

2021 ESPAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DAY TWO

Friday, 19 November 2021

Global Trends to 2040: Europe's strategic choices in a more disputed world

How will AI change humanity and can we master our digital futures?

Moderator

Marcus Scheuren, Head of Unit, EP Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age (AIDA)

Panel discussion

Eva Kaili, MEP, Chair, Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA), European Parliament

Anthony Gooch, Chair, OECD Global Parliamentary Network

Andrea Renda, Senior Research Fellow, CEPS; Visiting Professor, College of Europe, Bruges

Vladimír Šucha, Senior Policy Adviser, UNESCO; former Director General, Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission

Laura Nurski, Research Fellow, Bruegel

Summary of the session

Several key issues were discussed in the panel focusing on the AI's impact on humanity. One of the main topics was the ethics of artificial intelligence and exploring ways of ensuring that AI serves society and helps achieve societal goals (including responses to climate change). In this regard, several risks and opportunities were underlined.

First, there is insufficient data on the impact of artificial intelligence on humans and society, prompting the need for further exploration and discussions on this subject. A suggestion to guide these discussions would be looking at AI and its societal impact from different levels and perspectives, in order to grasp more effectively the geopolitics of this technology and the risks it poses.

Second, as AI is opening new paradigms for thinking and finding solutions, the risk of humans losing the capacity to decide increases. In this regard, all speakers underlined the need to build technology to complement humans, not replace them and to ensure full control over the tasks AI can carry out.

Directly related to this was the question of how to prepare humanity for an AI world, which brought into the discussion Europe's role in setting global standards to build an AI that provides solutions. An important milestone in this process is the recently adopted UNESCO global framework for ethics of artificial intelligence, which offers a blueprint for ethical regulations of AI. The links between policymaking and AI were also touched upon, as speakers emphasized the role of the practical elements from AI risk assessment frameworks in policymaking.

One opportunity featured in the discussion was the idea of a global learning experience on artificial intelligence, which could potentially start from experimental policymaking and assist global governance. A relevant suggestion, in this case, was the AI incident tracker, which could facilitate learning from incidents and accidents and help respond to emerging challenges. In this regard, speakers emphasized the importance of setting a medium-term agenda.

Another thought-provoking topic was digital wellbeing and the idea of translating the wellbeing indicators into the digital world to help humans thrive in an increasingly digitized world. Speakers underlined that digital flourishing also means making sure that human rights are protected and transferred online, while humans must retain full control over technology.

The following key questions were raised repeatedly during the discussion: how best to prepare for a digital future, how could AI help humanity learn from its failures and become an effective aid to decision-making, and how to apply the ethical principles on AI in practice.