The EU as a world leader in foresight for better policymaking

The unpredictability of future challenges requires a more systematic use of strategic foresight and long-term thinking in agenda-setting, policymaking, investments, budgetary allocation, and impact assessment across all policy areas to build a future-fit Europe.

With an Executive Vice President for Future Generations, the EU institutions could build on the innovation and progress made in strategic foresight over the 2019-2024 Commission term. This role could support further integrating and embedding intergenerational thinking in the policy cycle towards a positive future in line with EU values and goals.

The task ahead

The European Commission has declared foresight a strategic priority since 2019, and it has been integrated explicitly in the Better Regulations Guidelines and toolbox since 2021. These developments are important foundations, but more is needed: the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) analysis on foresight shows that despite important progress, clarity and consistency are still missing. This is particularly vital given the geopolitical and sustainability challenges facing the next Commission.

Decisions made today will shape the lives of people in Europe for decades. The next Commission will need to deliver the goals of the European Green Deal against a backdrop of complex challenges and polycrisis. Success will depend on its ability to balance long-term planning with short-term action, and for this, leadership is needed.

One of the main missions of the Executive Vice President for Future Generations would be to mainstream the use of existing strategic foresight and methodologies into the policy cycle so that it feeds into the annual work plan and budget to deliver better long-term decision-making.

What does this look like in practice?

How can the Commission build on the important work of Executive Vice President Šefčovič , the Joint Research Center, and the Secretary General's team in the next cycle?

The next step of embedding foresight should work towards completeness of integration in the policy cycle. This would require ex-ante, ex-durante, and ex-post integration and would entail a focus on: Impact Assessments (ex-ante); the EU Semester, planning the annual work programme, cross-DG coordination (ex durante); and monitoring & evaluation (ex-post).

Ex-Ante

Foresight in impact assessments:

The recent EPRS analysis finds that while the Better Regulations Guidelines, and Tool #20 calls for "a more systematic use of foresight", there is a lack of clarity about what that should entail. In the impact assessments' process, foresight is generally used at the problem definition stage and almost exclusively for policies related to climate, environment and energy. The next step to progress on foresight in the ex-ante stage of the policy cycle is consistency across policy areas and clear guidelines and instructions for good practice. This would include:

- **Clear operational guidance for good practice** in the Better Regulation Toolbox on selecting the appropriate foresight method in each section of impact assessments. For example, using megatrends can assist with defining the problem and with assessing policy options by understanding the impacts that can come from the interaction of policy options with mega-

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trends. Alternatively, using scenarios may help developing policy options. This recommendation would also align with the mandate of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board to ensure consistency in the policy cycle and to scrutinize the quality of the foresight analysis and its integration in impact assessments.

- **Use of foresight across all policy areas, consistently**. In line with the proportionality principle, the depth of analysis can vary depending on the type of file, the complexity, or political sensitivity of it. However, the introduction of a minimum standard would ensure that thinking ahead improves in all policy areas, consistently.

Ex-Durante

Foresight in the EU Semester:

Foresight could be integrated into the EU Semester process to ensure a mid- to longer-term perspective is taken in the context of economic development and stability within each Member State through the following innovations:

1. Use the Annual Strategic Foresight Report to reflect on whether Member States are investing enough in their preparedness for future challenges.
2. Use **mega-trends to report in the Country Specific Recommendations** whether Member States' investments relate to the megatrends we see.

Foresight in the Annual Work Programme:

Foresight could be **integrated into the annual exercise of operationalising the annual work programme**. After the annual work programme is announced, each unit responsible for leading a new initiative would first undertake an exercise to reflect on how long-term developments (foresight report, or megatrends) impact on the pieces of their work programme that year. This could make use of the JRC policy lab or foresight lab process and EU Foresight Network by facilitating or supporting this process.

Foresight in cross-DG Coordination:

While an EU foresight network was kick-started by EVP Sefcovic, to bring this to the next stage of integration, **at least one contact should be appointed within each DG to be the focal point for foresight. This focal point would** ensure foresight is well-integrated, would support capacity-building within their DG, and ensure efficient coordination across the multiple policy domains. The existing foresight network could then offer the infrastructure for coordinating on foresight, ensuring capacity, consistency, and strengthening the use of foresight.

Ex-Post

Monitoring & Evaluation

Using foresight in monitoring and evaluation can help understand the impact of a policy's outcomes on other trends or policy areas. **Connecting indicators and monitoring frameworks** with evaluation of the extended future trajectory of the policy's implementation outcome can help understand unintended consequences and think upstream. Lessons learned through this exercise could encourage ownership of past decisions and improve anticipatory capacities for better policy making in future decisions.

This working paper is one in a series outlining the portfolio of an Executive Vice President for Future Generations.

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