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Parliament of Finland Brochure | The Committee for the Future

The Committee for the Future

The Committee for the Future is unique in the world. It is one of the Parliament of Finland's 15 standing committees. The Committee has 17 members who are all members of Parliament and represent different political parties.

What makes the Committee different is the nature of its functions and its new fields of tasks. Its task is to conduct an active and initiative-generating dialogue with the Government on major future problems and means of solving them. Since the problems of the future and above all its opportunities cannot be studied through traditional parliamentary procedures and work methods alone, the Committee has been given the specific task of also following and using the results of futures research. Indeed, the Committee can be said to be making policy on the future, because its goal is not research, but rather policy.

History

The idea of conducting policy work on the future in Parliament came from the floor. In 1992 a large majority of MPs approved an initiative that called for the Government to submit a report to Parliament on Finland's long-term development options. In 1993 Parliament established a temporary Committee for the Future to prepare responses to the policies outlined in the Government's report.

On the basis of the committee's work, Parliament decided that the Government should submit a Report on the Future at least once during each electoral period. This decision

created a new type of political dialogue between the Government and Parliament concerning key issues for Finland's future.

The Committee for the Future had temporary status up to 2000. In connection with Finland's constitutional reform, Parliament decided to make the Committee for the Future a permanent committee.

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

The Committee for the Future prepares Parliament's response to the Government's Report on the Future during each electoral period. Key themes in the Government's report for the 2003–2007 electoral period, "*A Good Society for People of All Ages*", are demographic trends, population policy and preparation for changes in the age structure.

The Committee has made active use of its power of initiative also in defining its own work. After every election, the agenda of each new committee takes shape in the minds of the 17 parliamentarians elected onto it.

The current Committee, which was formed after the elections in March 2003, has started with five special issues:

1. The Future of the Finnish Information Society
2. The Future of Public Health Care
3. Human Security as an Extensive Long-term Phenomenon
4. Regional Innovation Systems
5. Social Capital in View of Future Risks for Children and Young People

Assessing the social impact of technological development

One task of the Committee is to assess the social impact of technological development. The Committee commissions studies from research institutes to support its work. Technology assessment in this context means analysing the impact of applying science and technology on society. Starting point is Parliament's questions and information needs.

"It is the duty of parliament to observe the changing world, analyse it, and take a view in good time on how Finnish society and its political actors should respond to the challenges of the future. Democracy cannot be realised simply by accepting changes that have already taken place."

Importance of international cooperation

The Committee arranges visits to other parts of the world to find out about the latest social and technological innovations. It is increasingly asked to tell about its work and attracts special interest from foreign delegations visiting Finland. The Committee also participates in many international conferences and congresses.

The Committee for the Future publishes various papers as well as reports on technology assessment projects and conferences. See www.parliament.fi/FutureCommittee.

Additional information

MAILING ADDRESS: Committee for the Future,
FI-00102 Eduskunta

STREET ADDRESS: Eduskuntakatu 4 D, 00100 Helsinki

E-MAIL: tuv@parliament.fi

FAX: +358 9 432 2140

Committee Counsel **Paula Tiihonen**

Doctor of Administrative Sciences

TEL. +358 9 432 2084

E-MAIL: paula.tiihonen@parliament.fi

Researcher **Ulrica Gabrielsson**

TEL +358 9 432 2183

E-MAIL: ulrica.gabrielsson@parliament.fi

Assistant **Minna Kostiainen**

TEL. +358 9 432 2091

E-MAIL: minna.kostiainen@parliament.fi

Expert of Technology assessment **Osmo Kuusi**

Doctor of Philosophy

Government Institute for Economic Research, VATT

TEL. +358 50 372 0829

E-MAIL: osmo.kuusi@vatt.fi