

Committee for the Future

The Committee for the Future is unique in the world. It is one of the Parliament of Finland's 16 standing committees. The Committee has 17 members who are all members of the Parliament and represent different political parties. Its only task is to think futures and work for the best possible Future for the people. Time perspective is long and scale of issues broad. Situated in the core of political life it has a lot of power - not legislative, but initiative and visionary. It really works, it has meetings twice a week.

What are the official tasks of the Committee for the Future? It

- prepares parliamentary documents entrusted to it, such as Parliament's response to the Government's Report on the Future
- issues statements to other committees on matters related to the future when asked to do so
- discusses issues pertaining to future development factors and development models
- analyses research regarding the future, including methodology
- serves as the parliamentary body responsible for assessing technological development and its consequences for society.

What does this mean? The Committee is supposed to deliberate factors that influence the development of the future, futures research and the impacts of technological development. Unlike the other committees, it does not generally deal with legislative proposals. Instead, it is tasked with drafting the Parliament's response to the Government's report on the future (normally one report during election period) which is handled in the plenary session as well as, upon request, making submissions to other committees and doing preparatory work on other parliamentary matters assigned to it.

Absolutely the most important effort is put on its own issues, own projects. First of all, **power to decide on agenda** is one of the pillars in the strength of the Committee. From the very beginning it has had the initiative power. The Committee itself makes the agenda and chooses methods for its work. Nobody else.

The Committee prepares studies on futures, different options, dangers, scenarios using methods of future research. This means that the Committee must itself create its success and earn esteem for its work in each and every parliamentary 4-year term. What is of essential importance is to choose one MP to act as the coordinator or steering group chair for each project and commit to this work. Especially during this period the use of sections (7) has added efficiency to preparatory work.

By virtue of its exceptional role and task, the Committee serves as the Parliament's Think Tank and in this way also serves our parliamentary institution by obtaining information to support decision making and appraising the long-term effect of decisions.

Something of the mentality, the mindset tells that the English name was originally Committee *of* the Future, but this was changed at the first meeting to Committee *for* the Future. I have worked in the Committee from the very beginning and I remember that it was felt that the new preposition reflected a proactive and positive grasp on the future. Often proposed name "Committee for the Future, Science and

Technology” is not comprehensive, because it excludes innovations (technological and social) for instance, in addition to which it is above all unwieldy and tied to a particular time.

Committee has a right also to draft it ‘s own future reports which are discussed in the plenary session. Deliberation of so-called own matters in a plenary session, as a topical debate on the basis of reports, is for sure a bit problematic. Another method that has been proposed is one in which the Committee would present joint long-term parliamentary initiatives, but this would for the long run blur the significance of both the Committee and the initiative institution. I would say that the same kind of problems are noticed with different kind of “ombudsman” organizations, including ombudsman for future generations. Those ombudsman that are part of parliamentary system are strong ones, others weak.

For all committees the corresponding minister/corresponding ministry is important. The Prime Minister as the corresponding minister is the only appropriate choice for the Committee for the Future. If, for example, a minister for science, technology and innovation is appointed, the matters associated with substantive questions that his or her remit would include would be in practice future-related. However, in accordance with the idea on which the Committee is founded, the broad scope of its tasks and a high level of Government-Parliament dialogue, the cabinet member with foremost responsibility must ultimately be the Prime Minister, who also chairs in Finland the Research and Innovation Council.

In accordance with the political system, it is the Prime Minister who should choose the theme for the Governmental Future report. There has been 7 reports:

- 1993 “Report on the Long-Term Future”
- 1996 “Part I “Finland and the Future of Europe”
- 1997 “Part II “Honest and Courageous – a Finland of Responsibility and Confidence”
- 2001 “A Finland of Balanced Development 2015”
- 2004 “A Good Society for People of All Ages”, a report on demographic development, demographic policy and preparation for a changing age structure, and
- 2009 “Towards a Finland of Low Emissions”, a report on climate and energy policy
- 2013 “Sustainable Growth for well-fare”.

Nearly 20 years ago, it was determined that the theme of the first report on the future in the early 1990s would be, already by virtue of the parliament debate that had preceded the Committee’s establishment, a general one. The theme covered all sectors and levels of political activities, starting from global development, extending to Europe and Finland and ending with management of affairs and institutionally always down to the local level and even to families.

The theme of the second report a few years later, in 1996, focused on Europe. Since then, the Prime Minister/Government has chosen the themes dealing with important special themes, confined mainly to the national level. The 2009 climate report was partly international, but still on a special theme.

In order to strengthen the political system as specifically an active dialogue between the Parliament and the Government on the long-term future, it was appropriate and timely to switch again to a multi-sector, broad and international deliberation of the future. The theme for the present parliamentary term “*How Finland is equipped for success in a changing world*”, the Finnish

sustainable growth model in a changing world, provides again an opportunity to make a general exploration of the state of Finland in a global world and the scenarios associated with it and/or a map of the future with alternative development paths. The general map of the future is an umbrella, underneath which are located the special studies that the members of the Committee choose and direct. Outlining Finland's long-term position and alternatives in both the global and European environment and in the Nordic countries and the neighbourhood of Russia is now especially important, given that on the level of Europe as a whole the financial crisis has clearly highlighted uncertainties, structural problems and needs for change.

The Committee for the Future has chosen in autumn 2011 four areas of study for itself:

- 1) Sustainable Growth
- 2) An Inspired Society
- 3) Acquiring New Knowledge, and
- 4) Can the Welfare Society Endure?

Then from the methodological point of view some projects more:

- 5) crowdsourcing
- 6) radical technologies.

The dialogue between the Government and the Parliament on the long-term future has got its flexible forms during 20 years.

The Committee for the Future is the only forum in the Parliament where all parties can together, without unnecessary regional, chronological or sectoral limits, appraise the development of the entire political system against a time frame that is longer than that of day-to-day politics and a parliamentary term. Turmoil and uncertainties in the economy are elevating democracy and politics to the centre of interest in a new way.

Summary: The Committee for the Future is not one of the most desired committees after a general election among MPs, but it has proved itself to be a good vantage point from which to follow changes in the world. A considerable proportion of ministers have been members of the Committee. In the period 2003-07 the Committee's chair was elected as the leader of the biggest opposition party, the National Coalition, and became Minister of Finance after the election. The Committee's report "A Caring, Encouraging and Creative Finland", which appraised the information society, was incorporated, complete with name, into the Programme for Government. Now Mr. Katainen is a Prime Minister. There are strong signals that the next Prime Minister will come also from members of the Committee. Mr Juha Sipilä, who also was chosen after working only a short time in the Committee to lead the big party, the Center party. He is now number 1 in polls/gallups and nowadays the winner in elections will take the Prime Minister's post.