

## **Problems of governance, sustainability and unity in an enlarged EU**

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on

### **"Mobilising the regional foresight potential for an enlarged European Union"**

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## **Abstract**

The paper starts with a brief “methodological” introduction. Subsequently it documents the debate which is presently going on within the EU about the reform of its institutions and more particularly on the ways to address the present crisis of representative democracy, whose most evident manifestation is the decreasing trust in institutions. In the following section, it addresses problems of growth, governance, and sustainability, in view of the constitution of a European Research Area (ERA) and the enlargement of the EU, with particular regard to the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). Finally, recalling evidence from the previous sections, it provides indications of how foresight activities can be useful not only to outline possible future economic and technological development, but also to enhance democratic participation.

## **1. Introduction**

**This paper doesn't present the results of a systematic study. Rather it collects the reflections of the author based on a (necessarily partial and selective) exploration of secondary sources and on a number of informal interviews with differing types of actors, academic, practitioners and “lay”. Besides official EU documents (used particularly for the first section), the guiding criteria for selecting sources of information was their first-hand knowledge (as scholars, researchers, economic operators, citizens or other) of (some of) the CEECs (Central and Eastern European Countries). The cues which were sought in written materials and the questions which were asked to respondents were aimed at identifying whether there is either a tradition or a potential for regional technological foresight within current cultural and socio-political orientations. In particular, which pitfalls should be avoided in setting up foresight activities in order to pursue progress towards European unity while respecting and valuing diversity and autonomy.**

**A major hindrance I encountered since the very preliminary phase of scrutinizing potential fonts of information, was my lack of the necessary linguistic skills. This was a constraint to my possibility of identifying, selecting, and approaching sources (both documents and persons). Although similar to other situations of linguistic diversity in which I am often involved, in this case I had no alternative resources, such as cultural proximity or customary routine, which could partially make up for my deficit.**

**The language filter is a very powerful one, as it limits not only access to information, but also identification of sources. The ones most visible and available are those purposely addressed to an international audience, and possibly appropriately “packaged”. This is not to say that such sources are unreliable, rather that they are somewhat more removed from local reality as they have gone through a “translation process”, which is cultural as well as linguistic. I will pick up the point about linguistic-cultural proximity/distance again, in the last section of the paper, where I talk about the construction of foresight exercises**

## 2. The governance debate in the EU

In the last twenty years or so, in the European Union and elsewhere, ideas of greater inclusion and transparency have achieved great momentum and have also been reflected in legislation and policy. There has been a very significant increase in opportunities for citizens' involvement in decision-making. The reasons for this development are not hard to find. For the past half-century, Western Europe, along with other advanced societies, has developed a mass public that is more highly educated than ever before, and also more sophisticated in its opinions and desires. With the ending of a social system of oppression of the many poor by the few rich, class conflicts have been transformed into debates over how best to achieve a good quality of life for all. Moreover, the paradigm of unlimited scientific progress and continuing economic growth has lost its prominence and has given way to considerations about sustainable development. Citizens, who have often experienced disillusion and frustration, are nowadays less and less keen to delegate important decisions to restricted groups, be they experts, administrators or politicians.

Thus, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scientific expertise and representative democracy are both experiencing a credibility crisis. Either peacefully or aggressively, the request for extended participation has arrived on the political stage and different forms of dialogue, be they spontaneous or coercive are already in place. Governments can no longer assume that they have the consent of the governed simply because of periodic elections.

Many transformations are occurring in both public and private institutions which are partly the result of pressures from the civil society and partly of a reflection internal to institutions themselves. It is a circular process with feedback loops in which it would be impossible (and wrong) to attempt to separate cause and effect.

Even major multi-national corporations have substantially changed their approach towards the public. When developing new products and services they now convene meetings with consumers and organized groups of citizens and carefully monitor their opinions and concerns, opening channels for a two-way communication and, sometimes, even looking for advice rather than mere acquiescence. On occasion, commercial policies, notably for innovations, have been discarded, on the basis of warnings of public dissatisfaction, anxiety or outrage.

**New forms of public participation are thus being explored (Renn et al. 1995), at a time when consumer boycotts and mass support for non-violent direct actions are a constant reminder that "the public" is now a force to be reckoned and negotiated with. Yet, at this stage, there are neither satisfactory models nor appropriate *fora* for the full realization of an extended participatory democracy. To this end, progress is necessary in constructing new methods of decision-making, which include not only revised structures, but also innovative modes of thinking, communicating, and interacting.**

The EU institutions are often perceived as a huge and monolithic bureaucracy pursuing its own outcomes, the main ones being its own reproduction and survival. This stereotype, which reflects Max Weber's ideal type, captures of course some traits and trends, but it fails to identify other ones, perhaps less apparent or just in the *statu nascenti* phase. In particular it misses to recognise and acknowledge the pervasiveness and richness of the debate which mobilises both internal staff and external consultants on a number of issues which are key for the realisation of a sustainable model of development. Also, it fails to acknowledge that the typology of the external consultants has enormously changed over the last years and is no longer made only of restricted circles of experts, but tends to include larger and larger sectors of the society. This trend has been pushed further after the devastating crisis of the BSE, other food scares, major emergencies and accidents related to productive and transport activities, where the urgency of a new management style was fully perceived and experienced.

The shift in policy in favour of more extended and active citizens' participation in issues of common interest is by now reflected in a great number of EU documents (declarations, programmes, action plans, reports and even legislation). Discussions about technological innovation and economic growth are now framed also in terms of health and safety, distribution of advantages and drawbacks, alternative forms of utilisation of environmental resources, and so forth. Thus a multiplicity perspectives are taken into consideration and the premises are set up for the construction of an "extended peer community" (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993).

For example, the Sixth Action Programme for the environment - entitled "Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice" (EC 2001b) designed to cover the period 2001-2010 – calls upon the large involvement and collaboration of all European citizens in order to face global change<sup>1</sup>. Societal mobilization is advocated with great strength particularly in view of the challenges posed by the accession of the candidate countries.

Ideas of inclusion and participation are also present in a recent report of the European Environment Agency, which looks to the past to find inspirations for the future. It is significantly entitled "Late lessons from early warnings. The precautionary principle 1896-2000" (EEA 2001) and stresses the importance of *foresight* and *precaution*, showing the devastating effects of not having applied either one in due time. The report is based on case studies related to the hazards of human economic activities which were not recognised, assessed or taken in due consideration. Among others there are the cases of fisheries, radiation, the ozone hole, asbestos, PCBs, antimicrobials, the chemical contamination of the Great Lakes, the BSE crisis, etc. The chronicles show the strict and unavoidable interactions between scientific, technical, economic, and political elements in all such cases. The comments stress the importance of integrating disciplines as well as non-academic knowledge, of

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<sup>1</sup> The same ideas were already present in the previous Programme, covering the period 1993-2000 and entitled Towards Sustainability (Council 1993)

involving experts and lay people in the early detection of potential, long-term, irreversible damage.

**The strong message is that uncertainty and ignorance must be openly recognized and addressed from outset in a time when “[T]he growing innovative powers of science seem to be outstripping the ability to predict the consequences of its applications, whilst the scale of human interventions in nature increases the chances that any hazardous impacts may be serious and global” (EEA 2001: Preface). The message echoes that contained in the European Commission communication on the precautionary principle (EC 2000) and I maintain that no one, in the EU member states and in the candidate countries, can underestimate its importance: were material growth the only focus of an enlarged Europe, we all will soon have to face huge and possibly irreversible problems.**

**Similar ideas are invoked in the European Commission Science and Society Action Plan (EC 2002), which is part of the process of creating the European Research Area and is intended to support the strategic goal set by the European Union in Lisbon of becoming by 2010 the most competitive *knowledge-based* economy in the world.**

**The document contains very strong statements which reflect a thoughtful consideration of the interactions between science, technological innovations and social change. Again, the recommendations are of taking into account different types of knowledge and looking for cross-fertilization between differing sectors and experiences. This is particularly evident in the paragraph dedicated to the use of expertise, where it is stated that: “... science is often perceived as dealing with certainty and hard facts, whereas this is rarely the case, particularly at the frontier of research” (EC 2002: 24). Overall, the move towards technological innovation is enshrined into a precautionary frame where risk governance becomes an important issue in the promotion of science and technological innovation. Attention to the possible social economic and environmental impacts of scientific and technological progress is considered the joint enterprise of many actors and a way towards the strengthening of the democratic process. “If citizens and civil society are to become partners, the debate on science, technology and innovation in general and on the creation of the European Research Area in particular, it is not enough to simply keep them informed. They must also be given the opportunity to express their views in the appropriate bodies” (EC 2002: 17).**

**Throughout the document - besides the specific section (2.3) dedicated to “research and foresight for society” - the importance of *perspective studies* is recognised and their use recommended, at all levels, as a means to improving understanding of complex phenomena and enhancing ability to respond to emerging crises and questions. Also, explicit reference is made several times to both the member states and the candidate countries, suggesting that a public dialogue on the new leading-edge technologies is essential to implement the actions necessary to the construction of the European Research Area and, more broadly, of the enlarged European Union.**

**The Action Plan is syntonetic with another key document of the European Commission, the White Paper on European Governance (EC 2001c) and aims at helping its full implementation. The White Paper is the product of a program launched in early 2001 by the European Commission for the reform of the European governance, identified as one of its strategic objectives<sup>2</sup>. There governance is described as “rules, processes and behavior that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence” (EC 2001c: 8). The five criteria included in the definition are illustrated in more detail further in the document, as “principles of good governance”. Also, they are supposed to apply to “all levels of government – global, European, national, regional and local” (EC 2001c: 10).**

The White Paper definition of governance quoted above is, not surprisingly, somewhat centred on government institutions. The following definition is, in my view, more comprehensive and it best capture that societal models of coexistence result from the aspirations and actions of a plurality of actors

*Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest. (Commission on Global Governance 1995: 2).*

Besides being echoed in the programmatic documents mentioned above, the ongoing discussion on how best to revise traditional ways of managing common affairs produces tangible effects also in the European Union legislation. In many cases, ranging from specific contingencies (such as major accident hazards) to more inclusive strategic orientations (such as sustainability) there have been a conceptual re-definition, and consequent change in regulation, of citizens' role and involvement. From rather passive subjects acknowledged the need, or at best the right, to be informed about choices accomplished by others, to active stakeholders, with the right to participate in decisions (De Marchi *et al.* 2001).

Of course, the translation of innovative principles and articles of laws into actual practice is not a small endeavour. As Vignon puts it, in the present legitimisation crisis shaking the EU institutions (and not only those of the EU) “the heart of the problem [is] the lack of feedback in the application of rules as experienced by those ‘on the ground’ to those who conceptualise law ‘from above’” (Vignon 2001: 4).

In the attempt to find ways to a “procedural rationality” - now that the stage of “substantive rationality” has been bypassed - a “new” political discourse is being developed at European Union level (and addressed to other levels as well) which

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<sup>2</sup> The preparation of the White paper was organised into six work areas and twelve working groups: I.a. European public space; I.b. European scientific references; II.a. Participation of civil society; II.b. Evaluation; II.c. Better regulation; III.a. Decentralisation through agencies; III.b. Vertical decentralisation; IV.a. Convergence of national policies; IV.b. Trans-European networks; IV.c. Multi-level governance; V. EU and world governance; VI. Future of EU policies. The result of this work is presented in twelve reports. All the documentation can be found at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/areas/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/areas/index_en.htm)

privileges and communicates ideas of dialogue, shared responsibility, efficacy and consistency for the governance of a system which is recognised as extremely complex. And the answers to complex questions are necessarily not simple. They cannot be provided by a revised regulatory model, as the present crisis is “affecting the very idea of a model, i.e. the idea that governance is to be understood in terms of applying a method, in differing environments...” (de Schutter *et al.* 2001).

In this context, even strategies of technological innovation and development cannot be designed and evaluated on the basis of merely economic parameters. It is necessary to develop new and multiple quality assessment criteria, which take into account changing environmental and human circumstances and to adjust governance processes accordingly. The articulation of the ideas of citizens’ involvement is now a great practical challenge, and more so in view of the enlargement of the EU to countries with very different traditions, where aspirations of this kind may be maturing at a different speed, springing from different premises and conditioned by different contingencies. The enlargement should be conceived as an opportunity to further explore our *mal-être* and to address with no hesitation the fragility of our own democracies (Pocecco 2000). Also it can be offer a chance to (reciprocally) re-visit the vocabulary of the Cold-War period, together with its underlying assumptions and preconceptions.

This is not a time for over-simplifications. To be accurate and useful, both theoretical analysis and practical action require conceptual systems that are not artificially truncated, but recognised in their full complexity. We are told that Milan Kundera used to fight against the arrogance and lazy narrow-mindedness of Western readers who interpreted his works politically as an account of life “behind the Iron Curtain under Communism” (Belhoradski 2000: 8). We need to restore, in our minds, the historical legacy and the multiplicity of cultures of what was labelled and perceived for decades as “just” Eastern Europe.

Foresight activities have a great potential for integrating different perspectives, as a result of communication and dialogue among different actors with no closure. If we cannot eliminate radical uncertainty about the factual basis for any particular scheme of development, we can, however, encourage public debate on the merits thereof. The involvement of a plurality of actors in analysis of and decision about the future (or futures) can enrich perspective, provide greater insight and favor better understanding of complexity. No received view is defensible or applicable in the face of irreducible uncertainties in knowledge and ethics.

### **3. Enlargement and sustainability**

At the 2001 Conference “An enlarged Europe for researchers”, the president of the European Commission Romano Prodi declared:

*Research is one of the fields in which enlargement can offer the greatest potential benefits both to the existing Member States and the Candidate*

*Countries. (...) Together we can bring about a second European Renaissance, a dynamic, knowledge-based society driven by research.*<sup>3</sup>

**I maintain that a deep reflection is necessary as to the meaning of the term “together” in that declaration.**

The, perhaps, unique experience of the Renaissance resulted from a blend of many circumstances and factors, and touched upon all spheres of human life and society. The “material culture”, the works of arts that we still admire with enchantment and surprise, are the materialisation of the values, beliefs, ideas, visions, and aspirations, of all that constitutes the “immaterial culture” of the epoch. In terms of human resources this incarnation of the spirit of the time required at least three categories of people: artists, craftsmen (sometimes the same individual) and *Mecenates* (patrons). The last ones were of course those who had the money, but money alone can easily produce works with no art at all. “Benefactors” had also the ability (or sometimes just the lack) to discover the genius, the intellect, the gift: Next came the nerve to invest in it, triggered perhaps by an egotistic drive, but also oriented by a vision of the future which included much more than expected pay backs in terms of money, gratitude and social appreciation. Also the *Mecenates* worked closely with artists, demanding, imposing, suggesting allowing, accepting, recognising, sharing, believing. And in the end, it was up to the craftsmen to make the most daring projects stand up, as Brunelleschi’s “impossible” dome.

Assuming that talent, gift and maybe genius are still there (somewhere), the question is: “Who will be the *Mecenates* of the new Renaissance?” There is no doubt that economic resources are concentrated (though unevenly) in the Member States, but even this time, I suspect, it is not just a matter of money, but also of intuition, imagination, determination, perseverance and courage. The first Renaissance was not imitation: It was search of novelty, dismissal of known models. Can we expect a second Renaissance to spring out of replication without critical assessment?

In my exploration of the situation in the CEECs (Central and Eastern Europe Countries), through reading and informal colloquia, I encountered recurring warnings about the many differences existing between and within countries, yet I found a rather general agreement on some common features and trends, both structural and cultural. Some of these are explicitly mentioned and discussed, others are just hinted to. One has to read between the lines of written documents or subscribe to an “off the records” agreement in informal talks to catch these aspects. Possibly, it is deemed not politically correct to touch upon what are considered sensitive issues, as they have to do with honesty and not simple competence. I do not intend to break any unspoken rules or informal agreements, however I want to point out that “between the lines” or “off the records” observations signal phenomena which are by no means absent in the EU and member states. Moreover, that bad winds do not necessarily flow in just one direction.

Coming back to the most commonly diagnosed problems, I will only list the principal ones here, as they are thoroughly described and analysed elsewhere (see for example Gasparini, Yadov 1995; Buček 2000; EC 2001b; Nyri 2002; Radosevic 2002). They are:

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<sup>3</sup> In this, and all other documents I happened to see (Cordis 2001), Member States is written in capital letters, and candidate countries in small letters. In the spirit of equality, and with the conviction of best interpreting Mr. Prodi’s intent, I took the liberty to use capital letters for both.

- lack of technological capability
- weak innovation systems (at best existing in 'niches')
- heavy dependence on external funding
- poor domestic infrastructure in all sectors, from transport to finance
- apathy and non existence of an entrepreneurial culture
- weak tradition of private property rights and obligations
- poor management abilities
- poor administrative capacities
- inadequate body of legislative norms
- absence of mechanisms for efficient enforcement and control
- null, partial or "fake" processes of decentralisation
- lack of coherent regional policies and regional autonomy
- unequal distribution of resources including productive units
- inefficient use of existing resources
- insufficient networks and networking capabilities
- scarce relations between university and industry
- weak public participation.

Checked against the Western, and more specifically the EU model of development all these features appear of course as deficits, failures, inadequacies, deficiencies, malfunctions, shortcoming, weaknesses, limitations, faults, etc. It would be then "just" a matter of amending such deficiencies for catching up with a more successful model. Radosevic has clearly shown how unrealistic this thesis is and how impossible the path, claiming that "building of the EU as the knowledge-based economy will be faced with increased gaps in knowledge and innovation related activities once central and eastern European candidate countries join the EU" (Radosevic 2002: 1).

But even if we hypothesise for a moment that "catching up" is a realistic possibility in the short or medium term, we should still enquire about its desirability. Capitalism is a package with advantages and drawbacks and moreover, these are unequally distributed. Efficiency comes together with competition; increased job opportunities means also antagonism and stress; work success corresponds to diminished personal time; full occupation is accompanied by the weakening of solidarity networks; availability of supplies leads to consumerism; quantity and quality of goods and services are frequently at odds; increased production and consumption have negative effects on health and the environment; technological innovations bring new opportunities as well as new risks. The last aspect is not absent in knowledge-based societies. Very large quantities of toxic materials are necessary to make a micro-chip (Ayers 2002) and, despite promises about the "dematerialization" of the economy, the extraction of raw materials reaches new frontiers (Martinez-Alier 2001).

Local absence of "dirty" production processes is not enough to grant sustainability. Sustainability is not a stable state, but a balance-seeking process in which a given community/society, moves through time between satisficing, adaptable and viable states, exporting no negative imbalances beyond its territory or into the future (Giampietro 2001). Such process requires democracy and participation. Exclusive attention to economic growth and material values is likely to reduce societal cohesion and trust in institutions, possibly leading to social instability and unrest, if there is no tradition of dialogue.

As it was discussed in a previous section, even in the EU - where political regimes have the form of consolidated (and sometimes mature) democracies - the debate on

the crisis of governance (and ultimately of representative democracy) permeates both institutions and civil society. Is it then rational and wise to export to differing environments that very model which is questioned “at home”? On which grounds do we base the expectation that a certain method, subject to deep critical revision, would work outside the context in which it was generated? The process of enlargement (in particular with reference to countries in the post-communist transition) cannot be guided by a vision of, so to say, export-import, proposing from a one hand and catching up on the other.

Promoting a market economy has profound socio-political and environmental implications, besides economic ones. It cannot be taken for granted that market economy and democracy go together hand in hand and certainly the construction of the latter deserves no lesser attention and commitment than the former.

As Blazek puts it:

*[T]he ideas of democracy, human rights and participation come to existence as creative solutions of local problems. Thus, they are principally culturally-bound, not culture-free. [...] When processes are only top-down or worse, imposed from the outside, with little knowledge of local tradition and no sensitivity to context, but simply importing methods developed in and for different realities, they may prove sterile, and even counter-productive to the outcome intended (Blazek 2000).*

Also, consideration is to be given the local actors by/through whom external model would be imposed/promoted: which sectors of the society do they represent, which are their drives, beliefs, values, which new and old *nomenklaturas* will they favour, which hierarchical schemes will they generate and support.

**An interesting thesis of “capitalism without capitalists” has been put forward as regards the Czech Republic and, to some extent, even Poland and Hungary (Eyal et al. 1998; Eyal 2000). The (first phase of) transition to capitalism was accomplished thanks to an alliance between technocrats (all economists or finance experts) and intellectuals (mainly former dissidents). In the authors’ view, their goal was not so much the pursuit of profit, but the construction of capitalist institutions, which was felt as a kind of “moral duty”. The intellectuals perceived themselves as responding to a “calling”, and were “working with and on others to create a moral community. This was the first meaning of ‘civil society’ in dissident discourse”. The “technology of government”, which the intellectuals were lacking, was provided by the technocrats, and it was “monetarism”. (Eyal 2000: 68 and 71).**

I have not enough knowledge of the situation to subscribe to or discard this thesis. However I find it worth thinking about as it attempts to explain the transition with reference to cultural, moral and symbolic elements, besides structural and economic ones. Also, it reinforces the idea that emancipation is an inner process and cannot be prescribed from above (or from outside), even if it can be favoured by structural changes.

**The centrality of non-material elements appears also in Belhoradski's severe diagnosis of what he calls "the failure of the Czech nation in its relationship with politics generally, as the constitutive dimension of Modernity" (Belhoradski 2000 1-2). In his view, "political realism" was substituted by the Czech discourse on "values, culture and morality" aimed at changing people's hearts and minds, in a kind of collective palynggenesis.**

**In popular terms, we may say that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions". Not only should declared intentions be constantly checked against matter-of-fact opportunities and constraints. They should also be complemented with a honest and straightforward exploration of those immaterial elements and latent dimensions which frame and give shape to human actions: interests, values, beliefs, ethic commitments, normative reference models etc. Foresight activities have a great potential for identifying and exploring ethical and axiological assumptions and implications of technological innovation and economic development.**

The adoption of a market economy without this kind of attention is likely to lead to systems configurations which are unsustainable, both locally and globally, both economically and socially. The Global Scenario Group of the Stockholm Environment Institute (Raskin et al. 1998; 2002) has warned that a "Market Forces future", i.e. driven by competitive, open and integrated global markets, is not likely to be either sustainable or desirable.

*[...] the long-term stability of a Market Forces world is certainly not guaranteed. It could persist for many decades, reeling from one environmental, social security crisis to the next. Perhaps its very instability would spawn powerful and progressive initiatives for a more sustainable and just development vision. But it is also possible that its crises would reinforce, amplify and spiral out of control (Raskin et al. 2002: 24-25)*

**Traditionally, economics has sought to demonstrate how social goals are best achieved through the mechanisms operating automatically in an essentially simple system - typified by the "invisible hand" metaphor ascribed to Adam Smith. It tends to argue that conscious interference in the workings of the economic system will undermine achievement of these goals. However, in the analogy with an eighteenth-century cloth market is nowadays inappropriate and automatic pricing mechanisms are clearly insufficient, as "externalities" are uncertain and irreversible (Foster 1997; Martinez-Alier et al. 1998; O'Connor and Spash 1999). Explanations, forecasts or decisions based on a reductionist approach - one that asserts definitive rather than disputed and disputable assessments and denies legitimacy to value-based judgments - are ineffective and insufficient (Holland 2000; O'Neill 1993).**

#### **4. How can foresight contribute to European unity?**

*On the basis of what has been discussed in the previous sections, it seems that the potential of foresight activities in the CEECs resides in creating fora and opportunities where different actors develop participative skills and in the meantime come to appreciate their cultural value and socio-political efficacy. The process of coming together, talking, discussing, battling, sharing, is a learning experience for the exercise of the assumption of personal and collective obligations. This is no different than elsewhere, but it is perhaps the novelty of the process in a context where democratic expression was long repressed, which can promote success (Klůvnkov Oravsk 2002).*

*If one wants to create the conditions for “generative growth” (Cooke 2002) one may well start by providing spaces where innovative ideas can develop. Foresight exercises encourage to “take vision” before taking action; they provide a contextual setting which may be confrontational but is never threatening; they stimulate reflection about available resources and ways to elicit and integrate them. For this reasons, foresight may be functional also in the construction of a regional dimension where this is weak or absent, precisely because representational, symbolic borders are not yet constrained by administrative ones. This may apply also to the Euro-regional dimension and whenever a “border discourse” (Meinhof and Galasinski 2000) is deemed useful. For example between neighbouring cities and regions which, though belonging to different political environments, share some common features, interests, or cultural heritage, including that embodied in linguistic and ethnic minorities (Ferrara and Pasi 2000; Gasparini 1995; Gasparini and Zago 1995; Zago 2001).*

*Others have provided the rationale and procedures for foresight activities (see for example Barbieri Masini 1994; Barbieri Masini and Nebbia 1997; EC 2001d; Faucheux and Hue 2001; IPTS 2001, Keenan and Gavigan 2002; Miles 2002) and there is no need to repeat their insight and advice here. However, a few points need to be stressed when referring to the CEECs reality. First of all, the lack of a tradition of foresight labelled as such, doesn’t necessarily mean that we are in the presence of a tabula rasa. There may be, and actually there have been (in some countries at least) actions devoted to elicit local knowledge and resources in view of enhancing community ties, building social networks, encouraging participation, and so forth (Blazek 1998; Kramarzova and Topinski 1998; 1999).*

*In testimonies from the CEE countries I often encountered a mirror-like mind-set of that described in the second section from the part of the EU actors. Important worries and dissatisfactions are expressed “between the lines” or “off records”. Among these the perception of being colonized, conquered, bought out, forced into alien models*

*and paths. To inquire if that perception is right is to pose the wrong question. It is rather a matter of acknowledging diversity, of putting aside one's "absolutes" (Bergnach and Pocecco 1998) in the process of building profitable ways to "self-understanding" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 17).*

*So, foresight activities can be metaphors of today real world, besides representations of the future. The experience of foreign professionals can certainly bring valuable contributions, but a patronising attitude is to be avoided at all costs, in foresight and any other activities. Not only is hubris unsympathetic and likely to generate aversion and rejection, it also prevents discovery of existing knowledge and resources. And an outside expert cannot but be dependent from local actors to design meaningful activities. The relationships must be one of collaboration and equal learning, with mutual feedback. The language problem (including body language) is key, and not always fully recognised in its multiple facets and subtleties. For an outsider to communicate effectively, cultural mediation, not just translation, is necessary.*

*If one of the outcomes of foresight exercises is to favour generative growth, spaces for creativity must not be constrained by alien definitions or assumptions. So, for example, the idea of participation can be offered as a stimulus and an opportunity, which will acquire meaning and momentum in local contingencies. By no means can one expect that the same process occurring in the EU and described above will be closely reproduced. Consequently even the assessment criteria of a given exercise must be part of the design of the exercise, subject to change and revision, checked against "emic" assumptions and meanings.*

*Perhaps the most important point regards the framing of the problem. It was mentioned in a previous section that descriptions of the situation in the CEECs countries are mainly defined in terms of shortfalls and insufficiencies, and indeed the overall EU policy towards the accession countries is framed in terms of harmonisation. The idea conveyed through this kind of wording is that accession countries are deficient and disharmonic, and have to adjust and fine-tune. This way of framing the issue is restrictive and doesn't favour generative growth of ideas and new forms of socio-economic policy development. Moreover, as discussed in a previous section, it may favour unsustainable development. A patronising attitude generates at best acquiescence, not creativity, as the relation with a client is not the same as with a partner. A principal, though benevolent and well meaning, is never a peer.*

*An alternative framing is of including EU players as parts of the problem rather than models. This type of framing doesn't necessarily deny the existence of a deficit, but it puts it into a different context. Whereas in the former case, the EU actors are left somewhat outside the picture, in the latter they are a part of it. Consequently the*

search for the “solutions” includes both sides and not only one. There are a number of reasons why this type of framing is to be preferred:

- *it favours a critical reflection about one’s way of life, which is not transformed into the best, unique, viable model*
- *it favours the recognition of existing diversities (regional and others) among the EU as well as the candidate countries, rather than taking a simplified view of two homogeneous (and opposite) blocks*
- *it doesn’t challenge the players’ identities, while it may stigmatise their behaviours and question their attitudes*
- *it is useful in identifying peers “on the other side”*
- *it promotes open-mindedness and curiosity on both sides*
- *it favours mutual recognition and enhances trust*

A number of tools exist which can be used in foresight activities. For example, MCDA (Multi Criteria Decision Aids) can favour communication between stakeholders and assist them in structuring decisions, including those relating to technological developments (Klůvanková Oravská 2002; Stirling and Mayer 2002). ICT (information and communication technology) can abate spatial-temporal barriers and integrate regional and European scenarios. When used in a competent and creative manner, all such tools have great potential also in enhancing local democracy. In several EC funded projects in which the author of this paper has taken part (Corral et al. 2001; De Marchi et al. 1998; De Marchi et al. 2000; O’Connor 1998) they have proved useful in assessing complex dynamics, in identifying and possibly reconciling different perspectives, in considering different time scales and spatial dimensions.

A foresight capacity is indispensable for the wise and effective application of the precautionary principle, inscribed in the EU Treaty and strongly encouraged by the European institutions and agencies (EC 2000; EEA 2001). Looking ahead, being aware of complexity, identifying uncertainties, recognising irreversibility of choices, acknowledging ignorance (De Marchi and Ravetz 1998; 1999) are all attitudes and activities which favour the early learning of important lessons.

## **5. Some proposals for reflection**

In this last section, I want to single out some themes, from the many that emerged from the previous sections, which I consider as key ones in the construction of the ERA (European Research Area) and an enlarged European Union.

These are suggestions for discussion at the September 2002 conference. More generally, they are intended at providing a stimulus for the community of all those interested in the construction of a fair and sustainable Europe in a fair and sustainable world.

- **“Sconfinare”<sup>4</sup>(crossing boundaries)**

There is presently in Europe an undeniable asymmetry, or rather, there are many asymmetries. These are contained in an extended network of boundaries, partially overlapping, partially conflicting one another. These are national, regional, geographical, economic, social, political, cultural, symbolic, and many more.

How can foresight help in framing the asymmetries so as to make boundaries (both real and metaphoric) permeable, and their constant crossing, back and forth, worthwhile and rewarding? How can it transform the “sconfinare” from an occasional physical experience to a constant intellectual exercise?

- **Vision vs. hallucination**

Designing paths to desirable futures involves imagination, creativity and audacity. It also requires knowledge, resources and congruence. The inclusion of this second set of elements distinguishes a “vision” from a “hallucination”. The former can catalyze energy and orient action, the latter distorts reality and ignores constraints.

How can foresight help to look at the future while keeping memory of the past and awareness of the present?

- **Assuring a quality process**

Sustainability is a reflexive process requiring a broad range of knowledges and perspectives. The widening of participation is now recognised as a pre-condition of success. This will help to avoid Type III errors, i.e. to solve the wrong problems or to frame issues in inappropriate terms.

How can foresight help to ensure that quality and participation co-evolve as complementary aspects of the process and are not at odds?<sup>5</sup> How can foresight be developed to include criteria of quality?

- **Political correctness vs. grounded politics**

Trust is an essential element in any joint venture. Trust doesn't belong only to the realm of feelings. Actually it is a pragmatic and behavioural principle. But it cannot be taken for granted: it is the result of a long and complex process of inclusion and recognition of the other, where the political discourse is not obscured by a rhetoric on moral and values. Caution, prudence, concealment, disguise, suppression, camouflage may be politically correct (are they?), but do not enhance reciprocal confidence.

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<sup>4</sup> In Italian, *confine* means border, frontier. And *sconfinare* means crossing borders, also hinting to something unconventional, or even irregular. On the this theme, see Pocecco (2002).

<sup>5</sup> These ideas are based on the report of the Working Group 1b in preparation of the White Paper on European governance (see note 2 above).

How can foresight help bringing “on record” what everybody knows but does not say?

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