Launching ESPAS Working Groups
European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS)
under the chairmanship of James Elles, MEP

Speech by Klaus Welle on "The purpose of ESPAS":
A recent study for the new Bureau of the Parliament was called "The European Parliament 2025 - Preparing for Complexity". It identified four major trends for the future. They all converge creating an increased complexity in our environment.

I. Increased complexity
One factor is the rise of a multi-polar world. We all know that additional actors are coming up into the international system. We know who they are. We are not yet sure around which pole they will gravitate. And we have to ask ourselves the question 'what do we have to do if we want to be a 'pole' in that new context'.

There is also the fact that we are now seriously entering into a multilevel system. The nation state over the last decades has not only given power to the European Union but in many of our countries it has also devolved powers to the regions. That is true for France. That is surely true for Belgium. We had it confirmed again in recent days. That is true for Italy. That is true for the United Kingdom. That is true for Spain. That is true for most
of our countries. We are witnessing in some recent cases that the European level itself is not anymore considered the appropriate level. Certain key political decisions are now being taken in executive fora like the G8 or the G20. This means that it becomes necessary for us to coordinate between many more partners. We have to manage with different levels of decision-making: the national level, the European level, the global level but also the regional level. This new situation is complicated enough.

We are witnessing at the same time new actors entering the game. They are not states. They are NGOs. They are private companies. They are sometimes individuals. I have recently been impressed by that professional from Google who thought one day that it was time to have a revolution in Egypt. He then reportedly asked himself 'why not develop a marketing concept for this', as it is true that even revolutions need some marketing. He developed his ideas and provided a decisive input to political change there.

I am afraid that it is not enough to describe our system and its dynamics as multi-polar, multi-level and multi-actor. We are seeing that the speed of developments is much higher than it was in the past. It is accelerated by technological change. Innovation affects simultaneously very different domains. We may speak of 'a multi-tech accelerator'. As a consequence, we don't have anymore a decade to prepare for institutional or policy change. We cannot say anymore that expected evolutions are to happen in two decades and devise carefully the adequate ways to prepare for them. Change is now happening in an accelerated manner. As a result, the context and the conditions for political competition and cooperation are being changed very swiftly.

So the context is complex and increasingly so. At European level, we are well aware that the relationship between our different institutions may also be complex.

II. The European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) as a way to reduce complexity

What we are trying to deliver here with our common effort to build a European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) is exactly what the German philosopher Niklas Luhmann advocated for: we are trying to reduce complexity. Why?

Firstly, we are not going to develop our ideas about the challenges ahead in completely separated frameworks. We are trying to give the other institution 'the benefit of the doubt'. We are trying to listen to each other. Because we shouldn't exclude after all that in the Commission there may be good ideas about the future. We should not exclude that in the Council too there may be good ideas. Even in the European Parliament there may be some good ideas, not to speak of the European External Action Service. So, if we have an exchange together at an earlier stage, it is much better than if we confront ourselves at a later stage with already finalized world views.

Secondly, this is also to serve a very practical purpose which is to prepare the next legislature. More exactly we are aiming at setting up a frame for reflection which could be helpful in preparation of the next legislature.
With the next legislative period we will witness some fundamental political and institutional changes. For the first time we will most probably see candidates for Commission President put forward by political parties. It will change fundamentally the nature of political competition.

For the first time completely unknown Declaration n°11 of the Lisbon Treaty will have to be applied. Who knows Declaration n°11 here? - No one? Well, it has its reason for not to be known, as some of course are not so keen for such a change.

Indeed, Declaration n°11 states that ‘after the next European elections the President of the European Council will consult with the European Parliament in order to identify an appropriate candidate for Commission President’.

It will no longer be only the European Council deciding on the candidature but the European Council after due consultation with the European Parliament's political families. Such a combination - direct candidates from European political parties together with the new consultation process - Declaration n°11 - will affect the nature of the next election. It may even change in a quite fundamental way the nature of the next 5 years in the European Union.

Given that the approach to the policy-making in the European Parliament as well as in the Commission will probably be more political, it will be extremely valuable to have a document available with some reflection which wouldn't be contested and could then easily serve as a common basis to debate about goals that we want to achieve in the next 5 years.
Of course we can rely on external support. But our experience is that in fact we have enough books, analysis and studies. There are already enough excellent ideas outside the European Institutions. But those ideas, although largely accessible, are not totally ours. Why? - For different reasons: they are many and our time is scarce; they often do not take into account our own constraints; they are not compatible with already established rules, policies, institutions.

So, our task is to find a way to appropriate them, to gain ownership on them, to make them alive. This task will be the responsibility of members of those Working Groups in the process.

As a consequence and a conclusion, organisation has to follow.

Working Groups' task will basically be to filter the input in order to finally find what may really change the legislative process and the institutions. All the input provided by contractors and experts will have to be subject to the reflection by the Working Groups on how to use these ideas to bring them to life, to make their content workable. Ideas about long term trends and their impact will have to be tried and tested, as well as looked at from the different institutional angles: Council, Commission and Parliament. The ideal result of such a reflection process would be to come to some kind of joint conclusions which could be taken up by decision-makers for the next legislature.

This explains why it is so important to have these Working Groups. So many excellent ideas in paper never arrive in the daily reflection of our institutions. Without this reflection of the ESPAS Working Groups we could well loose 80% of our efforts. If, in addition, we complete this reflection by a joint approach, a joint approach for the first time, it will be even better.

We have to realize what an enormous opportunity we are given with this project. This is for all of us definitely a new territory that we are going to.

It is striking to see what kind of progress we are accomplishing here, through ESPAS, in the field of cooperation between European institutions. Such a common work on long term trends and options would not have been imaginable a short time ago. Even three years ago it would have been difficult. Now we are doing this joint effort and I hope that we will discover that we all profit from this process. And we may even discover that we enjoy it too.