



## Scenarios on the spatial and economic development of Europe

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### ABSTRACT

Countless autonomous, self-reinforcing and countervailing forces impact the future competitiveness of Europe and its spatial structure. Poignant examples include globalization, ageing and climate change, but also policy decisions taken by nation-states or the European Union. Scenarios are an appropriate method by which to explore possible future developmental pathways in a dynamic context. This contribution describes and discusses four economic policy scenarios produced by the ESPON 3.2 project and link these to the Lisbon Strategy and the European Social Model. In each scenario, a policy package is assembled from existing EU policy areas according to a particular ideological context. Afterwards, its territorial consequences are discussed in terms of socioeconomic disparities, migration and the environment. In so doing, some observations will be made regarding possible spin-offs, trade-offs and side effects of European policy when placed in a spatial context. These scenarios should hold interest for policy discussions on territorial cohesion, a concept which seeks to integrate economic development and spatial planning, as well as on European competitiveness and cohesion.

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### 1. Introduction

By mid-decade of the new millennium, the project of European integration found itself at a historical juncture. The most extensive and daring enlargement had just been carried out, delivering a final and crushing blow to the cold-war division which had plagued the Continent for the second half of the twentieth century, and bringing in a rich variety of new cultures, languages and territories under the umbrella of the European Union (EU). At the same time, Europe was deciding whether to codify its long cooperation by means of a constitution, signalling not only a major milestone in peaceful integration but also an acknowledgement that the European Union had become much more than a free-trade agreement. The evolving European self-consciousness is epitomized in the Lisbon Strategy: the ambition to develop the EU into the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy. It is also epitomized by the commitment to a convergence of values commonly referred to as the European Social Model which eschews the propagation of pure market forces in favour of ideals of social justice and sustainability.

At the same time, Europe was faced with formidable structural challenges. With the 2004 enlargement, the EU had also inherited the largest levels of territorial inequality in its history, threatening solidarity, and with it, the European Social Model. Meanwhile, the Lisbon Strategy was being challenged by disappointing interim results. These great historical developments and the fundamental policy dilemmas they produced cast great uncertainty on the future of Europe. Because of this, no simple line can be extrapolated to predict the future social, economic or territorial development of the European Union. Instead, one must work with scenarios that allow for different developmental pathways to be identified on the basis

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of policy preferences. This contribution discusses the results of the thematic economy scenarios drawn up in the framework of the ESPON 3.2 project (see editor's introduction). Two of the four economy scenarios will be elaborated to illustrate the dilemmas surrounding the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and two to illustrate the dilemmas of solidarity and integration in the wake of European enlargement.

## 2. Scenario method and logic

The thematic scenarios for the economy were created for the 2005–2030 period using mainly qualitative methods (literature review and expert opinion). The first step for looking 25 years into the future was to examine the trends and driving forces of the previous 25 years of European economic development. This analysis, called the 'scenario base' in the ESPON 3.2 study, provided perspective on how much change was possible during the scenario period as well as some indication of the most important variables driving the economy and the relative importance of government policy, particularly at the EU level [1, pp. 77–114].<sup>1</sup>

The scenarios produced were of the *prospective policy type*, meaning that the independent variable is EU policy. For this reason, attention is focussed on the decision to adopt a particular kind of policy strategy, the various measures implemented to this end, and, finally, the impacts these measures may have on social and economic cohesion and spatial development. Because the intent is to examine the effects of different policy directions, as many ancillary variables will be held as constant as possible. All scenarios assume, for example, that globalization, that is the ongoing intertwining of international networks and economic relationships, will continue to increase. In addition, the rise of the knowledge, information or creative-class economy is assumed to continue in each scenario, as well as technological advances in health, transport, energy, communications and the like. Finally, structural challenges such as climate change or population ageing are held constant, although policy decisions can have a bearing on the effects these challenges will have. The policy variables are predominantly set at the European level and include the common agricultural policy (CAP) as well as regional, competition, research and development (R&D) and environmental policy. In each scenario a policy package is assembled towards a particular end.

The logic of the scenario selection is linked to policy orientation on the one hand, and the intensity of policy application on the other, creating four distinct possible futures. The vertical axis comprises the degree to which the EU strives to enhance its 'competitiveness' as understood in EU policy documents and political statements such as the Lisbon Strategy. The horizontal axis comprises the degree to which the EU strives to achieve equity or cohesion within Europe. These four scenarios are illustrated in the diagram below.



The presentation of the scenarios takes place in two parts. First, the high competitiveness-oriented scenarios (Best Foot and EuroTigers) are discussed against the backdrop of the Lisbon Strategy. Each scenario is elaborated by discussing the political context, the policy strategy and implementation and finally the potential effects on the economic and spatial structure. Second, the remaining two scenarios will be discussed with respect to enlargement and solidarity. Like the first two, after sketching out the situation at the beginning of the scenario period, each scenario will be treated by first providing the political context, policy strategy, implementation and potential effects.

## 3. The Lisbon imperative in 'Best Foot' and 'EuroTigers'

Because the timeframe of all the scenarios is 2005–2030, one must take a small step back into the recent past to arrive at the starting point. At that time, the uproar surrounding the budgetary woes, the non-ratification of the European Constitution and the potential accession of Turkey had claimed most media attention, but according to internal EU politics

<sup>1</sup> Since a large portion of this article refers to the same ESPON study, no further references will be made to it.

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