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Think2030 Ireland Conference

Policy brief: Preparedness for a Competitive and Climate Resilient EU

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Preparedness for a Competitive and Climate Resilient EU

The [Think2030 Conference Ireland](#), held on 16 September 2026 at the Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin, brought together representatives of the Irish government, European decision-makers, industry, civil society and thought leaders to explore how sustainability can strengthen Europe's resilience and support a competitive and secure future. As part of the Think2030 Conference, the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) organised a session titled "Preparedness for a Competitive and Climate Resilient EU", and this session brief summarizes the key take-aways from this session.

Lead: Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA)

Moderator: Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Interim Director General, IIEA

Speakers:

- Philip Nugent, Assistant Secretary for EU, International and Marine Affairs, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, Government of Ireland¹
- Eimear Cotter, Director General, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ireland
- Tomás Sercovich, CEO, Business in the Community Ireland
- Yvonne Buckley, Professor of Zoology, Trinity College Dublin and Co-Director of the Co-Centre for Climate+Biodiversity+Water
- Vadim Kononenko, Foresight and Policy Expert, European Environmental Agency (EEA)

¹ Philip Nugent was unable to join the panel due to urgent Presidency duties, however, he provided his notes which informed this policy brief.

Key recommendations

- **Moving from risk identification to setting clear climate risk ownership for enhanced competitiveness.**

The European Climate Risk Assessment identifies 80 percent of the 36 systemic risks as co-owned. A weak management of ownership delivers uncertainty and warning signs to financial actors, leading to a challenging environment for clear insurability of assets and detrimental implications for a competitive cost of capital. Climate risk is now a fundamental driver in the repricing of assets, so **a clear overview of climate risk ownership and accountability is needed for more financially predictable results.**

- **Develop a European framework for adaptation targets, tracking and funding**

The Commission's own analysis places ecosystems as the second largest category of adaptation investment needed, at around €70 billion a year for the EU until 2050. Current investment falls well short of this identified need. Without clear adaptation targets and tracking mechanisms, accountability and funding will be more challenging to assess. The European Commission must **create an effective guidance framework for Member States to implement adaptation strategies.**

- **Centralise climate scenarios for infrastructure investments**

A shared European reference warming trajectory would allow public and private actors to plan more efficiently for more resilient infrastructure investment. At the same time, resilience designed only through technocratic processes is unlikely to secure lasting public support. The European Commission should **centralise climate scenarios to secure investments in resilient infrastructure through public consultations and transparent conversations with public and private actors.**

- **Avoid climate resilience policy reversal and dependency on electoral cycle**

Tomás Sercovich highlighted that 'seventy percent of business leaders are telling [BITC] that they are worried about what they call a disorderly transition'. Businesses fear policy reversal and uncertainties more than policy ambition. A disorderly transition may come into place through sudden political changes and slow implementation of research outcomes into policy. **Climate resilience policy reversal should be avoided, while the speed of research implementation into policy should be improved.**

Summary of policy session

The opening high-level policy panel explored **how the European Union can strengthen its resilience and competitiveness while responding to accelerating climate and environmental risks**. The discussion took place against a backdrop of growing recognition that climate change, biodiversity loss, economic security and geopolitical stability are increasingly interconnected challenges.

While significant progress has been made in identifying and assessing risks through processes such as the European Climate Risk Assessment and national risk assessments, panellists argued that Europe's central challenge is no longer understanding the risks but **building institutions capable of addressing risks effectively and at scale**.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the **growing gap between knowledge and implementation**. Speakers noted that Europe possesses extensive scientific evidence, risk assessments and policy frameworks, yet institutional arrangements often remain fragmented and insufficiently equipped to translate this knowledge into action.

Climate risks increasingly cascade across sectors, affecting infrastructure, energy systems, health, water resources, food production and ecosystems simultaneously. Traditional policy structures, however, continue to address many of these issues in isolation. The panel therefore called for **governance approaches capable of dealing with systemic and interconnected risks**.

One of the strongest messages emerging from the panel was the **need to move from identifying climate risks towards establishing clear ownership and accountability to manage them**. The European Climate Risk Assessment has identified 36 systemic risks, many of which are shared across sectors, institutions and levels of government. The panel highlighted that approximately 80% of these risks are effectively co-owned, creating situations where responsibility becomes unclear and action may be delayed.

Panellists argued that **co-ownership should not result in an absence of accountability**. Instead, governance systems should identify lead actors, define responsibilities across institutions and establish mechanisms to monitor progress. Clarifying ownership was presented not only as a governance issue but also as an economic one, as uncertainty over responsibility can undermine investor confidence, increase financing costs and ultimately weaken competitiveness. Resilience policies

therefore need to be designed with implementation and accountability at their core rather than focusing solely on strategy development.

The panel also emphasised that **adaptation policy currently lacks accountability mechanisms** that have become standard, for instance, in climate mitigation policy. While mitigation benefits from clear targets, reporting obligations and regular progress assessments, adaptation efforts often remain difficult to measure and compare.

Panellists called for the development of a common European framework for preparedness and adaptation tracking, including shared indicators, reporting mechanisms and reference climate scenarios that can guide planning and investment decisions. Such a framework would support consistency across Member States while providing greater clarity for governments, businesses and investors. It would also help ensure that adaptation becomes a measurable component of economic and infrastructure planning rather than an optional policy objective.

A key area of discussion concerned the growing links between climate resilience, financial stability and economic competitiveness. Panellists noted that climate risks are increasingly influencing insurance markets, asset valuations and investment decisions. **Physical climate impacts should no longer viewed only as environmental concerns, but as material financial risks** affecting effective access to insurance, mortgages and capital.

The panel discussion highlighted the importance of **integrating climate resilience into infrastructure development, investment strategies and financial regulation**. Long-term planning requires stable policy signals, credible transition pathways and greater certainty about future climate conditions. Regulatory unpredictability and policy reversals can create significant barriers to investment, particularly during periods of economic transition.

Special attention was given to the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, many of which face capacity constraints in translating climate guidance into practical action. The panel therefore called for a combination of **regulatory stability, technical assistance and targeted support measures to strengthen implementation** across the economy.

The role of ecosystems emerged as another central theme. Panellists argued that **natural infrastructure should be treated as a critical component of resilience alongside built infrastructure**, including wetlands, forests, soils and coastal ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems provide flood protection, water regulation, carbon

capture, biodiversity benefits and enhanced food security, yet investment remains well below identified needs.

The panel highlighted the need to **move natural infrastructure from a category of long-term environmental concern into one of immediate strategic investment**. This requires dedicated financing, greater integration of ecosystem services into economic decision-making and stronger recognition of the contribution of nature-based solutions to resilience objectives.

Agricultural diversification was cited as an example of a policy area capable of simultaneously supporting climate adaptation, food security, biodiversity protection and rural resilience. Panellists argued that **investment in ecosystems should not be viewed as a competing priority but as a foundational component of the EU's preparedness strategy**.

Panellists repeatedly stressed that resilience depends on institutions and people as much as on policy frameworks. The discussion highlighted the **need for stronger links between research and policy**, noting that scientific findings often take many years to influence decision-making. Several proposals focused on strengthening science-policy cooperation through permanent policy-response mechanisms, better alignment of research programmes with emerging policy needs and earlier engagement between researchers and policymakers. Importantly, this is an area where businesses should be involved to ensure that the policy-research nexus serves industrial decarbonisation and fosters sectoral innovation for net zero and nature positive solutions.

The panel also identified significant skills shortages as a growing constraint. Delivering resilience requires expertise across a wide range of sectors, including engineering, construction, climate science, emergency planning and environmental management. **Investments in training, reskilling and climate literacy should be regarded as essential complements to technological innovation**. Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies were viewed as tools that can strengthen resilience, although not as substitutes for investment in human capacity.

Finally, the discussion emphasised that resilience cannot be achieved solely through technical and regulatory measures. **Public trust, participation and community engagement are critical components of effective resilience governance**. Speakers stressed the importance of involving communities in planning processes, incorporating local knowledge and ensuring that the benefits and costs of transition are distributed fairly.

While competitiveness and security arguments can reinforce support for environmental action, several panellists argued that these should not replace recognition of the intrinsic and cultural value of healthy ecosystems, clean air and clean water. **Building public support therefore requires policies that are both effective and socially legitimate, supported by meaningful participation and deliberation.**



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About Think2030

Launched by IEEP and its partners in 2018, Think2030 is an evidence-based, non-partisan initiative of leading policy experts from European think tanks, civil society, the private sector and local authorities.

By focusing on producing relevant, timely and concrete policy recommendations, Think2030's key objective is to identify science-policy solutions for a more sustainable Europe.

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