



EUROPEAN THINK TANK CONFERENCE 2023
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2023, 1:30 PM – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2023, 5:30 PM
DGAP, RAUCHSTRASSE 17, 10787 BERLIN

Technological change, geopolitical conflict, democratic decline, biodiversity loss, growing inequality, and political polarization – each poses a significant challenge for the institutions we aim to support. In combination, those challenges become exponential. Because such interconnected crises call for interconnected answers, we must deepen the cooperation among think tanks to develop a diverse set of approaches for engaging with the massive disruption we are facing.

How might we adapt think tank practices to engage with this dramatically changing environment?

The [Open Think Tank Directory](#) lists 1091 think tanks in Europe. Such diversity offers unique opportunities for cooperation. While think tanks are well-networked when it comes to their specific topics of interest, we need more opportunities to:

1. **Collaboratively forecast future pathways:** Which future developments can we foresee? Which blind spots can we detect together?
2. **Exchange learnings about current practices:** How is our professional practice looking at and responding to the future landscape and the questions this raises?
3. **Develop new approaches for our profession:** What kinds of interventions are appropriate for facilitating transformative change and building needed capacities into our ecosystem?

From October 18 to 19, 2023, the Think Tank Lab brought think tankers and think tank partners from all over Europe together in Berlin for the second European Think Tank Conference. This conference provided a unique and trustworthy platform for looking into the future of our field from very different perspectives.

Do you have ideas on what topics we should tackle next? - Get in touch with the Think Tank Lab team (thinktanklab@dgap.org).

1:30 PM

WELCOME

Caroline Paulick-Thiel, *Executive Director & Strategic Designer, Politics for Tomorrow*
 Weronika Perlinski, *Acting Head, Think Tank Lab, German Council on Foreign Relations*
 Dr. Mikko Huotari, *Executive Director, Mercator Institute for China Studies*
 Roderick Parkes, *Director of the Research Institute & Head of the AOZ, German Council on Foreign Relations*

2:00 PM

KEYNOTE: THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

Sir Geoff Mulgan, *Professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation, University College London (UCL)*

3:00 PM

PARALLEL SESSIONS 1

FEMINIST RESEARCH & DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE IN THINK TANKS

Co-Chairs:
 Anna Hauschild, *Research Assistant for Feminist Foreign Policy, German Council on Foreign Relation*
 Marina Solntseva, *Co-Chair, Co'moon e.V.*
 Denis Esakov, *Writer & Curator, Co'moon e.V.*

During the session, we looked at the process of knowledge production through decolonial and feminist practice, and discussed the problematic of the western knowledge production.

We reflected on how we can approach the process of knowledge production using decolonial and feminist practices and tried to discover blind spots that western knowledge production cannot reach.

The session combined two main goals: to discuss some fundamental feminist and decolonial research principles (critical self-reflexivity, politics of location, situated knowledges, feminist and decolonial ethics) and to give space for exchange between researches across think tanks and academia who would like inform their research by these principles.

MULTIPLE FUTURES: FORESIGHT AS A FORMAT FOR POLICY ADVICE

Chair: Georgios Kolliarakis, *Senior Research Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations*
 Lieve Van Woensel, *Foresight expert*
 Isabella Hermann, *Board Member, Stiftung Zukunft Berlin*
 Erik Øverland, *President / Special Convey on Education and Research, World Futures Studies Federation WFSF / Norwegian Embassy in Berlin*
 Rainer Rudolph, *Vice Chairman, Munich Security Conference*
 Katja Muñoz, *Research Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations*

In recent years, our world has become entrenched in a state of "multi-," "perma-," or "poly-crisis," which laid bare numerous vulnerabilities and gaps in European institutions and societies, and tested our ability to respond to and anticipate shocks.

Envisioning the future offers a major opportunity to analyze the consequences and side effects of our actions, expose blind spots, while pointing to difficult trade-offs. The DGAP "Multiple Futures" Report's Futurescapes for 2030 transcend the conventional "Good," "Bad," and "Ugly" mold and challenge prevailing assumptions about Europe's positioning within a rapidly evolving geopolitical order. To mark the report's launch, this roundtable discussion delved into foresight as a framework for policy analysis and contingency planning. Our conversation revolved around three key issues:

THINK TANK-LED POLICY GAMING SIMULATIONS

Co-Chairs:
 Jakob Hensing, *Research Fellow, Global Public Policy Institute*
 Gelila Enbaye, *Research Associate, Global Public Policy Institute*
 Sarah Pagung, *Programme Director Berlin Foreign Policy Forum, Körber Stiftung*
 Elizabeth Newbury, *Director of the Serious Games Initiative; Senior Program Associate, Science and Technology Innovation Program, Wilson Center*

Gaming and simulations promise forward-looking analysis and interactive learning in areas like conflict analysis and policy planning. However, their use currently remains relatively limited in the European context.

This session seeks to strengthen the community of practice of think tankers applying such methods in their work or interested in doing so. Speakers from the Global Public Policy Institute, Körber Stiftung and the Wilson Center will provide insights into their respective projects and reflect on learnings for further use cases. A moderated open discussion will serve to further exchange experiences and identify key challenges and best practices in the field.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing the Unlikely • Leveraging Foresight for Policy • Translating Foresight into Action 	
4:30 PM	COFFEE BREAK		
5:00 PM	PARALLEL SESSIONS 2		
	<p>AI ASSISTANTS FOR THINK TANKS – THE ROAD AHEAD</p> <p>Co-Chairs: Joscha Wirtz, <i>Digital Strategy Lead</i>, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy Sonia Jalfin, <i>Director</i>, Sociopublico</p> <p>Regardless of the political and social landscape in which think tanks operate, they face a growing number of exponential gaps. Given their importance for evidence-based policymaking and their influence on public opinion, think tanks need to understand, challenge and ultimately embrace emerging technologies, such as AI, that can address these gaps.</p> <p>So how can we make AI work for think tanks? We invited you to explore MVPs, readiness frameworks and approaches to implementation and learning in an application-oriented session. This session aimed to deliver two main outcomes: First, a comprehensive understanding of AI assistants and their potential applications in think tanks. Second, a framework for assessing organizational readiness to shape a responsible digital transition of think tanks.</p>	<p>FINDING THE GOLDEN THREAD IN THE TOWER OF BABEL</p> <p>Chair: Anahide Pilibossian, <i>Vice President of Strategy and Development</i>, APRI Armenia Fabian Zuleeg, <i>Chief Executive and Chief Economist</i>, European Policy Centre Aida Aidarkulova, <i>Executive Director</i>, CAPS Unlock</p> <p>“Finding the Golden Thread in the Tower of Babel,” proposes to workshop ideas for collaborations between European and non-European think tanks to reduce bias, geographically broaden access to expertise and advocacy, and ultimately create a more inclusive platform in which both sides can impact and influence subjects of common interest. In a paradoxical policy landscape, that is polarised and without boundaries at the same time, questions of geographical expertise or unconscious bias are more and more brought to the fore. Think tanks, in and beyond European capitals, are no exception.</p> <p>In this session, run by EU and non-EU-based think tanks, we had a candid discussion on why cross-regional collaboration matters and practices to promote or avoid. We hope that, as a result of this workshop, participants found potential collaborators or partnership ideas.</p>	<p>FROM THINK TANKING TO POLICY MAKING: STRATEGIES TO INCREASE POLICY IMPACT</p> <p>Chair: Abigaël Vasselier, <i>Director Research China's Foreign Relations</i>, Mercator Institute for China Studies Barbara Pongratz, <i>Think Tank Lab</i>, MERICS <i>Lead & Associate Analyst</i>, Mercator Institute for China Studies Tim Rühlig, <i>Senior Research Fellow</i>, German Council on Foreign Relations</p> <p>This was a workshop that bridges the gap between research and think tank production with policy making and implementation. This session explored how to translate your work into tangible policy change and actions. In this session, we guided you through the essential steps to increase your impact and footprint into the world of decision-makers and practitioners.</p> <p>In interactive group sessions, we learned how to craft a powerful advocacy strategy that not only communicates your think tank's research effectively but also makes your voice heard in the policy arena. We helped you understand the broader context within which policy decisions are made and connect your advocacy work to fundraising strategies. We enabled you to tailor your advocacy and fundraising efforts for maximum impact.</p>
6:15 PM	CHECK OUT & CLOSING OF DAY 1		
6:45 PM	SNACKS & DRINKS		
8:00 PM	AFTER CONFERENCE GET-TOGETHER		

<p>9:15 AM</p>	<p align="center">OPENING DAY 2 – WELCOME & NETWORKING Caroline Paulick-Thiel, <i>Executive Director & Strategic Designer</i>, Politics for Tomorrow Weronika Perlinski, <i>Acting Head</i>, Think Tank Lab, German Council on Foreign Relations</p>		
<p>9:30 AM</p>	<p align="center">THE THINK TANK STATE OF THE SECTOR Enrique Mendizabal, <i>Director, On Think Tanks</i></p>		
<p>10:30 AM</p>	<p align="center">PARALLEL SESSIONS 3</p>		
	<p align="center">BRINGING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GLOBAL LEVEL – ENGAGEMENT WITH THE G20 THROUGH THE THINK20 PROCESS</p> <p>Co-chairs: Sarah John, <i>Program Coordinator</i>, Global Solutions Initiative Sven Grimm, <i>Head of Research Programme and Training</i>, IDOS - German Institute of Development and Sustainability Luciana Servo, <i>President</i>, Institute for Applied Economic Research</p> <p>The G20 remains the key forum to address truly global issues, such as climate change, pandemic prevention, or economic growth. As official G20 engagement group, the T20 serves as “idea bank” by bringing together think tanks and high-level experts to discuss policy issues relevant to the G20. Engaging with the T20 offers the unique opportunity to feed research in the G20 discussions.</p> <p>But what are the key ingredients for policy recommendations to be heard on the global level? How and when should think tanks provide their knowledge? Building on first-hand insights into G20 and T20 processes, the session aims to find ways to boost the impact of think tanks’ policy recommendations to the G20 and collaboration among institutions.</p>	<p align="center">INDEPENDENCE, IMPACT, AND COLLABORATION: ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES FOR THINK TANKS IN EUROPE</p> <p>Chair: Johannes Greubel, <i>Senior Policy Analyst & Head of Programme</i>, European Policy Centre Helena Hahn, <i>Policy Analyst</i>, European Policy Centre Iulian Groza, <i>Executive Director</i>, European Policies and Reforms Renata Skardziute-Kereselidze, <i>Deputy Director</i>, Georgian Institute of Politics Abigaël Vasselier, <i>Director Research China's Foreign Relations</i>, MERICS</p> <p>Navigating the era of poly- and permacrisis is a challenge to think tanks across Europe. Growing political polarization as well as deliberate attempts to weaken democratic processes, including by limiting space for civil society, further complicate think tanks’ ability to act as bridge-builders. At the same time, the need for deeper, meaningful transnational exchange and cooperation (between the EU, member states, and neighboring/accession countries) has become ever more evident.</p> <p>This session offered a space for the think tank community to reflect and exchange on the structural challenges it faces. Drawing on input from an EU think tank, Georgia, and Moldova, participants were invited to share their own experiences, and the opportunities they see for transnationalizing think tank cooperation across Europe.</p>	<p align="center">UNDERSTANDING EUROPEAN IMPACTS ON GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS: HORIZON SCANNING & LIVING LABS</p> <p>Chair: Alexandre Fernandes, <i>Development Director</i>, International Institute for Environment and Development Europe (IIED Europe) Corrado Topi, <i>Senior Policy Advisor</i>, IIED Europe / <i>Director of CFSB and ICCAP programmes</i>, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Denisse Rodriguez-Olivari, <i>Visiting Fellow</i>, European University Institute; <i>CEO</i>, Voceras</p> <p>This session focused on understanding how European policies and actors impact environmental and socio-economic development in Majority World countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.</p> <p>The session started with a presentation of the main findings and next steps for the IIED Europe’s horizon scanning exercise. Using an interactive format, participants were invited to consider the relevance of these findings for the European think tank landscape and how they can work collaboratively to better understand the impacts of European actors on sustainable development prospects in the Majority World.</p> <p>Participants also had the opportunity to explore synergies with and actively engage in the next editions of the horizon scanning exercise.</p>

12:00 AM	LUNCH BREAK		
13:30 AM	PARALLEL SESSIONS 4		
	<p style="text-align: center;">FORESIGHT FOR REGIONAL RESILIENCE</p> <p>Co-chairs: Alexander Plé, <i>Scientific Consultant</i>, IQIB Institute for Qualifying Innovation Research and Consulting Roman Noetzel, <i>Managing Director</i>, IQIB Institute for Qualifying Innovation Research and Consulting</p> <p>Speakers: Oliver Rohde, <i>Head of Department Policy Issues in European and International Cooperation</i>, DLR Projektträger Saskia Werners, <i>Academic Officer</i>, United Nations University, Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) Dilâra Dayakli, <i>Policy Advisor</i>, DLR Projektträger</p> <p>The session introduced the concept of regional resilience and explored how strategic foresight can be used to achieve it in the face of global interconnected risks. After a brief introduction to the topic by the United Nations University, participants carried out an interdisciplinary analysis on the many factors that influence regional resilience in groups. This exercise took the participants through a guided simulation of the first phase of a strategic foresight process. By collectively exploring the multitude of factors from a variety of fields that can influence regional resilience, the workshop aimed at demonstrating the complexity of regional resilience and the benefits and potentials of interdisciplinary think tank cooperation.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">SHAPING TOMORROW: THINK TANK SCHOOL POLICY PITCHES & GRADUATION</p> <p>Thank you for joining the Think Tank School 2023 Closing Event, where you had the opportunity to explore our fellows' policy projects and learn more about the Think Tank School. The project presentations were divided into three rounds, each followed by a gallery walk where we invited you to connect with our fellows and share your own expertise and ideas to help them take their projects to the next level.</p> <p>The Think Tank School is a unique training program that empowers early-career think tankers to further develop their skills for effective think tank work and expand their network in the German and international policy community. It is based on a competency framework that is specifically developed to reflect the variety of roles required of think tankers today. The six-month curriculum covers topics such as policy analysis, policy advice, communication and advocacy, project management, and fundraising. Throughout the School, the fellows applied their newly acquired skills and tools to policy problems from their fields of expertise and explored novel ways to tackle them.</p> <p>The results are fifteen policy projects addressing issues such as gendered disinformation, EU-Africa relations, donor-recipient relations in Ukraine's reconstruction agenda, organizational readiness to deliver sustainable solutions, and many more.</p> <p>An overview of our fellows and their policy projects can be found here.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THINK TANK HYBRIDITY: STATE CAPTURE AND BEYOND</p> <p>Co-Chairs: Bojan Elek, <i>Deputy Director</i>, Belgrade Center for Security Policy Irena Djordjevic, <i>Chief of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit</i>, NALED</p> <p>This session dealt with hybridity in think tanks. After a short presentation of the basic concepts, including state capture and case studies from the region of Western Balkans that illustrate move towards hybridity as a consequence of state-capture, we discussed the following dilemmas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hybridity within TTs is and can Western audiences recognize it? • Are there just external challenges (e.g. state capture) or also other organizational • How does hybridity reflect beyond the WB region? • How will hybridity reflect in the future? <p>All participants were invited to actively contribute to the discussion. The outcome of the session was a mapping of different modalities in which think tanks operate within different contexts and a list of ideas on future perspectives of hybrid modality of operation.</p>
3:00 PM	COFFEE BREAK		

3:30 PM	PARELLEL SESSIONS 5		
	<p>AI AND RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS – WONKCOMMS 10 YEAR SPEACIAL</p> <p>Chair: John Schwartz, <i>CEO</i>, Soapbox Nick Scott, <i>Co-Founder</i>, PLAI - Purpose-Led AI Claudia Wessling, <i>Director Communications and Publications</i>, Mercator Institute for China Studies Elisabeth Nöfer, <i>Program Officer</i>, Aspen Institute Germany</p> <p>It's hardly an original observation to say that AI is set to disrupt knowledge focused organizations. And while think tankers have plenty of opinions on how to regulate AI, we've a lot less to say about how it might impact our own work as researchers and communicators.</p> <p>How will think tanks keep control and ownership of their research and messages? How do we know that evidence-based research will be prioritized by generative AI? How can we ensure that our colleagues are using AI ethically and how do we protect ourselves from organizations that are not?</p> <p>This special session marked the one year anniversary of WonkComms in Berlin and the tenth anniversary of the WonkComms network globally.</p>	<p>FUNDRAISING CHALLENGES FOR THINK TANKS: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS</p> <p>Co-Chairs: Luis Orlandi, <i>Founder</i>, Bridges2Funds Emanuela Dimonte, <i>Acting Head of Development</i>, Bruegel</p> <p>In this session, we explored the unique challenges faced by think tanks when it comes to fundraising and provided practical strategies to overcome these hurdles. The topic is highly relevant as think tanks play a crucial role in shaping public policy and discourse, and effective fundraising is essential for their sustainability and impact.</p> <p>During this interactive workshop, participants did:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the specific fundraising challenges faced by think tanks. • Learn about successful fundraising strategies employed by renowned think tanks. • Explore innovative approaches to diversify funding sources. • Discuss best practices for donor cultivation and stewardship. • Identify potential collaborations and partnerships to enhance fundraising efforts. 	<p>THINK TANKS & PARLIAMENTARY ENGAGEMENT: OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES</p> <p>Co-Chairs: Loïc Simonet, <i>Researcher</i>, Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik (OiiP) Sabrina Storm, <i>Programme Manager</i>, GIZ – Nepal Rebecca Farulli, <i>Associate</i>, APROPOS Group Saniksha Bade, <i>Research Fellow</i>, KU SOM Policy Lab Chiara Rosselli, <i>Executive Director and Co-Founder</i>, APROPOS Group Purna Nepali, <i>Associate Professor, and Program Director</i>, Kathmandu University School of Management (KU SOM)</p> <p>Advising -and at times lobbying- parliaments has become think tanks' main priority. And MPs, in fulfilling their central constitutional role, have become important consumers of think tanks' policy analysis and advocacy. But the relationship is often complicated, because of political affiliations and sensitivities, as well as (at least in some countries) the lack of culture and tradition regarding such interaction. This session tried to provide some insight into and trigger lively discussion about think tanks' relations with parliaments. It particularly addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practices in building trust and a win-win relationship between think tanks and parliaments; • Think tanks' contribution to building-up open and pluralistic spaces for dialogue, including MPs and the civil society; • Think tanks' impact on parliamentary life and political pluralism.
4:45 PM	CLOSING REMARKS, OUTLOOK & FAREWELL		

The Think Tank Lab is a joint initiative of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS). It is kindly supported by the Stiftung Mercator and the Robert Bosch Stiftung.