

# ARCHITECTS OF THE FUTURE

European policymaking in times of uncertainty,  
technological disruption, and societal adaptation

8th Open European Dialogue  
Helsinki, 6-8 October 2023

## HIGHLIGHTS

### IN A NUTSHELL

51

Our 8th Annual Policymakers Dialogue brought together **51 policymakers** from across Europe.

28

**We broke our record!** In our most geographically diverse dialogue to date, political voices from **28 countries** came together – from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

7

Thanks to the **OED Policy Incubation Lab** format, policymakers had the opportunity to identify areas of collaboration and co-develop initiatives with colleagues across Europe and the party spectrum: **7 ideas for cross-border collaboration initiatives** emerged out of the dialogue.

1<sup>st</sup>

We hosted our **1<sup>st</sup> AI Values Lab!** Through the case study of AI, this interactive exercise allowed policymakers to emerge difficult conversations and themes, and grapple with the paradoxes of policymaking around the topic of AI and emerging technologies.

18

**International experts and innovators** nourished our conversations and offered stimulating interventions.

- Aleksandra Przeglasińska, Vice-Rector of Kozminski University and Senior Research Associate at Harvard University
- Anselm Küsters, Head of the Department of Digitisation / New Technologies at the Centre for European Policy (CEP)
- Cathleen Berger, Research Director of Future Technologies and Sustainability at the Bertelsmann Stiftung
- Damiano Cerrone, Co-founder of UrbanistAI
- Fabian Stephany, Departmental Research Lecturer at the Internet Institute of Oxford University

- Florian Hönicke, AI Principal at JinaAI
- Francesco Pignatelli, Strategic Advisor for the Digital Economy Unit of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre
- Giulio Quaggiotto, Policy Fellow at the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP)
- Jessica Bither, Senior Expert on Migration and Tech, Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Joanna Bryson, Professor of Ethics and Technology at the Hertie School
- Johannes Anttila, Senior Policy Expert and Lead of Tech & Society at DEMOS Helsinki
- Julia Trehu, Program Manager and Fellow for the Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative at the German Marshall Fund of the United States
- Katju Holkeri, Head of the Governance Policy Unit at the Finnish Ministry of Finance
- Nicolas Forstner, Co-Lead of Langwith Research
- Pablo Garfias Torrent, Co-Lead of Langwith Research
- Philip Meissner, Professor of Strategic Management and Decision-Making at ESCP Business School
- Rauli Westerstrand, Chair of the Center for Philosophy at the Disruptive Futures Institute
- Sandra Chakroun, Core Team Member at OpenFisca

## KEY MESSAGES

It is impossible to summarise the richness of a three-day open dialogue, but here are a few impressions from our conversations.

- For policymakers to effectively navigate uncertain futures, the **value-added of honest, cross-party and cross-sector political dialogue spaces** is increasingly recognised.

“There are some issues that are better first discussed in a real working environment, a safe environment, with no judgment, just to put every possible argument on the table for the sake of really understanding what is at stake. (...) It’s very, very important for politicians to have a safe space to say out loud what they think, receive feedback from their colleagues, without having to fear immediate public repercussions.” – Member of the Swedish Parliament

- The future may require **embracing a politics of learning and patience** as a new political posture.

“The scariest thing for a politician to say is “I don’t know” – but sometimes that is necessary. The trump government, for example, went around asking its administration what they were hoping to learn this year, and the question took everyone by surprise – they had probably never been asked.” – Guest Expert

“Regulation takes time, but maybe we just need to accept that. Politics works this way in democratic countries.” – Member of the Swedish Parliament

- **Strengthening collaboration opportunities across parliaments, committees and governance levels** as a tool to break silos, bolster institutional learning and increase the regulatory capacity of individual governing bodies is welcomed.

“We all share and experience the same problems. Better solutions can be found when we’re working together.” – Anon.

“We all navigate complex realities in our countries. It is so good to know and remember each other from time to time that we are not alone. The strength of being a group is what I’ll take back home.” – Anon.

- A **positive attitude may be a necessary policymaking tool** for political forces invested in shaping the future.

“How can we become future lovers? It is in our DNA as politicians, but we need to find ways to be more positive about the future than we are right now.” – Anon.

“We cannot stop AI. If even Elon Musk couldn’t stop it, that much is clear. If we cannot find a positive narrative, these technological changes will be once more captured by fear mongers.” – Member of the Austrian Parliament

- Designing future-proof institutions may require understanding the profound difference between risk and uncertainty - and **exploring new institutional approaches and benchmarks to better equip political leaders** facing the unknown.

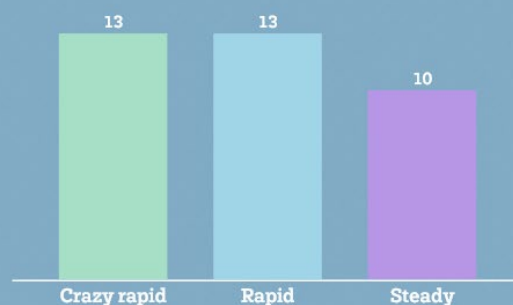
“We designed these institutions, we can do it again – I will bring back the desire to work harder at the institutionalisation of change in our society.” – Member of the Serbian Parliament

## THEMATIC INSIGHTS: HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS BE ARCHITECTS OF THE FUTURE?

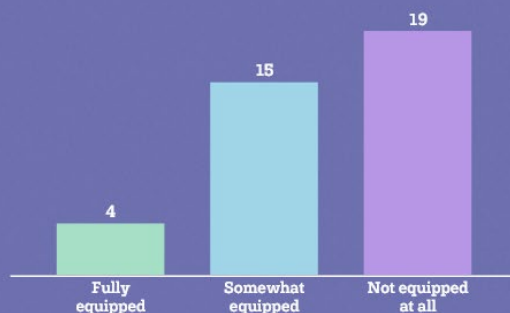
Technological advancements are already changing the playing field of policymaking and have profound, yet often still ambiguous, societal, economic, ethical, and political implications. At the 8th Annual Policymakers Dialogue, we explored today’s policymaking challenges through the lens of these technological advancements.

Across policy fields, policymakers are feeling the rapid pace of change, and many political representatives feel that the degree of preparedness of their parliamentary institutions to face the pace and depth of technological changes is far from ideal.

### At what pace is your current policy field undergoing transformation?



## How equipped is your parliament in navigating these changes?



>> Extracts from our Mentimeter polling kicking off the three-day exchange

Over the course of three days, the Open European Dialogue provided a platform for policymakers to engage with their colleagues across Europe, enabling them to learn from the perspectives of others and engage with different ideas and potential solutions to the conundrum of regulating and governing a fit-for-future society.

The [OED House Rules](#) were specifically designed to encourage active listening and a spirit of open dialogue. Participants reiterated the importance of such a platform for providing policymakers with a space to reflect on shared regulatory challenges and ethical political dilemmas while setting aside political antagonisation.

Below are some of the thematic discussions and insights that emerged from the conversations.

### **Regulation & governance of AI – at what level can we govern these technologies, and with what attitude?**

The European Union is considered by many a torchbearer in technology governance, with a strong focus on crucial domains such as privacy, data protection, market oversight, and antitrust regulation. The need for effective global governance of technologies, especially of artificial intelligence, was a prominent topic of discussion. At what level should governance be established, and what urgency is there to actually regulate?

“We as humans produce the technology and, at the same time, we have problems adapting to such technology - but AI undoubtedly improves lives. What we need is a New Fundamental Charter of Human Rights. Such regulation will defend democracy and lead us to a New Social Digital Pact.” – Member of the Spanish Parliament

“Has anyone of you directly voted on a bill regarding AI? I didn’t think so. The problem is that we are treated as the translator of EU policy for citizens, but we are much more than that, and we should have a more active role in these topics.” - Member of the Romanian Parliament

"I find that often, at the European Parliament level and at the national level, politicians are focused on the wrong thing when it comes to tech innovation. They are not investing the time into trying to better understand it so that they can better explain it to their constituents. This is our job - to create policy that helps to regulate it but also to help our citizens understand and use it." – Member of the European Parliament

"It is unfortunate, but I think many parliaments, like mine, are actually ignoring the innovation movement. This not only hurts our country, but it impacts regional development." – Member of the Slovenian Parliament

"Real innovation comes from the local level. It's important that national legislation or EU politics takes that into account, building contact points and ideating solutions that are relevant and enforceable for the local level." – Anon.

"We don't need to understand the technology to regulate it. What we need to do is set some standards of transparency and consumer protection and demand that private companies ensure their products respect these conditions. We should responsabilise the developers not run after the technology. We can look out for red lines being crossed and patterns of behaviour. We've done the same with lots of climate legislation." – Member of the U.K. Parliament

"If we get too good at change – we may lose who we are along the way. There is some point in conservatism." – Anon.

"I want to talk more about AI and threats and opportunities of technologies to my national parliament. It's a key question for the future, and we don't think enough about it." – Anon.

Many parliamentarians called for a global governance initiative looking to regulate AI, the same way it was understood that nuclear technology required global regulation. The need to act swiftly and in a coordinated manner was a recurrent topic of discussion throughout the three days.

## **Confronting the (hidden) power dynamics of tech**

Among the discussions surrounding the possible societal imbalances fueled by AI, the financialisation of big tech was a key theme, posing challenges related to the creation of tech monopolies that are increasingly difficult to subject to democratic control and raising questions about who truly is in a position to shape the future of our societies.

"The thing about private tech companies is that we are playing on their turf. Soon enough, instead of us thinking about how we regulate them, they'll start thinking about how they regulate us." – Member of the Estonian Parliament

"How do we create interesting new jobs related to tech instead of amplifying inequality and poor-pay jobs in certain areas of the world?" – Anon.

“We are always seeing regulation vs innovation as a dichotomy, but regulating monopolies can help innovation too. At the European level particularly, this could provide a better chance for small and medium businesses to compete.” – Anon.

“If we are being honest, the truth is disinformation makes for good business.” – Member of the Irish Parliament

“One of our challenges is that we are dealing with a small number of private stakeholders, and they are allowed to play in the field without constraints. We have to have a debate around the question of who’s going to have an impact on these regulations.” – Anon.

“To be honest, private companies don’t think about regulation when they are developing new products – unless they are forced to.” – Anon.

## **On the rise of tech-driven global competition**

The question of global competition, shifting power dynamics and democratic standards was felt by many parliamentarians as increasingly urgent in a time of global competitiveness driven by new technological advancements.

“I see that Europe is already behind when it comes to the idea of tech innovation. We are seeing that we do not have the expertise in Europe, or have not invested into developing it, so we are forced to outsource and invest into other countries.” – Member of the Portuguese Parliament

“I am less worried about a singularity occurring as I am about the access that bad actors will have to these technologies, who will be able to use the tech to explicitly do harm.” – Anon.

“When we look at Europe’s competitiveness in technology, we seem to be further behind. So I think that we should be defining parliaments’ and governments’ positions and thinking about how we can support innovators, small and medium enterprises, etcetera, to be more competitive.” – Anon.

“This could be an unpopular opinion, but maybe we think too much about the future. While we are overthinking about the future, our competitors are taking the present. What future are we talking about? We speak of peace and prosperity, while others imagine a future of domination.” – Anon.

## **Political attitudes and the role of emotions in a technology-driven society**

In a hyper-technological society, politicians reflected on the role of rationality versus emotions and empathy. A recent [Stanford study](#) found that it helps to empathise with political rivals as it increases the chances of changing their minds. Throughout the dialogue, participants reflected on the ways in which emotions and empathy influence their day-to-day political work.

“What will be the added value of parliamentarians if AI can do our job?” - Member of the Italian Parliament

“I am not sure the future will be governed by empathy. But still, we have our humanity, and humanity matters. It is very dangerous to rely too much on AI’s rationality and allow it to make decisions for us. I believe we need to talk to people. I believe we don’t put enough emotion into our own work – we act too much as managers, but if we forget about emotions, we forget a big part of politics. As politicians, we should work to switch on our feelings.” - Member of the Ukrainian Parliament

## **On the need for institutional renewal**

Faced with seemingly unprecedented levels of uncertainty, politicians reflect on the way our democratic institutions, parliaments and political parties operate – and how these institutions could begin to upgrade their operating systems to future-proof our democratic decision-making approaches.

“What did we learn from the last crises? That we have a lot more capacity for change than we have been expressing... and we have options.” – Anon.

“How do we make it so that, as politicians, whose time horizon is often just the next election – we spend time looking into the future, beyond our own nose – maybe if we made it fun – for example, integrating Sci-Fi exercises?” – Member of the Hungarian Parliament

“The Committee for the Future is already a thing of the past. Parliaments are already no longer effective – when was the last time you had a useful discussion inside parliament?” – Member of the Serbian Parliament

## **On the importance and value of dialogue as a policymaking tool and a means to address uncertainty**

Many parliamentarians recognise that the value-added of spaces for genuine political dialogue is all the more important when faced with complex challenges for which no clear solution exists. Dialogue as a tool to understand, learn and increase the ability of politicians to generate new ideas, seek out new tools and intervene responsibly in delicate societal questions is appreciated by many of the political representatives.

“For me, being here, and probably for most of us, is giving up something which is very valuable: Family, kids, friends, time with our constituency — but because it is so important for us to grow and to learn something new and to develop and make connections and to stay updated, we also need to participate in events like this. So, it is important for us to prioritise these exchanges.” – Member of the Georgian Parliament

“There are different sensibilities when it comes to technology. Dialogue formats are crucial for creating mutual understanding.” – Anon.



“Dialogue is not supposed to solve an issue or find agreement – but increasing to the maximum our social understanding of a particular political challenge.” – Anon.

“What is unique about this dialogue is everybody really had their ‘ears open’, ready to listen rather than to impose their own vision. It felt like everyone was really committed to the tasks and target of the OED.” – Anon.

## POLICYMAKERS’ INITIATIVES: FERTILE GROUND FOR CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

All collaboration starts with an idea. A testimony to the Open European Dialogue’s commitment to offer politicians a space to creatively explore new avenues for political collaboration across parties and borders are the seven policymakers’ collaboration initiatives that emerged from the dialogue.

#1 – **Best-Practice Sharing:** The Use of AI in Political Campaigns

#2 – **Policy Proposal:** An EU-Wide Effort to Block Illegal IPTV Boxes

#3 – **MP Training Program:** Educational Program for MPs on Tech Advancements

#4 – **Policy Tool Development:** Using AI to Support a Pilot Project on Comparing and Identifying Best-Practices across EU Member States’ Health Care Systems

#5 – **Broad-Spectrum Political Initiative:** A Global Conference on Kick-starting "Global Action on AI"

#6 – **Policy Tool Development:** Text-Analysis Tool for Comparing EU/National Legislation and Bills

#7 – **Policy Proposal:** Skills Training to be Included in Working Hours

🔔 Do you want to join this cross-party, cross-country collaborative effort? Send us a message to [team@openeuropeandialogue.org](mailto:team@openeuropeandialogue.org) to sign up for one of the initiatives!

We are currently assessing how we can use our resources to support the development of these ideas further. Watch out for more info coming soon!

## POLICYMAKERS' TAKEAWAYS: POLICY IDEAS AND PERSONAL INSIGHTS

A selection of personal takeaways and action pledges shared by participating politicians.

- *"I will introduce the 'National Dialogues' project of Finland back home and try it out."*
- *"I take home the idea of a Committee for the Future."*
- *"I take home the idea of mandatory subsidised tech training for employees. We have it in our resilience plan, but just for some cases. The idea of expanding it nationally makes sense. Also, I now have a research list on tech & apps for co-designing policy, cities, and citizen relations with elected representatives."*
- *"I appreciated the spirit of enquiry that is fostered in these dialogues."*
- *"I want to look into applying the OpenFisca tool back home."*
- *"I take away a number of new connections as well as a wealth of knowledge, including several great practical tools, that I could apply in my political & legislative process and party work."*
- *"I take away a different way to be a deputy."*
- *"Technology not being my area, I want to learn more about what is being done in my country and in Europe on the subject of artificial intelligence because the sessions we had awakened me to the urgency of the theme."*
- *"I take away a great will to deepen participation in this platform of interparliamentary dialogue and more attention to themes of digitalisation and artificial intelligence."*

## SNAPSHOTS







More pictures are available [here](#).

## DIGGING DEEPER

Download the [‘Architects of the Future’ Research Package](#) for a deeper exploration of the intersection between tech, society and politics. Explore useful readings and resources and an overview of innovative policymaking ideas, some of which were presented during the dialogue.

Thank you to all the politicians and experts who participated in our 8th Annual Policymakers Dialogue.

The Open European Dialogue will continue to provide spaces for genuine dialogue across countries and parties, striving for a more open and constructive political dialogue culture, one conversation at a time.

We thank all the enthusiastic partners and funders who make this work possible.

Find out more about the Open European Dialogue here:  
[www.openeuropeandialogue.org](http://www.openeuropeandialogue.org)

COOPERATIVELY RUN BY THINK TANKS AND  
FOUNDATIONS ACROSS EUROPE

**APR@POS**  
Advancing Process in Politics

**CIDOB**  
BARCELONA  
CENTRE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
AFFAIRS

**laI** Istituto Affari  
Internazionali

**G | M | F**  
IDEAS LEADERSHIP HOPE

**ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ**  
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΓΑΝΙΣΜΟΣ ΤΕΧΝΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ  
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΓΑΝΙΣΜΟΣ ΤΕΧΝΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ

**STIFTUNG  
MERCATOR**

**B** King Baudouin  
Foundation  
Working together for a better society

**Robert Bosch  
Stiftung**

**BertelsmannStiftung**