

FALLING WALLS SCIENCE SUMMIT



KEY RESULTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

“TECHNOLOGY FORESIGHT: SHAPING TOMORROW’S INNOVATION”

— *Anticipate, focus, execute: move from abstract trend-spotting to institution-level readiness with data, hubs, and finance that turn disruption into advantage.*

Europe’s research systems are facing multiple crises and accelerating technology cycles simultaneously. The panel’s message was clear: foresight should be viewed as two tasks – identifying new technologies and embedding organisational agility. This should then be supported by data access, freedom to experiment and capital so that ideas can be quickly translated into capabilities.

Technology foresight is most valuable when it links campus, industry, and government in a continuous loop: scan, test on real users, and scale. ETH Zurich’s foresight hub, ACATECH’s technology readiness mapping with industry, and Stanford’s policy reviews illustrate models that combine cross-disciplinary centres, technology readiness level-aware roadmaps, and direct policy engagement. The economic lens adds three enablers: connected data, permission to experiment (and fail), and lifelong reskilling.

THE PANEL CALL TO ACTION:

1 — Build foresight into institutions and use campuses as testbeds.

Create dedicated foresight units with mandate and ring-fenced budgets to prototype within weeks, not years, separating trend identification from organisational resilience. Run structured pipelines from 100 ideas to 10–15 priorities. Trial them with researchers and students, and embed cross-disciplinary centres with industry at the table.

2 — Focus on strengths and scale through mission-driven hubs.

Prioritise areas where Europe can lead (e.g., industrial AI combined with cyber-physical systems). Stand up innovation hubs that pool shared infrastructure, align to technology readiness levels, and connect startups with established firms to move beyond one-off projects.

3 — Turn data and experimentation into standard operating conditions.

Establish secure public-private data spaces and regulatory sandboxes so teams can link datasets, run real-world trials, and iterate rapidly. Shorten the time from application to funding, enable mobility between sectors, and fund mid-career retraining as a default, not an exception.

4 — Mobilise capital and procurement for the next “CERN-of-X.”

Blend public and private finance via European-scale vehicles and pre-commercial procurement to underwrite large, risky bets; develop a deeper EU capital market so breakthrough projects aren’t stranded in the “valley of death” between early research to real-world application.

5 — Institutionalise constructive controversy in policy advice.

Replace sporadic crisis summits with ongoing foresight councils that publish



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option sets, red-team assumptions, and measurable milestones – keeping autonomy of research while giving policymakers actionable roadmaps. Extend foresight beyond technology to societal impacts and democratic resilience.

This event is supported by Volkswagen Foundation and assembled in the framework of the Falling Walls Science Summit 2025 in Berlin. The Falling Walls Science Summit is a leading international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral forum for scientific breakthroughs. It commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and aims to promote dialogue between science and society.

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