

2021 ESPAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DAY ONE

Thursday, 18 November 2021

BUILDING EU RESILIENCE AND AUTONOMY IN A FAST CHANGING WORLD

How to use future scenarios for policy-making in an era of profound transitions

Introduction and moderation

Kristel Van der Elst, CEO, The Global Foresight Group

Keynote presentation – scenarios for the future of the EU

Stephen Quest, Chair, ESPAS and Director-General, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Round Table debate - how to build a shared vision for the future of the EU?

Jeanette Kwek, Head of the Centre for Strategic Futures, Government of Singapore

Peter Schmidt, President, NAT Section, European Economic and Social Committee

Duncan Cass-Beggs, Head of foresight, OECD

Jaana Tapanainen-Thiess, Secretary General, Government Report on the Future and Government Foresight Group, Prime Minister's Office, Finland

Summary of the session

The panellists discussed how foresight is leveraged to support decision making across different countries and institutions. Keynote speaker Stephen Quest started the conversation by describing three occasions when scenario building was included in policy making at the European Commission. Scenarios aided in updating legislation on the customs union, defining the goal of Open Strategic Autonomy, and drafting better regulation fit for the future. The diverse examples showcase how foresight can be used at all stages of the policy making cycle and allow to make better informed decisions in all areas of European policy.

Jeanette Kwek shared her experiences from working in Singapore, which has long incorporated foresight in the public sector. She highlighted that scenarios can provide a common platform and thereby facilitate a constructive discussion about future challenges. Ms Kwek focused on the importance of communicating the output of foresight research. From her own experience she recommended presenting it in a more interactive form, e.g. card game, rather than a bulky report. Ms Kwek expressed her concerns on how to bridge the gap between the people who create the scenarios and the people who create legislature. The challenge remains to ensure that insights from scenario building are actually used in public policy.

Peter Schmidt provided input to the discussion by talking about his experience in the EESC, especially on working on a comprehensive food policy in Europe. In his view, a successful foresight exercise needs to be participatory, take a holistic approach and fit into the democratic processes. He stressed the importance of involving civil society in all stages of foresight and subsequent policy making in order to create a wellbeing economy. Mr Schmidt noted that the EESC which houses employers, workers and civil society organizations is the perfect environment to practice inclusive scenario building.

Duncan Cass-Beggs talked about two scenario building exercises that the OECD has recently undertaken. In one case they created scenarios with regards to the position of OECD itself in 2035, considering the possible paths globalization and digitalization might take. He reflected that this exercise stimulated a debate around the role of OECD as an organization and its interactions with non-state actors. Another example Mr Cass-Beggs provided was about using strategic foresight to perform stress-tests on net-zero transition strategies proposed by the governments.

Jaana Tapanainen-Thiess continued the conversation by sharing how the Finnish government incorporates strategic foresight in their work. A Ministerial Foresight Panel plays a key role by creating scenarios to inform policymaking. Ms Tapanainen-Thiess noted that choosing to not outsource foresight required investments, but also allowed for a broader and more inclusive research.

The panellists agreed that there is a resurgence of interest in foresight which brings additional responsibility. Mr Cass-Beggs noted that it is important to maintain a sense of humility and be aware of biases intrinsic in the research that guides scenario building. Ms Kwek added the need to make a distinction between different foresight tools and what each of them can contribute. Mr Schmidt returned to the point of always involving civil society in foresight.