EUROPE PLUS THIRTY:

Analysis and prospective then and now.

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ABSTRACT

In 1974 the European Commission called for a report on whether it should have a forecasting instrument and a technology assessment office of its own. The writers of the report, chaired by the present writer, recommended it should. The differences between that recommendation and the current reality of IPTS is explored in this paper (edited and commented by IPTS Report Editor D. Kyriakou), which was given as a lecture there at the invitation of the Director of IPTS.

In the mid 1970s there was in Europe a coincidence of two historical phenomena. One of the phenomena was the presence in many Eruopean countries of a social democratic predominance on the long, slow left-right political wave pattern. The general climate was favourable to the conscious formation and pursuit of purposes. The air was thick with policy. The other phenomenon was the presence of the lion cub called the EEC, with its elite, semi-academic Commission, wondering how far it could go, looking for tasks, looking for ways to accomplish its tasks, and wondering what it meant when it talked of Europe. It may be that the coincidence was not fortuitous: certainly the Community itself was the fruit of purpose; in fact of heroic purpose.

Among the results of this conjuncture was the study called **Europe Plus Thirty**. Its father was the Commissioner then in charge of DG XII, Ralf Dahrendorf, a member of the German Free Democrat Party and a former Staatssekretar in the German Federal Government. He was (and is) also a European to his fingertips, bilingual in English, and married to an Englishwoman. He is now, like me, a member of the British House of Lords. Dahrendorf during 1973 conceived this study and guided it through the Commission and Council.

The name was the less than ideal title of a study which was to advise the Commission how it could best consider the future of the Community for the next thirty years, and could go on doing so ever after, to the rolling time horizon of thirty years, and through what machinery. Moreover, it had half a million ecus attached to it, which had to be spent within one year. Multiply by x for present value.

At that time I was a member of the **European Committee on Research and Development**, which advised the Commission, and particularly DG XII, on those two things. I had been asked to join it because I had recently finished a term of office in the British government - a Labour one - and in a Ministry which was a major consumer of policy-oriented research: the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, or as it later became, the Department of the Environment. In the ERDC, which Dahrendorf sometimes chaired, I used to speak of the relation between knowledge and purpose:

> what is the purpose of such and such a research programme?
>
> if it is successful, to what purpose will the Commission put the knowledge it has produced?
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> how can the success or failure of a given programme be judged except in terms of purpose?

Dahrendorf liked that, and in 1974 he asked me to undertake the **Europe Plus Thirty** study.

It was agreed that forty people should be invited to work on it, and that it should have two tiers. The upper tier was a Project Board of very distinguished people in the relevant fields who would supervise, check and encourage. They certainly were distinguished. One went on to become the President of Ireland, and there were several giants of those days: Casimir, Umberto Colombo, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Alex King, Prigogine. The lower tier was a project team of mid career

people,mostly academics, but some officials and industrial sceintists. They were to do the thrashing out and the writing up. I was self-confident in those days, and chaired both bodies.

The Board and Team handed in their report to the Commission on time and within budget, and it was published in a slightly edited form by the Cambridge University Press, under the title **The Futures of Europe.** (1)

We had been charged to report on two closely related subjects: the possibility of

> 'a forecasting instrument which can be constantly updated',

and whether the Commission should have its

> 'own technology assessment office in an attempt to evaluate in advance the effects of scientific and technological development on the society and economy of the Community'.

It is interesting that at that time it was not thought necessary to set out in our terms of reference what forecasting was - that had been going on since the Ancient Greeks - but it was thought necessary to explain what Technology Assessment was, since it had then only recently arrived in Europe from the US.

In the event our report devoted 183 pages to the forecasting and 15 to technology assessment. This was not because we considered forecasting twelve times as important as TA, but because the Commission had asked us two separate questions and because we considered the two activities as two different ways of doing the same thing, namely: thinking about the future and what could be done about it before it happened. Nor was it because everyone was unaware of the excellent proverb the last Director of ITPS, Herbert Allgeier, used in his farewell remarks in the IPTS Report: 'He who predicts the future lies even if he tells the truth'. Exactly: we have no right to use the indicative mood in talking about he future: no right to say 'this WILL happen.' But then there is - or ought to be - another proverb which says that 'He who enters the door of the future without looking may trip over the threshold'.

The first page of the introduction to the published version of **Europe Plus Thirty** said: 'the object must always be to examine what is possible for Europe and what is impossible; the latter is generally easier to identify than the former'. It is in fact by paring away the impossible that one can bring the 'not impossible' into sight. The same with paring away the intolerable and even the undesirable and the truly: that way the tolerable and the desirable emerge along with the not impossible.

We saw forecasting as talking in the main about the desirable and undesirable futures of societies and economies which were constantly affected both directly and indirectly by changing technology. And we saw technology assessment as the same thing the other way round: talking about possible and likely changes and what they might do to society. So it was a matter of simple

expediency to do most of our analysis under the first question: the question of that on which the effects of technological developments would be visited.

Under the heading of forecasting, then, we divided human life up into sixteen areas, as follows:

> climate; population; agriculture, fisheries, and forestry; health; social structures and values; education; science and technology; industry; energy; materials; the environment; transport; communications; economy and finance; defence and disarmament; and politics and institutions.

I have tried to remember why we put them in that order. I think it was intended to remind us that humanity emerged from the climate of planet earth, is intrinsically limited in numbers, has to eat, has long been organised, depends on knowledge, and so on down to defence, which we really did not need so much of, even then, and politics and institutions at the end because that was what we ourselves were part of, which was why we were examining all these things. One we then omitted was ethics. At that time, ethics did not automatically, as it does now, appear among the lenses through which the human condition has to be scrutinised. Nor did it occur to us that the US would
later deliberately turn a rapidly increasing defence budget into the main driver of technological advance.
Each of these sectors we examined from the point of view of present forecasting and future forecastability. We also paid attention to the interactions, both measurable and unmeasurable, between sector and sector and even produced a little matrix to show what we meant.

But before this, which was the meat of the report, came an ambitious introductory section on what forecasting itself could and could not be, and what it should and should not be. Many versions of forecasting we dismissed as useless or harmful. But here is how we presented our positive proposal for a usable, workaday, conceptual model of forecasting.

I have already mentioned the importance we attached to purpose. We even took comfort in our activist stance from the word future itself. The Latin word futurus is not only the future participle of the verb essere, to be: it also carries an older and distinct sense of generation, of begetting. Nothing worthy of our attention will come our way if we do not plan for it. If we are to have a tolerable future, somebody has to do something now, because if we don't, somebody else will, and that person may be intolerable.

We thus regarded our whole work as a contribution to the study of human teleology. We based it on the assumption that government has no reason to exist except to try to make things better for the people who have chosen it than if it had not existed. And the same was true by extension of international and supranational associations of governments: including of course the European Community.

This was the implicit social contract; we have governments to do for us those things we cannot as individuals do alone, and this is what makes their exercise of power legitimate. From this it followed that Governments are for doing things, as opposed to not doing things. Different levels of government are for doing different levels of things. They have goals suitable for their level,

and those goals are describable. It would thus be theoretically possible to envisage, or know roughly, where the European Commission, the Community's executive, thought the Community might wish to be standing in this or that respect, say ten, twenty and thirty years ahead: obviously getting vaguer as one looked further.

But ends need means, and your average social, political or economic aim could, like all aims, only be achieved by an effective mix of means, the choice of which (after the choice of the ends themselves) constitutes the skill of government. We even hoped that our work might in some small way help the electorates of Europe to know what the Community was about and, no less important, intrinsically could or could not be about, and thus to choose their Parliaments and Governments in a more informed manner.

To focus minds, we adopted (or at least I adopted: the others were kind enough not to object too loudly) a concept which we called teleonomy. The word has a history in 19th century theories of evolutionary biology, where it seems to have been quasi-apposed to teleology. The aims and purposes concerned were then those to be inferred by humans from the study the behaviour of species in evolution, and thus quasi-attributed to the species concerned. But one can cut free from all that, and take the two words as they come to us from the Greek component parts: teleology, the study of aims or purposes; telonomy, the ordering of aims or purposes. We thought of economy, the ordering of households, and of agronomy, the ordering of fields.

Here is what we said.

> Action there must be: it is unavoidable. We can, therefore we must, shape our futures. If we don't, somebody else will. Diversity there is: things will turn out in one of many possible ways, and that is why we have a variety of choice until the last minute. And certainty there is too, but it resides only in the negative. We can never be certain of what things will happen, but we can be certain that some things will not. Identifying the impossible may be the greatest service a forecaster can render a decision maker.
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> We do not mean by forecasting simply the casting forward of past experience, or projection, though we include that. We use it rather in the way one says: cast your mind forward, like cast you mind back: try to imagine, like try to remember. By forecasting we mean simply casting around ahead of us, by the application of all the mental processes which may rationally be applied to the future, save one alone: decision.
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> It is clear that there is no point in forecasting except to help decision, and that one cannot rationally decide without forecasting. But the two things are different in nature, and they should be, and are, done by different people. Only rulers may take decisions about the

future of society, and in democracies only elected politicians may rule. The distinction is obvious, and so is the reason to labour it.

What sort of forecasting, then, is useful to those we elect to govern us? One may deploy in one's mind an image of the future as a **cone**. [Send OHP] The further we look ahead, the wider is the range of possibilities open to us. Tomorrow will probably be pretty like today, the day after tomorrow will be less like. Outside our cone lies the impossible..., inside it lies the range of the possible.

Now let us consider the plane which can be thought of as lying across the base of the cone, say thirty years hence. It strikes us as very broad: so many future states of world and European society may rationally be imagined. But what can be presented to the Community decision makers is a number of conceivable future conditions of European society, including its relations with the rest of the world, states of things which could, without flying in the face of reason, be provisionally adopted as long term goals, states which do lie on the plane across the base of the cone of possibility thirty years ahead, or at whatever shorter term may be adopted for a particular purpose. Inconceivable states of affairs, which could not for whatever reason be rationally adopted as goals, lie outside the cone altogether.

Let us now suppose that the decisions makers adopt one of the described states of affairs as their goal. The choice of a particular goal thirty years ahead implies the adoption at the right time or times of the means or policies to reach it. But there are usually many alternative combinations of means to a given end. To take a schematic example: if we want to have a tree four metres high in thirty years time, there are many things we can do tomorrow. We can plant an seed. We can plant a one metre tree and cut it back, so that it grows regularly over the thirty years. We can plant a one metre tree, let it grow to four metres, and then prune it so that it keeps to that size. And so on. But if we do nothing for twenty nine years, then all we can do is to buy a four metre tree. Which costs more.

There are many things we can do now to get our tree the size we want in thirty years, but as time goes by there are fewer and fewer. Therefore the cone running from the small definite now of actuality to the wide plane of possibilities in thirty years time has to be echoed in our imagination by an inverse cone running from the wide now of means-choice to the small definite then of our chosen goal x years hence. These two interpenetrating cones - the
goal-choice cone with its apex now and its base in the future, and the means-choice cone with its base now and its apex in the future - seem to us a useful image of what really happens in forecasting and planning.

An appropriate number of alternative states of European society, and of its relations with the rest of the world, could be described, any one of which could, without requiring the impossible, be adopted (provisionally but usefully) as a goal to be reached in, say, thirty years time. The plane could of course be placed not at thirty years, but at any shorter date, when the cone will be narrower. The incompatibilities between these possible goals could be set out and the costs and benefits of each described.

> The benefits would be in terms of social goods apparent to all at the time, such as [at the time we were writing] justice, harmony, real wealth, 'quality of life', etc - none of them, it is worth noting, strictly quantifiable. Costs would be opportunty costs. Each alternative could be structured to give pre-eminence to one social good, and the cost of choosing it would be the rejection of the other goals, which gave pre-eminence to other goods. This way of sorting things out can be give the name teleonomy [see above]. A European forecasting instrument would from time to time present revised teleonomies, as the general perception of what was desirable or possible or unavoidable changes, as forecasting techniques develop, and as time itself unfolds.
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> This description is highly schematic, not to say ideal. At least until forecasting reaches a stage of development which is now only imaginable, the reality will no doubt be much more muddled. But one thing which we do believe could already be done with some confidence is the separation of the possible from the impossible. The cone itself can be drawn, and probably drawn rather clearly. Inside it uncertainty will prevail, but outside will be a no go area, and this awareness in itself could save us and our descendants from a multitude of woes.

The passage ended by likening the setting up of a European futures institute to fitting your car with headlights, and turning them on.

The emphasis on purpose, on intention, on will itself, is very strong. We supposed that the Commissions of the future would be willing and able to embody a European will to the extent necessary, not indeed for collective and purposeful action_in the whole area for which the Commission had been set up, but at least for the collective and purposeful consideration of different actions.

As it turned out, we were deluded: not so much about the Commission, as about the tenor of the age, about the kind of things our governments would decide to do with the power given them by their electorates, and by their electoral systems.

Four years after the submission of our report Margaret Thatcher had been elected in Britain, and very soon after that Ronald Reagan was elected in the US and Helmut Kohl in Germany. (Incidentally, such is the inefficiency of the British electoral system that Mrs Thatcher was elected by a minority of the voters, and then re-elected three times by ever shrinking minorities.) The new wave of governmental abdication in favour of unbridled commercial license and financial speculation spread to differing extents across all the states of Western Europe. It was an Anglo-Saxon invention, or re-invention; something very similar had been attempted with the free trade of Manchesterismus, as it is known in German, in the 19th century. The new and even rawer form was revived first, apparently through a rapid-reading course of parts of Adam Smith and a hearty
misunderstanding of Hayek, in the right wing think-tanks of the United States during the 1970s. And probably no country which is now in the European Union was completely unaffected by it.

It was then suddenly no longer to be taken for granted that the purpose of government, or even of the state, was to make things better for people; indeed, it began to be imagined that the highest ambition of any government should be to get itself out of the way in order to allow something else, some other force, to make things better for people.

The new laissez faire, the new pococuranza, the new je m'en foutisme - the new dogma was based neither on experience nor on argument. It consisted of the single proposition that government is bad and commercial and financial enterprise operating through unregulated markets are good. A more careful reading of Adam Smith and a glance back at European and American history might have warned that this, like other dogmas, should be taken with a grain of salt.

Nor, of course, was the dogma ever tested against the discarded disciplines of forecasting. Apparently no-one in power expected the outcomes of its application in Eastern Europe which we have seen from the Arctic to the Adriatic. The collapse of communism itself seemed such a confirmation of the hopes they were resting in unregulated market forces that all the later woes which sprang from the precipitate application of the dogma were brushed aside as if they were merely evidence of racial inferiority. In the dogma's countries of origin, the United States and Britain, 'trickle-down' was expected to benefit all of us. Instead, income differentials have widened, what popular talk accurately calls 'real jobs' have disappeared, and firms depend more and more on tax-payer subsidies to make up either for the less-than-living wage they pay their work-force, or for that workforce's down-sizing. That incidentally was where the British North Sea oil revenues went.

There had of course in the seventies been plenty of academic economists waiting in the wings, who had been poring over the statistics between their blinkers and polishing the models, often deriving quite precise accounts of how **homo economicus** perceives, is motivated, and behaves. In those models, market forces could be seen operating in an admirably logical and reliable way. Left to operate properly, they would, with the right mix of the familiar 'factors of production' and a few twitches and tweaks to the money supply, create 'growth', which could be measured and compared. All 'labour' was required to do was to submit to a steady increase of its productivity.

The potency of the dogma was magnified many times by the fact that 'growth' was measured only by that deeply misleading yardstick, the Gross Domestic Product. All that GDP measures is transactions which are both recorded and marketed. It excludes work within the home, voluntary work, bartered work, and criminal work; it is enough to remember that nothing creates more GDP 'growth' per time unit than a really disastrous accident.

Nevertheless, growth measured in those terms has seemed more real to many governments than well-being. And because 'labour' to them was one of the 'factors of production' that should be downsized through increased productivity, the fact that it is also, in democracies, a large part of the electorate, seems to have escaped attention until quite recently. Being downsized is something they don't like.

All this amounted to a momentous change which bears in many ways on what forecasting may be thought to be. First, the new dogma rejected or was ignorant of 'the lessons of history'. Free

markets had, for instance in Britain, been tried before, in the 1920s and 30s, and before that in the second quarter of the 19th century, and had led to misery and political turbulence.

Second, it rejected the academic discipline of political economy in general and Keynes in particular, which had been mostly about what governments could and should do to regulate markets in the

public interest. In rejecting political economy it misread the very theorists it proclaimed as its guides, starting with Adam Smith, who had no doubt about the importance of 'public morality'.

Third, the new doctrine rejected the idea that government itself, so long as it is democratic, is the best body to take decisions for the peoples of our states, in favour of the idea that the major corporations which dominate the market are better.
It followed from this sudden new politics that every action a government might take, apart from abolishing regulations, was really a sin of which it should be ashamed, and that every piece of public property was really property alienated from its rightful owner, a large corporation, and should therefore be sold to a large corporation at once or, better still, given. Such God-given oddities as natural resources should be used to smooth the way of the large corporations, in our case by subsidising their down-sizing with massive unemployment spend.

Now it is impossible for an entity which regrets and half denies its own existence to have any purposes but its own dissolution, and it would be absurd to think that it could be interested in the means by which that sole purpose might be better or less well formulated. Thus it was that forecasting and technology assessment, along with the whole paraphernalia of planning and policy formation, went out of the window in many capitals of the Union. So there should have been no surprise when something so free-will-based and so would-be precise as the **Europe Plus Thirty** recommendation lay where it fell in the gathering chaos of the Thatcherite age.

That recommendation has still to be described. We recommended a permanent institution to carry out forecasting and technology assessment for and at the behest of the European Commission, and for the benefit of all three of the Institutions of the Community; the Commission, the Parliament and the Council.

We advised that it should not be embedded in the Commission bureaucracy: it would be too much absorbed by day to day urgencies and crises, and too close to the shifting conceptions and prejudices which inhere in any bureaucracy. Equally it should not be too far away, for fear of the opposite danger: that it might fall in love with its own insights regardless of their utility to the Commission. Therefore it should be two or three hours away, and preferably in a big city, where there would be good schooling for the children of the young people we hoped would work there.
We gave a lot of thought to its size, expressed as the number of graduates working there, and these were difficult discussions because of the ardent desire we all felt not to get ruled out of court by proposing too much. Here is how we finally recommended:

> 'Fewer than 30, probably not worth it. 30-50, worth it, but likely to lead to rather sketchy outputs. 50-75, good. 75-100, better, but probably not all that much better. Over 100, not necessary.'

Let us now turn to the result. After a time the Commission set up FAST, three people at first, gradually rising to five, and deeply embedded in its own central bureaucracy. It seemed likely to us for years that we had indeed ruled ourselves out of court by suggesting so large a staff. But gradually national tides began to turn and European governments, influenced largely by Japan, began once again to mount foresight exercises. And then at last, twenty years after we had reported, the Commission set up IPTS, with a staff of 50, seven or eight hours away from Brussels.

The way IPTS was set up and the tasks it carries out seem to differ in two main ways from what **Europe Plus Thirty** recommended all those years ago. First, it does not do the sort of forecasting we talked about. It does not speculate very much about future trends in the development of society, economy or science. Since this is so, so much the less does it deal with what we called teleonomy; it does not speculate about purposes or ends in society and the economy, etc, or seek to compare alternative purposes or variants of possible purposes in this field or that. Nor therefore can it easily consider what politico-social effects technology may have, nor how technologies could best promote any particular politico-social results which might be desired.

In short, it seems not to help the Commission either to identify or adopt aims, or to choose among the means by which aims might be achieved.

Nor does it do technology assessment in quite the sense that we used the words. We were clear that technology assessment did not include judging the likely profitability of a new technology or branch of a technology: that was for enterprise, not for us. By TA we meant a three tier process. The first stage was gathering information about new technologies. The second was considering whether they might have any particular effect on social and economic functions and structures. The third was considering whether such effects would be desirable or not, and whether there was anything the Commission could do to eoncourage them, modify them, or even or discourage them if it thought fit. We thought that technology assessment could not, in that sense, be free-standing. IPTS, as I understand it, undertakes mostly the first of these tiers.

That is perhaps the result of the still non-interventionist climate in European social and economic management: the wave of laisser-faire, of political faineantisme, is still far from having rolled over us. But are there rays of hope? Is it thinkable that purpose, that exiled prince among human faculties, is on the way back?

ITPS is considering a ‘plan of action in the field of innovation to be set up as part of the series of measures to be undertaken in the fight against unemployment, which is the top priority of both the European Union as a whole and individual member states’. What does this portend? Will the Institute have to go upstream and see if the future of the economic doctrine that has been in full flood during the last twenty years may itself have to be the subject of some measures to be undertaken?

Will the Institute in fact be led forward into the more proactive modes which **Europe Plus Thirty** recommended all those years ago? If it is, will it be able to do that kind of work in an

enlarged Union at its present level of staffing? If so, what will the future bring to the Institute, and what will it bring to the future?

The lecture was followed by a discussion in which the following points were taken up (though not in this order): the origin and correct use of 'teleology-teleonomy;' the now outdated Cold War restriction on the Institute's purview, and indeed on the purview of the JRC and DG XII as a whole, imposed by the continuing ban on examining any military technology (a ban which does not hamper the United States); alternative interpretations of recent politico-economic theory and practice: the possibility of introducing ethical and social considerations into TA; the relevance of TA to 'labour markets', etc etc.

Wayland Kennet

COMMENT

A brief commentary on Lord Kennet's points (largely reflecting the discussion that ensued after his presentation):

1) We should learn from the successes and failures (and the excesses) of both the 'fine-tuning' approaches of the sixties and seventies, as well as the neo-laissez-faire backlash of the eighties and nineties. There are valid points made in both camps, for both the 'thesis' of government intervention and the 'antithesis' of government retreat; what we are still in dire need of is a new synthesis to liberate us from both sorts of quasi-religious arrogance: the state's omnipotence and the market's infallibility.

2) The IPTS is presented as differing from the Europe plus thirty recommendations in two ways; this is not entirely accurate. Whereas it is true that the IPTS does not identify or recommend grand-scale aims to the Commission, it does speculate about future technoeconomic trends and impacts, and does suggest, when possible, ways to deal with projected future developments. More importantly, however, when it comes to the second count on which the IPTS is deemed to differ from the recommendations, it is perhaps encouraging to see how closely those recommendations are to the approach of the IPTS: We have a staff that is at, or approaching the then-recommended optimal size; we are located away from the day-to-day friction of Brussels operations, yet not too far; enough to give us a bird's eye view, and to allow us to build bridges in disinterested fashion among actors, at the same time being part of the Commission sharing its goals and preoccupations.

Even more striking is the analogy between the three-tiered approach suggested back then and the IPTS approach. At IPTS we start at a first level of analysis, the science and technology level, but we do not stay there; we move to the second level and look for the impact of S/T developments on the socioeconomic context, from which S/T springs and which in turn it shapes (note moreover that this emphasis on impact helps focus our work at the first level, too). At a third level we look at what this projected impact may imply for policymaking; this helps focus even more our attention to those impacts (and underlying S/T developments) which have policy-relevant dimensions. This three-tiered approach of ours parallels the one proposed in the Europe plus thirty recommendations, and is reflected in much of our work (e.g. the IPTS Report).

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