it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to study elected politicians. The empirical material to be collected, by means of quantitative methods as well as qualitative work, then analysed and cross-examined, is vast and diverse. Let us mention a few aspects:

- What do we know about the social background of the persons who join the Executive entourages? What about gender balance, geographic origin, family background, etc.?
- Are there education curricula which 'predestine' some people to join a ministerial cabinet, why and how?
- What are the political advisers' former occupations/professions? Are there different profiles, related to age, gender, position to be occupied in the entourage?
- How are the advisers recruited, and by whom? Are there counter-intuitive facts in that regard (cases of advisers 'imposed' by the party to a minister; cases of advisers chosen by the chief-of-staff and not by the minister, or imposed by the Prime Minister and President)?
- What are the legal provisions regulating the architecture and functioning of ministerial cabinets? Which type of contract do collaborators get, with which guarantees, material rewards, obligations (code of conduct)? In the context of an increased democratic demand for more transparency, are deontological faults, favouritism, and conflicts of interest a raising issue regarding entourages?
- How can the role of (different kinds of) cabinet collaborators and policy advisers be described in detail and analysed? What are the features of their daily life? With which partners or stakeholders do they interact more? How do they interact (maybe in concentric circles) with more "outside" policy advisers such as private consultants, think-tankers, academics, all sorts of experts, and lobbyists?
- How can we assess the real influence and actual power of the entourages, in politics and in policymaking? What are their limits?
- To whom exactly are they responsible and accountable? What does 'loyalty' mean and imply, or not, in different contexts?
- Is an experience within ministerial staffs a resource for being promoted, or obtaining a 'golden parachute', or taking "revolving doors", or not, and under which felicity conditions?
- Moreover, a wider question could be explored: if confirmed by the national case studies, in what respect and to which extent is the growing 'reign of the entourages' congruent – 'medium or result'? – with current transformations of our post-modern polities: increased personalization; media hyper-exposure and 24/7 info channels; political time acceleration; multi-actors, multi-level network governance & 'overcrowded' policymaking?
- Etc.

These few thoughts are indicative. All young researchers and more senior colleagues who have original research relating to our topic, as well as practitioners from all European, national and territorial layers of government (public servants, elected officials, policy experts) are mostly welcome to contact us and submit abstracts. Abstracts can be sent in either English or French, and accepted papers will be presented in these two official EGPA working languages.

**A variety of contributions is warmly encouraged**, such as:

- Theoretical contributions exploring the types of the entourages and policy advise roles.
- Country-specific analyses on the role of entourages and policy advisers, at all levels of governance, including case-studies on a specific public policy.
- Institutional analyses at European level.
- Practitioners' reflexive sharing of their real-life experiences in delivering policy advice and/or mobilizing expertise in decision-making.
- Etc.

## Co-chairs of the PSG XVII

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## Practicalities

*Important dates:*

- ✓ Deadline for submission of abstracts: May 30, 2023 (extended)
- ✓ Deadline for notification to the authors: June 15, 2023 (extended)
- ✓ Deadline for online submission of full papers: August 17, 2023
- ✓ EGPA PhD Symposium 5-6 September 2023
- ✓ EGPA 2023 Conference: 6-8 September 2023

EGPA 2023 Conference Website: <https://www.egpa-conference2023.org/>

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