



OPEN EUROPEAN DIALOGUE

Blank Canvas: an opportunity for Europe?

7th Open European Dialogue

Lisbon, 9th-11th September 2022

HIGHLIGHTS

IN A NUTSHELL

- 70** Our 7th Annual Policymakers Dialogue brought together **70 policymakers** from across Europe.
- 26** Our most geographically diverse dialogue to date brought together political voices from **26 countries** – Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, and Ukraine.
- 3** Over three days our **Blank Canvas dialogue** combined open agenda elements, allowing policymakers to propose and choose their own conversation topics, as well as exploring key policy and political challenges such as the **Ukraine War, Leadership in Times of Uncertainty, Life After Covid, and Critical Energy and Digital Transitions.**
- 9** **Globally renowned experts** nourished our conversations and offered stimulating interventions.
- Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook, Executive Vice-President at the Bertelsmann Foundation
 - Elisa Lindinger, Co-founder of Superrr Lab
 - Marty Linsky, Co-founder of Cambridge Leadership Associates
 - Robert Muggah, Consultant and Co-founder of the SecDev Group and the Igarapé Institute
 - Geoff Mulgan, Professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation, UCL
 - Júlia Seixá, Pro-Rector and Professor at NOVA University of Lisbon
 - Vincent Siegerink, Policy Analyst at the Centre for Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunities (WISE), OECD
 - Cat Tully, Founder of SOIF – The School of International Futures

- Fabian Zuleeg, Chief Executive and Chief Economist at the European Policy Centre (EPC)
- Hannes Kunz, President of the Institute for Integrated Economic Research (IIER)
- Rebekah Ison, Communications Manager at Apolitical Foundation

SNAPSHOTS







>> More pictures are available [here](#).

KEY MESSAGES

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

- The **Ukrainian conflict is as a prominent concern for European policymakers** and the testimonials of Ukrainian colleagues were profoundly cherished as instrumental in providing invaluable insights and perspectives

"I will persevere in trying to explain the need to support Ukraine in spite of consequences"

- The **need for more thinking around long-term future goals and visions** and the need for spaces where policymakers can work on more long-term, strategic and also **creative and imaginative solutions**

"I will advocate in my party for working on long-term strategic planning and offering people a vision and concrete plan for deeper societal transformation (energy, digitalization, new welfare state)"

- The relevance of **the tool of radical empathy** especially in times of poly-crisis and uncertainty, both to connect with citizens as well as other political realities

"By coming here and engaging in discussions with colleagues, I realized how important it is to be there for your citizens, to feel what they are going through and to show compassionate leadership. (...) Sometimes we don't have the answers, but we can already do a lot if we learn to simply listen, as we are doing during this event"

- The recognition of **the value-added of non-partisan dialogue** as a tool to find new solutions and move ideas forward

"I will apply the OED house rules to all meetings I organize!"

- **Welcoming opportunities for further collaboration** across parliaments and parties

"I hope we have the chance to meet again and keep supporting each other and sharing good practices and experiences. We have already shared many business cards and ideas for cooperation. Emotionally, I realized that we are all in the same place and I am happy that we have chosen to support each other"

THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS AND EXPERIMENTATION

Under the **OED House Rules**, designed to encourage active listening and a spirit of open dialogue, over the course of three days, policymakers covered a variety of different topics and were able to choose which conversations they wanted to explore further.

A substantial discussion around **the war in Ukraine** covered a broad spectrum of topics including the prosecution of war crimes, how to communicate with the electorates across Europe to avoid war fatigue, the speeding up of the energy transition, the impact of sanctions, and protection from Russian propaganda.

Policymakers were also given the opportunity to explore different macro trends that are currently affecting European policymaking, from **economics and inequality in times of crisis**, the impact of the **Covid crisis** on societal dynamics, to how to build new alliances for **climate action** and future-proofing **digital infrastructures** against global **digital threats**.

An exploration of the concepts of radical empathy, leadership in times of profound uncertainty and political imagination, informed a collective brainstorm in which policymakers selected topics where to explore imaginative and creative ways forward. A selection of the **policy and thought experiments** that emerged is reported below.

CHINA-EU RELATIONS: RISKS VS THREATS

What if...we were to start the relationship with China from scratch – what would it look like?

DEALING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

What if...we taxed excess profits from energy companies?

...we installed solar panels in Africa?

...we had a European inheritance tax?

...we developed small nuclear plants around Europe?

...we temporarily suspended the merit order?

EU ENLARGEMENT

What if...we granted provisional status of membership, with selected benefits?

FOLLOWING THE RULES OF DEMOCRACY

What if...we created new spaces in public media for a different political culture and better political education?

...we designed public informed debate spaces between societal parties – citizens, civil society – and not only politicians?

...we tried to foster media literacy for children to develop tools against disinformation?

CLIMATE RESILIENCE POLICIES

- What if...**we launched an EU level experiment for no packaging stores, or “zero waste stores”? What impact would such incremental policy changes have on internalized societal values?
- ...we tested the impact of returning ownership of water collection infrastructures to rural communities as a common good?

LEADERSHIP vs POWERLESSNESS

- What if...**we sued the government?
- ...we had more town-hall meetings?
 - ...we attended the Open European Dialogue more often?

DEMOGRAPHY. MIGRATION...AND YOUTH POLICIES

- What if...**we invested in remote work as a solution for depopulated areas?
- ...subsidized smaller employers to move to rural areas and small cities?
 - ...we had on-demand public transport to underserved areas?
 - ...we provided free housing in rural areas with high-speed internet?
 - ...we created a rural Erasmus?

MENTAL HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

- What if...**we embedded into new laws the possibility to apply tweaks after carrying out an impact assessment on wellbeing?
- ...we included in the data we use to analyse policies more of a qualitative component (such as interviews) together with hard data?
 - ...we tried to standardize the happiness index internationally for usage alongside GDP?

POLICYMAKERS' TESTIMONIALS AND INSIGHTS

The OED as a space to recharge and create new hope

“I’ve been to a lot of conferences in the past few days, and they drain your energy. **This conference was the only one that gave me energy instead. For a moment I forgot what is going on in Ukraine and it gave me the mental space necessary to go back home and do my job.** This is the kind of conference that makes you say: I want to come back!” – Member of the Ukrainian Parliament

“I’m still surprised and extremely glad that I was chosen to join this group. Coming from Hungary, **I did not have any hope that people wanted to connect with me** and hear about my perspective on democracy in my country” – Member of the Hungarian Parliament

The importance of political networks

“When I started working as a parliamentarian in Madrid, I realized the importance of establishing a network of people I could work with in Parliament and outside. **When I joined the OED, I realized how it was also important to establish something similar with my European colleagues**” – Member of the Spanish Parliament

“I got a concrete idea out of it – I did not know Spain had an AC temperature cap and managed to save 6% in energy bills. It’s these sorts of small ideas that can make a difference, **and I don’t know what other space would have provided me with the chance to acquire this information. I go home with many new ideas**” – Member of the Polish Parliament

A better political dialogue culture is possible

“This is a unique space where I get to **really engage** with my peers” – Member of the Polish Parliament

“The OED is different. I attend many parliamentary assemblies, but this is **the only time that I don’t have a strict agenda and list of to dos and things to say, and I can talk freely**” – Member of the Polish Parliament

“I’ve **never experienced something like this before**” – Member of the Croatian Parliament

“What is different in this event is that I found a space **where I can test ideas that I have.** I could not do this in parliament, where I face opposing parties, not even in my own party, which I lead. **Here I’m free to discuss ideas and debate ideas I could previously only share with my friends**” – Member of the Polish Parliament

“In our parliaments **it is easy to feel lonely** due to competition, **this is one of the only spaces where we can come and truly connect** with colleagues working on the same topics, and do so freely” – Member of the German Parliament

“I am going back to factory settings, being **reminded about why I was motivated to enter politics in the first place**. I will go back home and commit to practicing the balance between authority and vulnerability” – Member of the Serbian Parliament

Engagement and constructive exchange across parties

“I observed different political ideologies, **engaging in a non-partisan way**” – Anon

“I am making friends. **Even friends with very different views**” – Member of the Romanian Parliament

“Europe is divided, and this is visible in many discussions...but **convergence sometimes comes unexpectedly beyond our typical political affiliations**” – Anon

“I want to **promote a friendlier atmosphere in communication with my colleagues**. To be **more empathetic to people with opposite views**” – Anon

Thinking bigger and re-igniting political imagination

“I take away **intellectual inspiration** to think about issues also beyond my own country’s borders” – Anon

“I will try to **think much more about the long-term future** and how we can provide incentives to voters and associates for them to demand, by us, more thinking about the long-term future, more creativity, more imagination” – Anon

“As politicians we spend most of our time dealing with refrigerator issues – fixing technical things - **we need spaces like these to re-ignite political imagination**” – Member of the Latvian Parliament

Radical empathy in policymaking

“I learned **what compassionate leadership is**. By coming here and engaging in discussions with colleagues, I realized how important it is to be there for your citizens, to feel what they are going through and to show compassionate leadership. We all represent citizens who are going through a lot of challenges and all of them look back at us for answers. Sometimes we don’t have the answers, but **we can already do a lot if we learn to simply listen as we are doing during this event**” – Member of the Georgian Parliament

“I am taking away the **need to combine radical compassion and a positive action plan**” – Member of the Latvian Parliament

POLICYMAKERS' ACTION PLEDGES

A selection of policymakers' personal action pledges that resulted from the dialogue.

Policy Ideas

- Encourage own party to develop a “Rural Erasmus” initiative
- Host an open policy conversation in Bucharest
- Promote stronger cyber-security legislations
- Discuss action points in parliament in the case of a China invasion of Taiwan
- Create a global campaign involving parliamentarians to call on International Financial Institutions to stop using GDP as the main metric for wellbeing and develop a new index
- Redesign the current projects I am working on paying much more attention to impact, assessment and innovation
- Working immediately on a classified list of things to do to change our economic model, at a European level, national and local levels

Better Interparliamentary Cooperation

- Romanian parliamentarian invites all dialogue colleagues to a climate dialogue she is holding in October in Bucharest
- Ukrainian parliamentarian invites the OED members to visit Ukraine – “it is important to see with your own eyes the consequences of Russian aggression”
- I will encourage more interparliamentary exchanges through the contacts I made here
- I will share information requested by colleagues about bills I was involved in
- I will propose a parliamentary mission on the project of a European political community at the French Parliamentary Assembly

Better Political Dialogue Culture Across Parties and Borders

- I pledge to listen carefully. I don't need to share a vision or belief with someone to be able to learn something from them
- Listen more. Talk less. Stay connected to the people I met here to exchange on European topics in my everyday work
- I will advise my party to work more with foreign experts

Future-Proof & Inspired Policymaking

- ➔ Draft a 10-bullet point plan for the future, even if it is unrealistic in this term. Offering a positive outlook to the population is important to provide hope beyond easy-fix solutions
- ➔ Take time out weekly to plan for the future and work on long-term goals and ideas
- ➔ I will advocate in my party for working on long-term strategic planning and offering people a vision and concrete plan for deeper societal transformation (energy, digitalization, new welfare state)
- ➔ I will organize for my party a brainstorm session on future vision
- ➔ I will organize a roundtable with experts, parliamentarians and business focused on developing a new energy supply model as an anti-crisis long-term policy, the discussion will incorporate the ideas from the OED discussion
- ➔ Opening direct communication with citizens on a common future vision and actions we are ready to take now
- ➔ I would like to propose to my parliament to try to imagine a quite long-term future, using social networks in collaboration with young adults with the idea to define a “new dream” for our society
- ➔ I was interested in the experience of the Ministry of the Future which exists in some countries. I want to learn more about this initiative

Applying Radical Empathy

- ➔ Contribute to preparing society to the economic hardships of war through radical empathy and brutal honesty

Combatting Ukrainian War Fatigue in Europe

- ➔ Persevere in trying to explain the need to support Ukraine in spite of consequences. “First they came for the Jews – and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me” – Martin Niemöller
- ➔ Strengthen interaction with colleagues from parliaments of EU, using the arguments that we found during the session “Russia-Ukraine war” to prevent war fatigue
- ➔ I will talk more about why sanctions against Russia are working
- ➔ Enquire about the satellite currently not in use by a colleague’s government

DEMAND FOR MORE OED

A number of ideas were put forward by the participating parliamentarians signalling a strong demand for more OED activities and engagement opportunities going forward, as well as some concrete proposals to collaborate with official parliamentary institutions.

These included ways to stay connected, from Whatsapp groups to more virtual engagement opportunities, as well as supporting interparliamentary cooperation by helping to coordinate cross-border initiatives and projects for better information sharing of legislative practice at the European level.

We are extremely humbled and proud of the outcome of the 7th Open European Dialogue.

The Dialogue has strengthened our resolve to keep advancing better political communication spaces in Europe and promote tools and methods for creating a more open and constructive political dialogue culture, one conversation at a time.

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

Find out more about the Open European Dialogue here:

www.openeuropeandialogue.org

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