

Closing Plenary



Summit Reporting Panel

Abstract

Three students in science, diplomacy and business report on their experience at the GESDA Science and Diplomacy Anticipation Summit 2021.

Participants

Moderated by:

David Goodhart, Journalist, Author and Think-Tanker; Head, Demography Unit, Policy Exchange (think-tank); Member, GESDA Diplomacy Forum, UK

With:

Joseph Maggiore, Ph.D. Student in Bioengineering Medicine, University of Pittsburgh, US

Hannah Tickle, Master's Student in Social & Organizational Psychology, University of Lausanne and London School of Economics, Switzerland/UK

Keshav Khanna, Master's Student in International Affairs, Graduate Institute Geneva, India

Discussion

Three students, all aged 25 and under, told the Summit's Closing Plenary that their experiences of the summit over the past three days had been, by turns, educational, overwhelming, fascinating, concerning and encouraging that older generations acknowledged many of the enormous challenges that will be left to youth to confront.

"It is very refreshing to see older generations think about our future and not only about more short-term consequences, in terms of governance and science," said Hannah Tickle, a Swiss-British dual national who, like the other panellists, noted that most of the summit participants seemed to be much older than them. She was enthusiastic when asked if she would sit on a GESDA youth advisory board if one were created. "In terms of key takeaways, the two things which stand out for me, which probably connect to my background in social science, is the act of translation between science and the more general public. I think it's something for a very long time which has not been taken seriously enough, or set in smaller circles," she said. "And it's important to use a more accessible vocabulary. And on the note about inclusion and accessibility, translation is going to be very important in order to include people from diverse locations, but also age groups and educational backgrounds in order to just make sure everybody is part of the conversation."

As a graduate student in Switzerland, Keshav Khanna, who hails from India, said it was incredible to be surrounded by so many diplomats. "This is like Comic-Con to me. The younger people in the audience laughed, so I'm good," he said of his reference to the popular comic books convention in San Diego, California. "It's fantastic to have this sort of environment where not only as young people, we can learn from everybody and their years and years of expertise, but also sort of understand the applications that are possible for advancing technologies. I have attended a lot of very interesting sessions." Khanna's biggest takeaway, he said, was that the level of science going on in the world is staggering but the world's governance systems may not keep pace. "And this reminds me of a session where this gentleman was talking about the G-20 and G-7, and he said that the G-20 and G-7 are designed explicitly to solve the problems of today. So, then, who's thinking about the problems of tomorrow? And with that, I feel GESDA is a fantastic platform for that sort of thing. Because you're thinking five, ten, 25 years in the future, and you are trying to solve problems before they even happen. I honestly wish that that is coupled with the sort of political reform we need and not just domestic context, but also international institutions, and we are able to bring these two things together and make a real difference."

Khanna said he worried about science "splintering" along political divisions if the world returns to a "sort of Cold War science development only for the benefit of geopolitical advances" or to science as a competition rather than "for the sake of it" as a worthwhile pursuit. In an opening address, Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis had told the summit that geopolitical considerations – what he called "a growing feeling that a new 'Cold War' is about to be fought over science and technology and the power they confer to the states that master them" – prompted the Swiss and Geneva governments to create GESDA as a Swiss foundation and public-private partnership in 2019. Cassis said GESDA could serve as a bridge among scientists and policymakers worldwide and as an "honest broker" helping ensure that all nations, rich and poor, enjoy the benefits of science and technology.

Joseph Maggiore observed there were "not that many people" at the summit as young as him, so it was overwhelming to realize the Science Breakthrough Radar® identified things that may occur when he is 30, 35 and 50 years old – and so many things need to get done before then. "We are the people that are really going to be responsible for [accomplishing] these," he said. The summit marked

a step for him: “Hearing these sessions when it came to the science, I felt very confident about what is the right way to move forward. But it is frankly shocking that, me being in this place of privilege with the education I am receiving, this is the first time that I have ever heard the word multilateralism,” he said, adding that GESDA’s science and diplomacy programmes also could help train “scientists who want to create global change”.

Khanna said he also worried about another issue: trust. “Not just in our generation, but in our societies that we are coming from, we see that trust has been broken in science, in governance institutions,” he said. “And that is resulting in catastrophic difficulties in trying to get people vaccinated or trying to stop some sort of conflict within societies. And I am very curious to see what sort of solutions GESDA can bring to the table for that, and how they can sort of assist different nation-states, different community actors, in building a more coherent trust through to confidence building measures in our societies.”

He agreed with Khanna that trusting older generations is a big issue because “there is an intense distrust when there is not an acknowledgment from leaders of really what is going on in a situation.” When he observed some summit participants acknowledge the possibility that

technology can be used for “evil”, however, it restored some of his faith in their objectivity. “Some people just want to see the world burn,” said Maggiore. “I feel like the biggest power is in acknowledging that these forces may exist and acknowledging these boundaries and that GESDA may be in a situation where we can provide incentives for good behaviour, and that we should acknowledge that we can all talk about a lot of these things. But how can we get academics and industry members to be excited about creating global diplomacy? The reality of it may be that they are not that interested,” he said, but “having GESDA play a role in incentivizing that” could spark interest.



Takeaway Messages

Younger participants felt encouraged that older generations acknowledged the challenges youth will confront – and were enthusiastic about the idea of a GESDA youth advisory board.

Translation between science and the general public can use a more inclusive and accessible vocabulary.

Unlike some other multilateral institutions, GESDA’s focus is ‘thinking about the problems of tomorrow’.

GESDA could help train and incentivize academics and businesspeople to become more agile in the world of global diplomacy, and vice versa with diplomats in the worlds of academia and business.

Trust in scientists and diplomats can be built up by acknowledging worst-case scenarios.

More information

[Session recording on YouTube](#)

[Related interviews: Voices from the #GESDASummit](#)

[Tweets related to the session](#)

[Review about the Summit “On the confluence of science and diplomacy”, written by Keshav Khana, published on the Graduate Institute Geneva website.](#)