

# 2021 ESPAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## DAY TWO

Friday, 19 November 2021

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

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### **Transatlantic foresight 2040: Comparing and assessing scenarios for common challenges ahead**

*In conversation*

**Maros Šefčovič**, Vice-President for Inter-institutional Relations and Foresight, European Commission

**Maria Langan-Riekhof**, Director, Strategic Futures Group, US National Intelligence Council (NIC), Washington DC

*Commentary*

**Florence Gaub**, Deputy Director, EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

**Bruce Stokes**, Executive Director, Transatlantic Task Force, German Marshall Fund (GMF)

*Moderator*

**James Elles**, Founder and Chairman, Transatlantic Policy Network (TPN)

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### **Summary of the session**

*The rise of foresight:*

Vice-President, Maroš Šefčovič stated that in this highly volatile global environment we needed foresight more than ever. Excellent research existed in the past, but it remained disconnected from political action. The financial, migration and health crises of the past decade had made us more aware that we should think collectively to respond to potential scenarios. Foresight was becoming embedded in our processes, and every legislative proposal now takes into account foresight findings to make our policy future-proof. Foresight had finally become a priority and embedded in the political cycle. The usefulness of foresight was well-established

in Europe, with various member states initiating programmes and strategies that take a long-term approach.

#### *Scenarios:*

Maria Langan-Riekhof emphasised the importance of using scenarios to outline potential futures and the effect of potential decisions that could be made now. One of the reasons why scenarios were included in their work is because it helps the reader to think about difficult futures, it allowed you to tell stories about trends that unfold that may be uncomfortable. The goal is to explore scenarios that policymakers can connect to, and engage with. The Vice-President stated that scenario-building was the focus of the foresight community. It provided decision-makers with the necessary information to navigate towards the future we want, and avoid the future that we do not want. Identifying signals of key trends helped us cope with climate change, and provided answers to how we can attain our climate targets and realise a greener economy.

#### *Integrating different perspectives:*

It was emphasised that there was a consensus on the need for a greater number of perspectives, experts and experiences in scenario-development. Analytical techniques, computer modelling and strategic conversations to challenge our biases were being deployed, and included different perspectives from every continent. The NIC had recently turned to virtual exchanges and conversations with experts around the world. The main difficulty in this situation, lay, in fact, with reaching non-experts. It was suggested that diverse groups around the world must be included and contrasting voices were needed to have effective foresight. Connecting with young students to involve them was a feature of the NIC's work, something it would like to do this more of in the future. The Vice-President Šeřčovič said that young people were tremendously motivated to engage with foresight. More broadly, he raised the issue of finding ways to integrate Asian perspectives in the foresight work being undertaken.

#### *Dissemination:*

The US intelligence community was now sharing its work with the American people. The forecasts that they have released offer readers an understanding of global systemic challenges such as climate change, disease, financial disruptions, and geopolitical competition. The role of the US intelligence community was to make the public aware of such issues. The US President was the first recipient of the NIC's global trends report, the latest one having been published in April 2021. The report was also disseminated across government agencies and Congress. The Vice-President underlined the potential of the European ministers of the future network, and emphasised the need to assist politicians to think longer-term. In order for senior political decision-makers to understand the benefits of foresight, the information provided had to be relevant, actionable and translatable into concrete steps for policymaking.

*Global foresight cooperation:*

The Vice-President emphasised that we needed not only national and EU-level foresight, but also a global approach in which we connected with foresight analysts in other parts of the world. This would allow us to better understand their perspectives on the future, and compare it to ours. It would be an important next step. He said that it would be particularly interesting to cooperate on both sides of the Atlantic to establish an 'early-warning' system to detect threats. Ms Langan-Riekhof stated that the lessons that we have learned during this time of societal resilience will be critical for the future, and a subject for further exchanges between the EU and the US.