Eye of Europe Workshop Report

1.1 Introduction

Democracy and its principles as well as societal challenges and public debates are increasingly influenced by new and emerging technologies. To improve democratic principles, public engagement, and citizens 'understanding of technology-related policies and strategies, we need to go deeper in research of this interaction between technology and society. This also means to examine the potential health, environmental, economic, ethical as well as other risks connected with new technology applications and the impacts thereof upon the various societal groups (for instance, age groups, men and women, social groups, etc.).

Therefore, TC Prague organized the face2face workshop focused on assessing the impact of new technologies on society and democracy as a whole - from a foresight perspective that examines these issues in a broader context and systematically explores various scenarios for future developments. The aim of the activity was to highlight and increase attention to respecting social aspects in policy-making process and to strategically direct them toward topics of high social relevance.

1.2 Process and methods

The workshop drew on specific foresight methodological tool developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, the so-called "cards of potential future crises" and the "matrix of uncertainties and impacts".

The participants were divided into three groups. Following an introductory presentation in which participants were briefed on the Eye of Europe project and the importance of foresight, a short icebreaker followed - using visualization, the participants were asked to express their perception of how the society moves into the future.

The follow-up workshop proceeded in three steps:

Activity 1: Enhancing the risk awareness by exploring the broad spectrum of risks

Each group worked with 12 selected risk cards. They were asked to consider and discuss how aware they are of the potential impact of this risk (from each person´s own perspective). "Is there uncertainty or certainty with regards to how the risk might develop? And how significantly could this risk affect the future?" A benefit of this exercise for participants was hearing other points of

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view. Perspectives on risks are widely different and exploring attitudes, values, current assumptions, concerns and alongside priorities can be very insightful to better understand partners perspectives. Finally, the group expressed its collective opinion by placing the cards on the “Evaluation of selected risks” matrix.

Activity 2: Mapping future potential risks and exploring interconnected (cascading) impacts

Participants were instructed to select 3 risks that, in their view, we will face most in the future for further work. Independently of the other groups, each group selected "Loss of Human Control" as one of their key risk cards.

Participants “travelled to the future” with a selected number of risks to explore the possible consequences of their occurrence. Using the “Future Impact” matrix, they examined their impacts in the context of technology’s influence on democracy, looking for connections between individual impacts and how they are interlinked (in causal loops) and influence one another. As a result of connections and interdependencies, the consequences of disaster impacts created cascading effects throughout the system. This was intended to lead participants to consider whether the initial event is more damaging or the cascading effects are more important. And how to prepare for less expected events, which could have more devastating consequences.

Activity 3: Identifying measures to mitigate disasters and support policy goals

Participants focused on the main impacts, which served as the basis for developing scenarios. The development of the scenarios was left to the AI. In the subsequent discussion, the groups debated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with its proposal, based on their previous experiences and expectations. They identified measures and strategic points of intervention for core drivers that might be helpful to mitigate negative consequences and discussed potential policy responses and solutions.

Finally, each group was invited to create a short story about one person in that future.

The main goal of the workshop was to help participants broaden their thinking about the range, origin and drivers of future risks. Think about different perspectives, check and challenge assumptions.

Participants rated the workshop very positively and appreciated the excellent organization and professional approach.

1.3 Results and outcomes

The interest and active participation of citizens during the workshop highlighted the relevance of the topic and the appropriateness of the foresight method used. Participants welcomed the opportunity to learn about foresight and would like to gain a deeper understanding of how to use foresight methods so they can apply them in their own work. In this context, they appreciated the

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initiative of the Eye of Europe platform and expressed interest in subscribing to its newsletter. At the same time, thanks to the practical exercise, they realized how essential it is to involve both experts and the public in addressing public affairs - not only because of the opportunity to influence issues that affect everyone, but also in terms of strengthening the legitimacy of the resulting outcomes.

The foresight method used demonstrated how complex the perception of the future of democratic systems is in the context of technological change. It showed that, given the same initial assumptions, three different scenarios with different consequences for democracy can emerge.

Using this foresight tool helped participants to build awareness of systematic risks and cascading effects of risks, beyond well-known hazards. It could help to identify where the risks and potential crisis come from, to support decision making and the development of strategies that might minimise risk events, as well as plan and strenghten crisis preparedness measures. It is important to keep in mind that many solutions are cross cutting and beyond any single policy area.

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