

# **BLLED FORUM 2007**

## **Statement by Maria João RODRIGUES**

[www.mariajoaorodrigues.eu](http://www.mariajoaorodrigues.eu)

### **FORESIGHT AS A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FUTURE**

Foresight differs from other kind of more traditional activities of strategic planning such as forecasting because it is based on other approach regarding time and the relationships between the present and the future. Rather than building on the mechanic projection of the past trends to the future, foresight assumes a more complex pattern of interactions between the shaping factors and the actors underlying these trends.

That is why foresight is more appropriate to deal, on the one hand, with uncertainty and indeterminism regarding these trends and, on the other hand, with the possible influence of human action regarding most possible and likely scenarios. Foresight means for the traditional forecasting the paradigm shift which quantum physics meant for the traditional Newtonian paradigm.

Taking into account these features, foresight seems particularly appropriate to be used in fast changing societies, where analysis, debate, choice and action are in permanent interaction. These features seem even more appropriate in the present stage of development of knowledge-based societies and multilevel systems of governance, where specific knowledge is being mobilised in order to support decision making of a wide variety of stakeholders at the local, national, regional or international levels of governance and where huge amounts of complex knowledge should be considered by the central poles of strategic decision.

In the European Union, a new agenda is being developed with a quite intensive use of foresight, but we need to go further in this use.

# **THE EU IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD**

## **- THE LISBON STRATEGY**

### **A forward looking narrative on the European agenda**

In a globalized world, Europe must redefine its position. This should now be the main purpose of the European integration. This is also the main concern of the European citizens: in a globalized world how can they sustain and improve their living standards?

The choices are now clear between:

- To remain as we are, to protect what we have without changes; but this is becoming unsustainable, for the next generations, for the environment, for the additional investment which is necessary to create more and better jobs;
- Or to change and to adapt to the global challenges. Nevertheless, we can choose either downgrading our Welfare States to give a boost to competitiveness; or investing in knowledge and innovation for growth, building long-term competitive advantages, as well as redesigning our Welfare States to support change;

This last choice was made in Lisbon in the European Council of 2000, with the aim of combining a high level of competitiveness and sustainable growth with more and better jobs. The only way to achieve this is by speeding up the transition to a knowledge intensive economy, redeploying investment and economic growth to new activity areas, equipping people for new skills. When many other countries are trying to do the same, what should make the difference and the comparative advantage of the European way is the quality of life, a concern with social cohesion and environment and the respect for cultural diversity.

Over the last period, the Lisbon strategy was turned into a European agenda with new policy measures for research, innovation, information society, single market, employment, education, social protection and environment. Some were implemented such as connecting schools, companies and public services to Internet, creating one-stop shops for start-ups, launching new research networks, opening the single market for communication, energy and financial services or modernising the employment services. But many other are still waiting for stronger implementation regarding innovation, entrepreneurship,

better regulation, the single market for services, lifelong learning and the pension systems.

Moreover, the implementation has been very unequal across Member States and the gap between the European Union and the USA, Japan and other emerging economies seems increasing in many areas. Finally, the ageing trends in Europe are leading to an increasing imbalance between the working age population and the elderly, making it harder to sustain our pension and health systems.

In these conditions, a major relaunch of this European strategy took place in 2005:

- The key priorities were clarified. With a stronger focus on growth and jobs, they are now three: knowledge and innovation for growth; making Europe a more attractive area to invest and to work; and more and better jobs with social cohesion;
- A stronger focus is now being put on implementation at national level by launching national reform programmes for growth and jobs for the next three years in all Member States.
- The financial means to implement the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs were strengthened by improving the Stability and Growth Pact, by reforming the State aids regulations, by launching new instruments of the European Investment Bank and by defining new priorities for the structural funds and the Community budget.

The national reform programmes for growth and jobs for 2006-2008 can represent the largest process ever made in the European Union with the aim of connecting the European and the national policies with the citizens every day life.

More jobs should be created in new areas, by networking between companies and universities, reskilling people, providing better public services, fostering the participation of more people into the labour market, developing better infrastructures for energy, transports and telecommunication and opening the European single market and the external markets, with respect for basic standards in labour, environment and intellectual property.

These national programmes will turn the tool box of the Lisbon strategy in something more tailored made to each country specific needs. Nevertheless, the outcomes of all this process will depend on the initiatives to be taken by the main actors: not only the governments and local authorities, but also all the civil society stakeholders. Foresight can provide them with new tools to shape the future.