



EU Missions: catalysing multi-level governance across Europe

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Climate change poses and represents the defining challenge of our era. If inadequately addressed, observable and increasing climate impacts such as extreme weather events will cause irreversible damage with significant economic and social costs.

Elena Višnar Malinovská, Head of Unit for Adaptation and Resilience to Climate Change at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), emphasised that over €600bn has already been spent on climate damages across Europe in just 40 years. Urgent and coordinated action is needed, she argued, at all levels of governance to mitigate further climate change and adapt to the changes already occurring.

Taking place as part of the [SSH CENTRE](#) (Social Sciences and Humanities for Climate, Energy and Transport Research Excellence), this event explored the capacity of the EU's Missions framework to address major societal challenges through collaborative governance and policymaking.

“What we can take from the Mission approach is that it aligns the governance. It should really work as a one-mind-body when it comes to the national, regional and European level”, emphasised Ms Višnar Malinovská, underscoring that the Mission scope should be to overcome the fragmented approaches and siloed thinking.

The necessity to overcome fragmentation and disrupt silos was a theme echoed by Polish MEP **Jan Olbrycht**, Vice-Chairman of the Group of the European People's Party, Member of the CONT Committee and President of the URBAN Intergroup at the European Parliament. Indeed, Olbrycht stressed that the Missions' connection with research should allow them to foster horizontality in policymaking, but the important step is to assess whether the Mission approach can be translated to different EU policies and different accession to European funds.

Olbrycht highlighted the challenges of introducing horizontal thinking within EU institutions, as he noted that breaking down silos has been an ongoing reform effort for many years. The challenge often resides inside the structure of European institutions such as the Commission, where Commissioners and departments might have conflicting interests and priorities, making cross-sectoral collaboration difficult. As this mission-oriented approach in the Commission is relatively new, providing support to this innovative governance practice could show the value that it has for future policymaking.

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During this debate, the panellists stressed that citizen engagement and stakeholder participation are critical requirements to foster more horizontal governance approaches within EU policymaking. Considering how policies are made in the currently established channels at the EU level, **Patrick Child**, European Commission Deputy Director-General for the Environment (DG ENV) and Mission Manager for the European Union Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, strongly endorsed new types of bottom-up practices and approaches. Child remarked that through his work on the Missions, he had the opportunity for a new, and more intimate, type of connection with citizens to see how EU decisions impact daily lives at the local level.

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Julia Leventon, Professor of sustainability science and Head of Department at the Czech Academy of Sciences’ Global Change Research Institute

Regarding the potential of Missions to contribute to innovation in the EU, Child stressed that the EU Missions are in Horizon Europe specifically for their focus on bringing innovation in governance. While he highlighted that the Missions seek to meet the climate targets by 2030, their true motivation lies in pioneering new models of collaborative decision-making. As an example, Child mentioned the drastic shift happening in local administrations, where cities are leveraging app-based platforms to directly interact with residents, and foster new conversations that bring together transport, energy, environment and quality of life portfolios.

The focus of the Friends of Europe policy insight moved to examine the implementation of this Mission-oriented approach to policymaking. As stressed by **Julia Leventon**, Professor of sustainability science and Head of Department at the Czech Academy of Sciences’ Global Change Research Institute, while the Missions aim to directly involve communities in decision-making at the local level, this may not always address agenda-setting at higher governance levels. If Missions have their focus on being able to rapidly implement new measures and only take into account success indicators defined in the design phase, they cannot incorporate citizens’ views earlier in the process.

“If we are using the Missions as a vehicle to increase democracy, engagement, collaboration, they need to be backed up with some broader thinking about what we mean by democracy within this multi-level governance systems.”

The questions of citizen engagement and the urgency to address climate change remain essential, as citizens are increasingly aware, from the extreme weather events and the different challenges they are facing, that climate change is real. According to Patrick Child, Europe is not suffering from a shortage of money to meet the challenges of climate change, but instead, the problem resides in the lack of

clear mature projects which can be funded. With the Mission approach, Child argues, which should allow stakeholder engagement at multiple levels and also reform the accession to EU funds, the point will also be to put an end to fragmentation, such as between the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the traditional structural funds, and support local actors to develop their ideas to the stage where these innovations can become financeable and operational projects.

Re-thinking governance and policy-making in the EU will require to consider all the challenges and opportunities that the four panellists in this discussion have highlighted, addressing the tensions between the focus on implementation and success indicators and experimental governance, long-term foresight on the key factors driving societal change, and the necessity to disrupt silos and reduce fragmentation.

Policy Recommendations

- Implement a mission-oriented approach in policymaking to strengthen multi-level governance and foster budget alignment.
- Foster consultation and engagement practices that increase connections between citizens and decision-makers in the policy design phase.
- Take advantage of strong stakeholder engagement and support the development of mature and financeable projects
- Develop systems to monitor EU Missions through an inclusive, long-term approach, taking into account their societal relevance and innovation potential.
- Tackle fragmentation in policymaking by breaking silos across themes and funding instruments. Support local administrations in integrating and aligning their portfolios to foster climate action.



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