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Revamping the work of the Committee for the Future ¹

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 Parliament and represent different political parties.

Tasks

The Committee for the Future

- 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

Summary

1. Tasks

Sufficiently broad and demanding right from the beginning. Science, technology and creation of new concepts and ideas as well as revitalisation of institutions are important, but so is the ability to recognise what will be permanent in the future and what ought to be.

2. Powers

Adequate and very permissive. It would not be advisable to lose the character of a parliamentary think tank, which is both of a high standard and even unique in the world, by routinely accepting legal matters as the subjects of especially statements.

3. Name

Short, timelessly broad and apt. The English name was originally *Committee of the Future*, but this was changed at the first meeting to *Committee for the Future*, because it was felt that the new preposition reflected a proactive and positive grasp on the future. The proposed name “Committee for the Future, Science and Technology” is not comprehensive, because it excludes innovations for instance, in addition to which it is above all unwieldy and tied to a particular time.

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To conclude the parliamentary term, the secretary of the Committee and its permanent experts have compiled the development-related proposals put forward in recent years and included them in this memorandum. At the same time, the status and standard of the existing tasks and functions have been pondered.

4. Methods

It is important that the tasks with which the Committee has been entrusted have from the very beginning included the methods of futures research. This will continue to be the foundation of high-quality futures work. In particular, the new Committee must be given training at the beginning of each parliamentary term to familiarise it with good work methods.

5. Budget

Because the Committee itself decides its meagre annual research, printing and translation budget, outside research projects must be chosen/manned/timed/directed well. A sum of €73,000 has been set aside for 2011, in addition to which €5,000 per month has been granted to cover the salary of a special expert.

6. Policy lines, choices and success

The Committee must itself create its success and earn esteem for its work in each and every parliamentary term. At the beginning of a term it must choose the most important so-called own themes and the best work methods for dealing with them. What is of essential importance is to choose one Representative to act as the coordinator or steering group chair for each project and commit to this work. A new operational policy must be adopted by the mid-way point at the latest. The use of sections could add efficiency to preparatory work.

7. Right to draft a report and deliberation in a plenary session

Deliberation of so-called own matters in a plenary session, as a topical debate on the basis of reports, is problematic, but so far the only way. A right to draft a report concerning own matters, along the lines of the model that applies to the Audit Committee, would strengthen deliberation as a normal plenary session matter. Another method that has been proposed is one in which the Committee would present joint long-term parliamentary initiatives, but this would blur the significance of both the Committee and the initiative institution.

8. Corresponding minister/corresponding ministry

The Prime Minister as the corresponding minister is the only appropriate choice. 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-Eduskunta dialogue, the cabinet member with foremost responsibility must ultimately be the Prime Minister, who also chairs the Research and Innovation Council.

9. Theme and processing of foresight report

In accordance with the political system, it is the Prime Minister who should choose the theme. It would now appear to be the time for broad handling that covers a wide spectrum of sectors, for horizontal processing rather than special themes. In any event, the Committee should once in a parliamentary term conduct a general exploration of the state of Finland and the related scenarios and/or futures map. The report should be presented during the early part of the Government's term and the response prepared so that there is time for the Eduskunta to give it thorough deliberation. The timetable for deliberation can be agreed in such a way that in the end, as a part of the dialogue between the Government and the legislature, the results are evaluated and future prospects examined.

10. Links to other committees

Efforts should be made to create joint steering groups and arrange joint evaluation seminars and also to devise streamlined methods for producing statements and comments.

11. Links to the world of science

The Committee's intention once the Turku Futures Centre has become more closely involved in the work during the next parliamentary term is to create from their researchers and those belonging to the so-called network university a pool of professor-level experts, who will be used to provide assistance in conducting studies, but also to create ties to the world of science. Precisely targeted visits to the scientific community must be increased. The secretary will begin in the board of the Institute of Management at the University of Tampere.

12. Contacts with citizens

Regional meetings alone and together with the corresponding ministry, i.e. the Prime Minister's Office, have been increased. During the current parliamentary term, especially the cooperation with the business world, municipal committees for the future as well as youth councils that has been stepped up will be continued. Working together with the Futures Research Centre, it will be possible to arrange new kinds of meetings using new methods.

13. Publications

On the publications front, there has been an accelerating shift to the Internet, but print can not be abandoned. A published book is more important to many researchers than a financial reward. It is advisable to publish an abridged version of long reports.

14. Forecasting EU development and international activities

It is important on the EU level to create practices by means of which a debate on major and important questions of the future can be initiated in the Eduskunta at such an early stage that different alternatives and policy lines are still completely open and under development. In forecasting EU matters, the abilities of Europarliamentarians and the Eduskunta's Brussels-based adviser to recognise political themes that are important for Finland's future will be availed of. Already-closer links to international organisations, especially the OECD and the EU's research and innovation units, must be revamped.

A factor mitigating against taking care of international contacts is that funds are no longer available for translating reports into English. During the last parliamentary term, the Russia 2017 report, which was translated also into Russian, was ranked on one American web site that evaluates scenario projects, as the third most interesting scenario report in the world. A dearth of translations is also a problem from the perspective of the numerous groups who visit the Eduskunta.

15 Information

The diversity of our information efforts has been increased during the current term. Visits have been made to the regions and various new kinds of events, about which information has been disseminated in collaboration with hosts/cooperation partners.

16. Direct democracy

The Committee has held "unofficial meetings" elsewhere in Finland. It participated successfully for four weeks in an open popular discourse on an education theme on the Internet. Systematic hearings

to elicit the views of citizens would be important, but require a lot of resources. The Committee will support and participate if the Eduskunta makes a policy decision to hear the views of citizens on, for example, important major legislative projects.

17. The Programme for Government and citing 10 pain points at the end

On a few occasions, 10 pain points have been specified at the end of a parliamentary term as a basis for the negotiations to form a new coalition. These have mainly been compiled by analysing the Committee's own projects during the past term, consulting secretaries-general about their respective ministries' reviews of future prospects and evaluating other committees' comments. It would be advisable to continue along these lines.

18. Vantage point

The Committee for the Future is not one of the most desired committees after a general election, 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, Representative Katainen, 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. In the spring 2011 general election, Mr. Katainen is a contender for the prime ministership.

The Committee for the Future is a part of Finnish foresight

It is difficult to pinpoint just when scientific study of futures began. The general consensus is, however, that it came into being soon after the Second World War. The history of futures research is often regarded as having begun in 1946, when Ossip K. Flechtheim created the concept of futurology. Long before that, however, Plato wrote about an ideal state (390 BCE) and Thomas More about his Utopia (1516). Also in Finland, the Turku Academy's first professor of practical philosophy, Mikael Wexonius, noted in 1640 that people had three different abilities relating to dimensions of time: memory focused on the past, understanding on the present and concern on the future.

In the wake of the stock market collapse in the 1930s and the Second World War, futures studies became institutionalised as a part of social sciences research and political decision making. The US Administration played a pioneering role in this. The RAND Corporation, which was set up in association with the US Army and the Douglas Aircraft Company after the Second World War, is still one of the world's most important actors in this sector. Later, in the 1950s and 1960s, futures research gained strength also in Europe, and especially in France. At the same time, more societally oriented contents were accentuated (instead of, for example, military, economic and geopolitical themes).

The traditional fundament on which activities in this field rest in Finland is made up of the Finnish Society for Futures Studies (1980), the Eduskunta's Committee for the Future (1992), the Turku-based Finland Futures Research Centre (1992) and the Finland Futures Academy network (1998). The Finnish Society for Futures Studies is a quasi-scientific body, which brings together citizens, researchers, business life, organisations, authorities and political decision makers. Its mission is to prompt and maintain a national discourse on the future.

The Finland Futures Research Centre is a scientific body that works under the aegis of the University of Turku. The Ministry of Education and Culture has entrusted it with a national task in the development of the Finnish foresight system. The Centre is Finland's biggest futures studies unit and also a significant concentration of competence by international standards. The Finland Futures Academy network, which is coordinated by the Centre, produces basic teaching courses in futures studies at currently nine universities around the country. In addition, master's courses as well as doctoral degree programmes are available.

In the 21st century, new actors and structures have taken their place alongside the traditional ones: they include the Government's foresight network, foresight forums and networks run by ministries, the Academy of Finland, Tekes - the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation and Sitra - the Finnish Innovation Fund as well as the foresight services and units of regional Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, and regional councils. There are also several new networks and databases that coordinate foresight efforts on the EU level. In the corporate world, foresight work has held a strong position for decades.

The creation at almost the same time of the Finland Futures Research Centre and the Committee for the Future had the same motivation: to develop a national foresight system against the background of the recession that was afflicting Finland in the early 1990s. In the intervening period, thinking in relation to the future has become broadly and deeply rooted in Finnish society. Indeed, the Finnish foresight system is of a versatility that is rare anywhere in the world.

Many problems as starting points

Creating a Committee for the Future within the Eduskunta was a difficult and complex task². As is typically the case when significant changes to an old, tradition-bound state institution like a parliament or its structures, operating methods or way of thinking are mooted, the proposal initially encountered considerable opposition. A kind of friction with the traditional legislative committee system is still discernible and indeed is to an extent natural and even necessary.

What is, however, of essential relevance is that from the beginning the need for long-term examination of the future also at the core of democracy, i.e. in the parliamentary institution, has been recognised in the Eduskunta as being so important that there was a willingness to create a new institution specifically within the national legislature. Precisely for this reason, the Eduskunta has received a lot of international plaudits for its own innovation.

The Committee for the Future was established as a temporary committee in 1993. Before that, a popular initiative in which 133 Representatives, researchers and journalists expressed concern at a lack of long-term planning and assessment had been submitted to the President of the Republic, the Presidium of the Eduskunta and the Council of State (i.e. Government). A year later, in 1987, a written question signed by 136 Representatives led by Jussi Ranta (Social Democrat) was presented in the Eduskunta. Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa (likewise a Social Democrat) replied to the question and said, with regard to a concrete proposal to set up a futures unit within the Eduskunta framework, that no examples of this kind of research units operating within parliaments were known. Futures units had generally been created within the administrative sector or the scientific community and futures research was being conducted in many places. The matter ended with the State Science Council being entrusted with the task of looking into and reporting on it. TUTKAS, a

² Viz. Arja Aalto-Lassila's 2008 pro gradu thesis dealing with the genesis of the Committee for the Future

society with a membership composed of researchers and parliamentarians, arranged seminars on the theme, and especially its chair, Representative Martti Tiuri (National Coalition) actively championed the cause.

The economic crisis in the 1990s brought an increased need to formulate views on how Finland could cope with the recession over the longer term. In 1992 a legislative motion signed by 167 Representatives, of whom the first signatory was Eero Paloheimo (Greens), was introduced in the Eduskunta. It called for the then Constitution Act to be amended so as to require a new Government to submit to the Eduskunta for its deliberation, in addition to the Programme for Government, a report on its plan for the long-term future. The number of signatories was an all-time record for an initiative presented by an individual Representative. In fact, 167 was more than the five-sixths majority that would have been required to amend the Constitution during a single parliamentary term.

The matter was referred to the Constitutional Law Committee, which did not support a constitutional amendment, but did take the view that there was a need for the Eduskunta to conduct discussions on the long-term future. It was also of the opinion that there was a need for the Government to draft a report on the matter. When the matter was deliberated in a plenary session, Representative Martti Tiuri (National Coalition), who had been involved in all stages of the project, managed to get through a resolution under which the Government, having provided a long-term report on the future and in the light of the experience gained in the course of deliberation of this report, would consider possibilities of submitting an equivalent report to the Eduskunta at least once in each four-year parliamentary term. And, because somewhere to deliberate the Government report had to be found, the plenary session on 22.10.1993 appointed a temporary committee on futures policy to draft the response.

From the very beginning, the Committee for the Future has assumed an active role as a generator of independent initiatives. The first Committee worked for only a little over a year, but it immediately began drafting, for the report, its own extensive review of the state of Finland's future and this was subsequently incorporated into its report. Throughout the period of its existence, the Committee has specified its own themes, which have been examined and reported on using a variety of futures research methods.

A Committee for the Future was not appointed after the general election in spring 1995. This was partly due to opposition to the idea within the Eduskunta. However, the matter became topical when, under the Programme for Government, the Government was presenting part I of its next foresight report, dealing with Europe, to the Eduskunta. A dispute arose in the house as to whether it should be deliberated by the Committee for the Future, the Foreign Affairs Committee or the Grand Committee. In February 1996 the Eduskunta decided to set up a temporary Committee for the Future and gave it a new task. It was to launch technology assessment work in the Eduskunta and draft a report on how this could be integrated into parliamentary work. Societal assessment of technology became an integral part of the Committee's work from 1996 onwards. The first evaluation report dealt with plant gene technology (TuV 3/1997 and 4 /1998).

In 2000, as part of a revision of the Rules of Procedure, the Committee was given permanent status. When a proposal to amend the Constitution was submitted to the Eduskunta for deliberation, the Committee requested that its status be put on a permanent footing and the Presidium included it in its proposal to amend the Constitution, although many officials and experts opposed the move. The Presidium's proposed new rules of procedure went to the Constitutional Law Committee, which opposed giving the Committee permanent status, with only 4 members in support. The final vote

was historic in that in the plenary session on 10.12.1999 the proposal to give the Committee permanent status won, despite the Constitutional Law Committee's opposition, by a vote of 96-73.

The Representatives who have chaired the Committee are Eero Paloheimo (Greens) 1993-1994, Martti Tiuri (National Coalition) 1996-1999 and 1999-2003, Jyrki Katainen (National Coalition) 2003-2007 and Marja Tiura (National Coalition) 2007-2011. The secretary of the Committee since its inception has been Dr. Paula Tiihonen.

The Committee's tasks have changed little

The task with which the Committee is charged has been clear and simple from the very beginning. It

- deals with parliamentary documents sent to it for deliberation and preparatory drafting, such as a submission on the Government's foresight report
- gives reports, when requested, to other Eduskunta committees on matters with a bearing on the future
- deliberates questions associated with factors affecting the course of the future and development models
- conducts studies relating to futures research, including the procedural questions involved
- acts as a parliamentary body that performs assessment work relating to technological development and the societal impacts of technology.

The Committee for the Future had made submissions on the following Government foresight reports:

- 1993 "Report on the long-term future"
- 1996 Report part I "Finland and the future of Europe"
- 1997 Report part II "Honest and courageous – a Finland of responsibility and competence"
- 2001 Report "A Finland of balanced development 2015"
- 2004 report on demographic development and making provision for a change in the age structure "A good society for people of all ages"
- 2009 Report on climate and energy policy "Towards a low-carbon Finland"

The debate on the Committee's status that arose in the context of revision of the Constitution and the Eduskunta's Rules of Procedure in 1999 clearly illustrated a number of fundamental problems associated with the Committee's work that still become the focus of discussion from time to time.

The arguments in favour of giving the Committee permanent status that were presented in the plenary session debate were mainly pragmatic and can be placed in the following categories:

1) With respect to the work that it does, the Committee for the Future can be compared to the Grand Committee as well as in part to the Foreign Affairs and Defence committees, which likewise deal with questions other than those associated with legislative and budgetary matters in their own sectors. 2) The long-term planning and deliberation of matters that the Committee for the Future does in the Eduskunta and specifically for the legislature are important. 3) The continuity that giving the Committee permanent status would ensure would also bring greater esteem for its work. 4) The international interest that the Committee has prompted and the positive reputation that it has brought are important. 5) Putting the Committee on a permanent footing is specifically a political

solution and staking out of policy. 6) Practical problems relating to resources and quorums would arise as long as the Committee's status remained different from that of the permanent committees. 7) Despite the opposition that the idea was encountering, giving the Committee permanent status was not, in the view of either experts or the Constitutional Law Committee, contrary to the Constitution.

Correspondingly, the arguments put forward by those who viewed the idea of permanent status in a negative light can be grouped into the following categories:

1) The role played by the Committee for the Future differs essentially from that of the other Eduskunta committees insofar as it does not have any legislation- or budget-related tasks. 2) Matters relating to the future are indeed important to the Eduskunta, but a committee is not the right kind of body for dealing with them. 3) How future-related tasks could best be dealt with in some other way should be studied and the role of the Committee for the Future assessed on this basis. 4) The esteem that a committee and its members enjoy does not depend on its formal status, but rather on its work and the results achieved.

Where should futures policy be formulated in the Eduskunta?

Accentuating long-term futures policy and creating a forum to deal with it within the Eduskunta led to the idea of renewing democracy from within taking shape in the parliament's own circles. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has described it as one of the outstanding political acts of the 21st century and an especially meritorious example of parliament-related innovations anywhere in the world (Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century – a guide to good practice. IPU Geneva 2006).

One of the most central arguments against the activities of the Committee for the Future has been that all committees must look to the future and deal with futures-related matters pertaining to their respective sectors.

Futures policy, which is counted as including also science, technology and innovations, is made in committees and plenary sessions.

This is a clear objective, but in fact growth in the workload of committees entrusted with legislative tasks (e.g. EU matters) means that very little time has been left for futures work.

However, what matters most when assessing the location of futures policy is the general division of labour within parliamentary democracy. As is the case everywhere in democracies, the division of labour within the political system means that the Government is a proactive political actor. What this means is that, taking the demands of the future into consideration, it makes proposals to the parliament, which in turn has the task of approving laws and the budget. The Government governs. The parliament can be active and a source of initiatives specifically in long-term futures policy and for this it needs an empowered and capable body that concentrates, with the aid of the methods of futures research, on these often difficult and complex matters. The Finnish solution of entrusting this task to a special committee has succeeded very well when evaluated internationally.

At a plenary session in 1999 Representative Kyösti Karjula presented a clear argument in favour of giving the Committee permanent status. He has been a member of every Committee for the Future since 1996 and considers its work especially important. His starting point was that what is involved in futures policy is the Eduskunta's prestige and Representatives' influence. As he put it:

“The Committee for the Future performs a service role in the Eduskunta. It is a body that can comprehensively concentrate on examining the future, on articulating, from the perspectives of both parliamentary work and the general development of society, the present-day societal pressures to which also the law-making committees must find better answers than heretofore. In my view, putting futures work on a permanent footing is a matter of how active a relationship the Eduskunta adopts to not only appraising future courses of development, but also to the Government and the public service. After all, what is very largely involved at the moment is that we, as a parliament, are content with what the Government enacts within its Programme for Government as well as that, very largely, also citizens express criticism, asking whether public servants direct the Eduskunta. In my view, our attaching sufficient importance to futures work and giving it enough room in the Eduskunta as a whole will also help us towards assuming the role that belongs to the Eduskunta. Namely, the Eduskunta must remain, true to its traditions, the most important forum for the social discourse”.

Representative Karjula has stressed on numerous occasions since then that, in addition to legislative and budgetary power, the Eduskunta also has power of vision. This form of power is nowadays more important than it was in the past and it is precisely what is involved in the Committee’s futures policy.

Do the themes of foresight reports and the Committee for the Future’s own reports encroach on the spheres of competence of other committees?

In the early years, when the Committee dealt only with foresight reports, the themes of which were broad – global – and the perspective from which they were examined was horizontal, there was no danger of overlapping. Where examination of technology is concerned, the possibility of overlapping is limited to information society matters, in which the Transport and Communications Committee, as the body corresponding to the eponymous ministry, plays an important role.

When the theme of the Government report in 1996 was “Finland and the future of Europe”, a dispute over the division of labour arose with the Grand Committee, which deals with EU matters, and the Foreign Affairs Committee. Likewise, when the theme of the most recent report in 2009 was “Climate change”, the Environment Committee, which deals with climate treaty-related matters in the Eduskunta, and the Commerce Committee, which deals with energy matters, found to some extent that the demarcation lines between committees had been blurred.

Nearly all of the themes chosen by the Committee for its own reports, with the exception of technology, have been of such a nature that there has always been one or several committees whose sphere of interest has been encroached on. During the last parliamentary term, when the Committee conducted an in-depth sounding of long-term problems of health care, it ventured into the field of tasks entrusted to the Social Affairs and Health Committee. The Russia scenarios outlined over the course of two parliamentary terms impinged on matters that belong very clearly to the purviews of the Foreign Affairs and Defence committees. Long-term examination, the choice of perspectives and the methods used have, however, been so distinguishing that no real problems have arisen.

Is the Committee for the Future’s existing operational model good?

The Committee for the Future, where 17 parliamentarians themselves stake out policy lines for the future, is unique in the world as an institution. It continually prompts major attention in the parliaments of other countries. Many parliaments have adapted our model to reorganise their

futures-related work. Organising a new activity like futures policy and making practical functions productive and efficient has not been easy anywhere. Getting representatives of different parties, often holding strongly divergent views as individuals, even to meet around the same table to discuss the problems and opportunities of the future – much less to formulate policies jointly – is a task that has proved virtually insurmountable in many countries.

Especially in the task of assessing technology, the parliamentary units belonging to the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment Network (EPTA) share a lot of features with the Committee for the Future. The linkage was strengthened especially after 1996, when the Eduskunta gave the Committee responsibility for arranging, in collaboration with other committees, assessment of the impacts that technological development has on society.

One of the key modes of work done by the Committee, which has been acting as a de facto permanent one since the beginning of 2000, has been to prepare the Eduskunta's response to the Government's foresight report and draft submissions to other committees in relation to other Government reports or on the budget. Another important task has been the production of foresight reports which, in addition to examining other societal issues, have always assessed the impacts on society of technological development.

An especially unique feature of the Committee has been that parliamentarians themselves have actively participated in outlining the opportunities that the future presents. In most other parliaments, foresight work or projects to appraise the effects of technology have been outsourced, i.e. commissioned from independent research establishments. The role of politicians has been to observe and approve. In some countries, a special parliamentary official has been appointed to examine the interests and status of future generations. The effectiveness of the functioning of the Finnish model, in which Representatives act as an official committee, is aptly illustrated by the fact that the Committee holds two meetings, generally lasting 1-2 hours, each week, in addition to which project-specific sections/steering groups meet often for longer deliberative sessions.

When it has worked well, the Committee's operational model has been almost an ideal way of creatively and critically combining scientific and technological information with a search for innovative new political solutions. The Committee has enjoyed fairly good success, because sufficiently different politicians with broad minds and an interest in the new have sought membership of it. What is very important is that the Committee contains, on the one hand, very experienced, inquisitive and bold politicians and, on the other, also ambitious "rising stars" with a thirst for knowledge. It is likewise important that they represent the Finns in all their diversity of education, from farmer to professor.

The second foundation stone for lasting success that can be pointed to is that the aim in the Committee's reports is to be thorough and scientifically critical rather than trying to please the public or voters with showily produced and light pamphlet-style publications. Lighter versions of reports have been needed for information purposes, but the serious and thorough way that science deals with phenomena has not been overlooked.

Compared with the units that deal with equivalent questions within the state administration, the Committee has operated with very scant resources. This has been especially evident in the current parliamentary term after funding by Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, ended and with the Eduskunta trying to reduce its outgoings. Despite this, the Committee has been fairly productive also in this term. In the course of the current year, 2010, which has been exceptional in that many

projects have reached conclusion, a total of about 900 pages of text has been published in the final reports of four projects.

Should the Committee's task be broadened to include handling of important and far-reaching legislative initiatives relating to science and technology?

The answer to the question depends yet again on what importance is attached to the Committee's original character of a high-level think-tank that is at the core of democracy and has an unlimited sphere of operation. If this is valued, it would be advisable not to add elements that would change the Committee's character and make it similar to the other, legislation-related committees. Very soon, a situation would arise in which the very foundation for the Committee's existence would become blurred.

On the other hand, there are at least two arguments for considering broadening the scope of the Committee's activities to include dealing with legislative initiatives that would have far-reaching effects. One is that of motivating parliamentarians who have a broad outlook and adopt critical thinking about scientific and technological matters to seek membership of the Committee. The other has to do with the special procedural methods that appraisal of legislative projects with far-reaching implications presupposes.

Although a scarcity of resources has impeded the Committee's work a lot, a dwindling of Representatives' interest has also become a serious threat to its future. That may happen for at least the following reasons:

- 1) Competent and ambitious parliamentarians want to exercise influence. They feel that they can not do so significantly through the Committee.
- 2) Politicians see the Committee's work as being lacking in quality and/or uninteresting where its contents are concerned. Representatives do not feel that they can learn anything of essential relevance by being members of the Committee.
- 3) Researchers and the media regard the Committee's work as lacking quality or uninteresting where its contents are concerned. They do not report what it does or else write disparaging articles. Politicians do not get the positive visibility that they want.

When the Eduskunta, by a vote of 96-73, granted the Committee permanent status in 1999, not one of the Representatives who spoke in the plenary session considered it an unnecessary body. The main reason for opposing the proposal to grant permanent status was that it differed too much from the other committees, because the Representatives on it did not participate in legislative work; in other words, their work on the Committee is not what they were elected to do. Many also predicted that Representatives would become frustrated with activities in the Committee owing to a lack of opportunities to influence decisions directly.

Of course, a basic fact that is often overlooked is that Representatives' real opportunities to influence legislative proposals that have been agreed within a majority Government are rather limited. The limits of power to change proposals are often clear – the Government governs and allows only technical corrections of obvious errors.

It has been suggested that the Committee could gain greater esteem if it dealt with, besides the Government's foresight reports, also some other matters with which considerable prestige is

associated in the Eduskunta. On the other hand, if the Committee becomes a submission machine subordinate to others, all of its prestige will have vanished. Nowadays all committees make submissions on the budget and the Government's annual report, and if some or other committee is interested in making submissions on legislative proposals, it can generally be arranged.

If the Committee's powers were to be broadened to take it into the sector of lawmaking, legislative projects relating to science and technology and with long-term and far-reaching implications would be suitable objects for its attention. It would be natural to lay the groundwork for deliberation of legislative initiatives by means of assessment projects supporting them. An example of this during the current parliamentary term was the Committee's project dealing with the future of the bio-sector (Voyages of exploration into bio-policy 2010) as part of the preparatory work for a foresight report on climate policy.

If the Committee for the Future were a legislative committee, it could have been the principle drafter of the Eduskunta's response or report in relation to the following legislative projects, for example:

- The new Universities Act, which entered into force at the beginning of 2010. It will regulate matters relating to the tasks, administration, funding and direction of universities far into the future as well as their research and teaching programmes, students and staff.
- Applications for licences to build nuclear power stations. The decisions made set the policies that will guide Finland's energy and climate policy for as long as 50 years into the future.
- Legislation on production of genetically modified plants. The theme of genetic modification was dealt with from a perspective of decades by the Committee in the 1990s with respect to plants and most recently broadly in the biopolicy report mentioned above.

Legislative projects with long-term and far-reaching implications, such as those mentioned above, which could be entrusted to the Committee in the same way as foresight reports are typically anticipated already when the Programme for Government is being drafted. Instead of a single law, some or other theme relating to, for example, the foresight report and the key legislation associated with it could be entrusted to the Committee for deliberation. If, for example, the theme of the foresight report in this parliamentary term had been the development of the information society, legislation suitable for deliberation by the Committee would have included the following:

- Legislation on regulation of information management in public administration as well as to amend certain sections of the Act on openness of official actions.
- A Government Bill concerning electronic auctions and a dynamic procurements system as well as certain associated items of legislation.
- A Government Bill concerning electronic processing of client data in the social welfare and health sector as well as to amend certain associated items of legislation.
- A Government Bill to amend legislation on electronic processing of client data in the social welfare and health sector, electronic prescriptions as well as the population data system and legislation on the Population Register Centre's verification system.

Besides motivation of Representatives, another key argument in favour of having the Committee deliberate legislative projects with long-term and far-reaching implications is that preparation for the remote future needs to be different from what is done with the near future in mind. What is essential above all is to be prepared for many possible futures. Good preparation can be promoted by means of futures research methods, of which the most important are scenario building. In committee deliberation, preparing for many futures means a questioning, critical and polemical discussion first with experts and then behind closed doors among the 17 committee members. Depth and momentum is added to these discussions throughout the process by means of seminars, workshops and open online discussions. The final outcome is a statement of position, often arrived at by consensus, but without the different views or futures paths in the background being overlooked or bypassed at any stage. Because there are many futures and no one can know which of them will come to pass, there is usually no point in taking a vote.

It is a fact that the division of tasks between the Eduskunta committees, which mirrors the division of labour between ministries, is very well established. It has been a long time since there has been any desire to interfere with it. The most recent survey in the Eduskunta in 2010 showed that there is no interest in interfering with the committees structure at least in the 2011-2015 parliamentary term.

Methods of futures research and familiarisation with them

The persons elected to the Committee for the Future should be given more thorough training and familiarisation with futures research methods and concepts than at present right at the beginning of the parliamentary term. For this purpose, the Turku Futures Centre should be involved more closely in the Committee's work. As part of the reform of the universities system carried through in 2010, futures research was upgraded to the status of an area of emphasis in Turku and the Futures Centre there was given responsibility for developing a national foresight system. Cooperation with an organisation that has been tasked with arranging teaching in scientific futures research is to be desired.

However, strengthening ties with the Turku Futures Centre will not automatically solve the problem of quality work. What is important is, on the one hand, to ensure that the Committee members have a good basic competence in the methods of futures research and, on the other, that broadly based expertise is valued and reflected in the Committee's practical work. Futures researchers take the view that the most sensible way to examine development more than 15 years ahead is in the form of alternative scenarios and/or a futures map. Some economists share this view. What is involved is not indecisiveness, but rather being prepared for many possible futures.

A Minister for the Future

The idea of creating the cabinet post of Minister of Science and Technology has been mooted in several discussions. As long ago as 1994 the Eduskunta approved a resolution calling on the Government to look into this possibility. On 3 March 2011 another initiative calling for the appointment of a Science and Innovation Minister was made by the scientific community (Professor Vihko et al). This cabinet member could be in these matters the Committee for the Future's corresponding minister in the Government. In futures policy, science and technology are only one factor, and therefore the existing practice, in which the counterpart cabinet member is the Prime Minister, is the only right one.

Is the future of democracy one starting point?

Right from the beginning, the future of democracy has always been an important theme or at least mode of approach in the work of the Committee. It has been studied as an international theme and as a Finnish one. A variety of new democracy experiments have been arranged. All in all, democracy has been, as it were, a permeating theme in every project.

The view that the way the democracy theme is addressed should be more profound and systematic has gained ground within the Committee. But how can this be done?

The futures researcher Mika Mannermaa proposed several new democracy-related tasks for the Committee in the report “Democracy in the turmoil of the future” (2006). The most important relate to direct democracy and the broad public discourse. His proposals are:

- The Committee for the Future will launch the practice of using “futures juries” in Finnish society. These are well-prepared public civic discourses on the key societal questions relating to the future. It is important that the participants in them are not just the elites in society; instead, the aim should be to bring about discussion between grassroots-level civil society, experts as well as political and economic decision makers.
- The Committee will work proactively to ensure that drafting futures reports that are of a high standard and independent is adopted as the practice that is always followed in Finland before decisions that have broad and far-reaching implications are carried through. Futures reports can be commissioned from various instances and the Eduskunta will be expected to adopt a stance on them on the basis of the preparatory work done by the Committee. A stance means something more than just a general discussion, for example initiation of law drafting.
- A “living conditions in the Finland of the future” body should be created. This would operate virtually as much as possible and would have the right and obligation to act on behalf of future generations by speaking for them in society, and if necessary also taking legal action in the name of people not yet born.
- The Committee will launch a project with the objective of studying means of preventing a widening of the intergenerational gap and strengthening the development of multigenerational democracy.
- The Committee will play a proactive role in the practical launching of virtual conferences that are open to all citizens. One of the first could feature key questions to be dealt with by the Government and ministries. Virtual conferences could also be held on, e.g., municipal themes (“electronic town meetings”).
- A thorough and fresh-minded study of possibilities of implementing flexible voting cycles, constant voting, intelligent voting and other democracy-enhancing models as well as of trials in local-government and parliamentary elections will be launched.
- The Committee will be active in presenting initiatives so that, for example at the Government Institute for Economic Research, modern futures research and econometrics models, with the aid of which the impacts of long-range policy programmes can be systematically evaluated, are developed. This will give citizens the opportunity to make genuine choices between different policies when they vote in elections.

- The Government Institute for Economic Research could also develop virtual expert systems, with the aid of which the consequences of planned political decisions relative to the desired objectives could be assessed; in other words, the consistency of decision making.
- The Committee will be a source of initiatives in creating a system for examining weak signals to help decision makers. It should be implemented as an open system so that also ordinary citizens can highlight signals. A well-prepared open futures forum, where weak signals that have been detected can be evaluated, conclusions drawn and follow-up measures initiated, can be arranged on a regular annual basis.
- The Committee will begin preparatory work with the long-term objective of formulating a model for the gradual development of global democracy. Finnish political actors can promote the realisation of global democracy within the European Union and UN frameworks. Although the idea may seem unrealistic at present, there will almost certainly have to be some kind of global democracy in a century or so from now if only to save our planet's ecosystems.

These are all good proposals, but they demand a bigger organisation and greater resources. Before these can become available, of course, the Eduskunta will have to formulate its policy with respect to new democracy. In Denmark, broadly-based panels for consulting citizens have been used for decades to appraise the significance and future of technology. Coordination of this has been entrusted to Tekniska Rådet, which is a large research institution. The themes have been limited to technology.

It is obvious that the need to revitalise democracy will grow to the extent that also the Eduskunta will have to demonstrate initiative and play a pioneering role in this matter.