

## ***Virtual Regional Foresight Centre***

### **Sustainability plan**

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## Executive Summary

The document provides a concise sustainability plan for the Virtual Regional Foresight Centre. Foresight is understood as **a systematic, participatory, future-intelligence-gathering, and medium-to-long-term vision-building process aimed at present-day decisions and mobilising joint actions.**

The ViReFor (Virtual Regional Foresight Centre)'s mission is to serve as a knowledge and competence hub providing *adequate tools, resources and a process that will be applicable regularly in the future to enable SEE regional stakeholders to anticipate trends and developments, to join forces with their neighbours to compete in the global environment, to bridge the local/regional industry and academia and to make better use of scientific resources while responding to strategic national/regional needs.*

The ViReFor sees itself as a **regional change agent** that promotes the culture of foresight in different communities – e.g. start-up communities, R&D commercialisation communities, social entrepreneurs, cultural and preservation of historical heritage communities, digital content and many others – aiming at the long-term embedding of foresight into the culture of thinking, decision- and policy-making in SEE.

The ViReFor is put in the context through analysis of the foresight implementations in the SEE region as well as the policy-making structures available in the region.

A simple sequencing of institutionalisation is provided: pre-institutionalisation (capacity building, outreach and awareness raising, foresight culture support), soft-institutionalisation (where a few foresight-related projects are implemented) and hard-institutionalisation (in mid to long term). The time-line provided is put in the context of the timeline of the strategy roadmap. Concrete partnerships have been recommended with other regional networks or innovation stakeholders.

## **1 Introduction**

This document provides a plausible scenario for sequencing of institutionalisation of regional foresight know-how generated through the implementation of the FORSEE project in Southeast Europe.

It starts with a brief discussion of the role of foresight methodology in the region so far in the context of ICT and overall national innovation systems and the existing regional policy-making or policy-influencing stakeholders, continues with a value proposition, vision and mission for a proposed Virtual Regional Foresight Centre.

The document explores potential capacity-building projects and services to be provided, and outlines a concrete timeline. Partnerships with regional networks are strongly recommended that would secure the long-term persistence of the ViReFor and increase the sustainability of the institutionalisation.

## 2 Status quo of foresight in national innovation systems in South East European countries

### 2.1 Overview of the foresight and forward-looking exercises in SEE

Foresight and forward-looking exercises in Southeast Europe have been implemented with various intensity, thematic focus, methodology and participation in different countries. Some countries as Austria, Greece and Hungary are among the early adopters of foresight in 90s, Romania started in 2001, Bulgaria in 2002 and others followed shortly, mainly through framework programmes projects. Although there are instances of foresight implementations that covered several SEE countries (i.e. Future Food 6 project covered Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech republic, Hungary and Slovakia aiming at healthy and safe food for the future; EnVision 2020 project covering cities in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania and Slovenia from SEE and Germany and Italy from other EU countries and of course all pan-European foresights) and usually there are policy-makers in the foresights and forward-looking exercises in SEE the FORSEE project was not able to identify **a truly regional project** in terms of participation at all levels (driving partners, experts, wide consultation workshops) and **targeting regional policy making**. The closest proxy identified is the FRAME project<sup>1</sup> by the European Training Foundation (ETF), which tries to identify the skills for the future in the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey). The FRAME, not surprisingly follows also the Southeast Europe 2020 strategy.

Yet, the growing number of implementations in virtually all countries in SEE is an important prerequisite for **higher awareness** of the method among the experts and policy-makers, **acceptability** of the foresight process results as valid and reliable and **higher propensity** to engage in other foresights. So, FORSEE project appears in a good timing in the SEE region, where there is an initial momentum of implementations and responds to an unmet need for regional foresight aimed at improving policy making in an area of a rising common interest (digital content).

In particular countries and regions (sub-national) foresight exercises have been instrumental in modeling the regional innovation systems (i.e. Vojvodina in Serbia and several regions in Greece) and have been acknowledged by the international foresight community as best cases in formulating national policies (i.e. knowledge society in Romania, development priorities in Slovenia and probably the ultimate champion being the National Technology Foresight Programme in Hungary). However, FORSEE project did not find institutionalized foresight as an overall (not sectoral/thematic) method for informing and policy making in the national innovation systems.

Lately, most of the countries in SEE region went through the process of formulation of smart specialization strategies, which in principle should have been participatory and visionary exercises, based on sound SWOT, PESTLE and micro-trends analyses. Although the European Commission did not specifically recommend running foresight projects in order to prepare the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Frame\\_Project\\_EN](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Frame_Project_EN)

smart specialization strategies it looks quite closely as such. However, looking at the processes behind smart specialization strategies none of them implemented foresight. Only Austria and Greece, when preparing the regional innovation strategies have implemented foresight and forward-looking participative methodologies.

FORSEE project studied instances of ICT related foresight projects on sub-national, national and supra-national level in SEE related to the national innovation systems with the aim to highlight best cases, which could be used later as promotional examples to convince policy makers in the effectiveness of the foresight approach and to borrow specific ideas to be implemented in the regional foresight.

FORSEE identified 14 best cases from around SEE and the period between 1996 and 2009. Most of them (8) were national, 5 were sub-national and only one was regional (supra-national) but actually pan-European, with no SEE regional focus. Foresights tend to be very techno-economic (which is normal because of the ICT focus). In addition, there are instances of foresight implementations in the SEE region countries (i.e. Bulgaria, Hungary and Austria), which are focused on wider citizen participation (i.e. Civisti).

Most widely used methods are Delphi (11), Literature review (10), Expert panels (9), Future workshops/scenarios (7) and others. Altogether 22 instruments have been identified in the best practices. This provides a relatively good exposure to different foresight methods, by the stakeholders engaged in the foresight implementations.

CORDIS database provides information for 155 foresight projects (simple search for the term *foresight*) funded within FP5, 6 and 7. UK is the leader with 27 projects, Germany 21, Spain 18, Belgium and France – 15, Italy 10 and Austria – 8. Other countries in the SEE region include Greece with 5 and Bulgaria with 4. It is quite hard to exhaustively find all forward-looking participatory projects funded by the EC through FP.

To a large extent the conclusions from [5] are still valid a decade later, with the only exception that foresight is much more popular now than back then - in the beginning of 00s. Yet, there might be a drawback of the situation – the community of experts, which already experienced different models of foresight implementation in SEE might have developed the feeling that foresight results are only remotely connected to the policy making.

## **2.2 Overview of the South East European networks and stakeholders for regional policy making**

There are various political initiatives that target sustainable development of the Southeast Europe, such as Stability Pact, Southeast European Cooperation Initiative and the Stabilisation and Association Process. All of these initiatives at different points of time between 1990 and 2014 had significant impact on policy making of some or most of the SEE countries. As of 2014 the major region-led initiative, a successor of the Stability Pact is the South East European Cooperation Process, launched on Bulgaria's initiative in 1996. A decade later, in 2008 the Regional Cooperation Council was established as a more permanent and institutionalised



entity to support the SEECF and provide a regional perspective in donor assistance – notably the EU’s Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programme and support increase involvement of civil society in regional activities.

The RCC still functions more on project and coordination level than on policy-making level, but this has always been true for the region – it is rather **a recipient** and **a beneficiary** of policy making made outside the region than **a designer and creator of policies** for the region. There are other similarly institutionalised international organisations such as the Regional Programme on Cultural Heritage in Southeast Europe (at the Council of Europe), Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) and Association of Non-Governmental Organisations of Southeast Europe (CIVIS). Even more so, this applies for other networks in the region with policy-making goals and ambitious – such as the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of Southeast Europe (NALAS)<sup>2</sup>, the Eastern European and Central Asian Business Incubators and Technology Parks Network (ECAbit)<sup>3</sup>, the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI)<sup>4</sup> and others. Private sector organisations understand that they would have higher leverage in their own countries if they associate on regional level and cooperate for joint pressure for adoption of policies supporting local economic development, innovation and entrepreneurship or transparency and good governance. These three and other regional networks could effectively partner with the RCC for effective formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nalas.eu/members.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [www.ecabit.org](http://www.ecabit.org)

<sup>4</sup> [www.seldi.net](http://www.seldi.net)

### 3 Institutionalisation of the *Virtual Regional Foresight Centre* (ViReFor)

The ViReFor would have a Steering Committee consisting of prominent foresight experts well-appreciated by the European Commission (through funded foresight projects) and civil society organisations that have promoted the foresight in SEE region or in particular countries in it. The initial composition of the Steering Committee will be based on the FORSEE experience and experts (project partners and regional experts) but gradually transitioned to the Secretariat of the Regional Cooperation Council in Sarajevo. The exact timing is to be jointly determined by the initial Steering Committee and the RCC, subject to non-objection by the RCC members. As ViReFor would generally rely on continuous interaction with the civil society organisations and citizens, it generally fits into the priority line of action of RCC in that it is targeting a higher involvement of civil society in implementing the RCC goals and objectives. Introduction of foresight and its institutionalisation could best be viewed as an instrument that strengthens civil society involvement and impact to the RCC.

#### 3.1 Value proposition (including vision and mission)

South East Europe has generated and impacted the European culture and economy for thousands of years. Different geographies, states, and leaders have played their premier roles in different times and there are plenty of reasons for glorification of the past but also for taking the historic responsibility of wrongdoings to the neighbours' predecessors and heritage. Although the region does not share the same view about the common history it shares the food, music and entertainment of the present and might build a common future. The FORSEE generated common vision "*Smart coalitions*" of the region includes an **open and socially innovative** nexus of governments, businesses and civil society groups in SEE with an **integrated SEE regional identity** through **geographic, historic, cultural and touristic content, collaborative research and innovation and joint ventures**. This vision presumes the **building and sustaining conditions to consolidate and exploits the benefits of smart specialisation strategies** developed or to be developed in SEE. Immanent characteristic of the vision is **coherence** (vs. fragmentation) between different countries and layers of governance.

Smart specialisation strategies emerged as replacements of the regional innovation strategies (RIS), which had some drawbacks – mainly related to the process of their development. RIS, especially in SEE were not effectively embedded into the policy-making life cycle and did not successfully translate the local needs into regional priorities and national measures. Practically, no RIS took into account cross-border issues and there is still very limited cross-border regional innovation planning (the only exception being the nexus around the border of Serbia, Romania and Hungary). Due to various geographic, infrastructure, economic, ethnic and other issues specific regions of one or more countries have their prospects of development tight to the foreign and not to the home country. Hence, demand- and locally driven smart specialisation strategies (as opposed to national and centralised strategies) need significantly stronger cross-

border consolidation and cross-national policy coordination. Although not explicitly mentioned in the “*smart coalitions*” future image, it is a shared concept between all stakeholders who participated in FORSEE’s process, that there would be a **coherent regional policy making**. It might happen at different layers (parliamentary, ministries of culture, ministries of tourism/economy, ministries of science and education, municipalities in a cross-border region, business associations from a specific sector, etc.), but definitely it should be **long-term** (or at least longer than today’s horizon of planning of most of stakeholders), **open/participative** and **binding** (most of the current regional policy making is just wishful thinking and intentional).

The ViReFor (Virtual Regional Foresight Centre)’s mission is to **serve as a knowledge and competence hub** providing ***adequate tools, resources and a process that will be applicable regularly in the future to enable SEE regional stakeholders to anticipate trends and developments, to join forces with their neighbours to compete in the global environment, to bridge the local/regional industry and academia and to make better use of scientific resources while responding to strategic national/regional needs.***

ViReFor sees itself as a **regional change agent** that promotes the culture of foresight in different communities (start-up communities, R&D commercialisation communities, social entrepreneurs, cultural and preservation of historical heritage communities, digital content and many others) aiming at the long-term embedding of foresight into the culture of thinking, decision- and policy-making in SEE.

In the context of the ViReFor, foresight is understood as **a systematic, participatory, future-intelligence-gathering, and medium-to-long-term vision-building process aimed at present-day decisions and mobilising joint actions**. The ViReFor builds on the successful pilot implementation of FORSEE’s Regional Foresight Methodology [1], the tacit knowledge of the foresight experts involved in FORSEE project, the readiness to embrace foresight by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) – at least regarding culture and society issues and particularly in the area of cultural heritage –, and the willingness to cooperate expressed by regional stakeholders during the project implementation and the new ones contacted during the preparation of the sustainability plan.

The ViReFor’s value proposition lies in providing **a tested regional foresight methodology, a pool of experts** in foresight with experience in implementing foresight in several countries in SEE and European Union, and in **an initial momentum of regional interest in foresight**. Metaphorically speaking, the ViReFor’s vision of itself would be the **modern Delphi Oracle** of the Ancient Greece, but way more **transparent, accountable, and trustworthy**.

The resources needed for the institutionalisation of the ViReFor could be viewed as the **transaction costs** of improving the tool-set for policy-making at the RCC. If the RCC has a **positive attitude** towards foresight, is ready **to experiment** and the pilot proves to be **effective and supportive** towards overall RCC goals and objectives, then it would be already a soft institutionalisation. The **soft institutionalisation** here is understood as a consensual readiness of repeated usage of the foresight in different settings by the nexus of partners or by the leading institution that leads to regular instances of its implementation through various means (institutional, project or in-kind funding). The **hard institutionalisation** would be implementing

a formal decision by the RCC (and/or other stakeholders) stipulating the situations when foresight is needed and will be implemented, and how it will be conducted and resourced. In many cases soft institutionalisation works fine without any legal action and there are plenty of cases where even laws and strategies adopted by the parliament are not implemented for years (or ever). For the purposes of the sustainability plan the aim is soft institutionalisation, which gradually might evolve in harder form, when the effectiveness is proven and stakeholders find it necessary to do so.

So, the major resources needed to kick-off the institutionalisation would be to achieve the following milestones:

- The RCC or important internal stakeholders like the foresight methodology and are ready to experiment. Based on interviews with RCC representatives it is considered done.
- Capacity building targeting the RCC and major constituencies, which will allow RCC representatives to understand the complexity of regional foresight methodology, the estimated costs of running a regional foresight provided different constraints and expected outcomes, limitations of the instrument and confidence in foresight project planning. Based on expert estimates it is considered that the cost would be between 40 and 100,000 euro. The range depends on how wide the regional constituents are involved in the capacity building.
- Planning of a pilot foresight implementation, which will convince the RCC and other stakeholders that it is worth doing it. This could vary from about 50,000 euro (small scale, not actual foresight but foresight related project aimed at reviewing and assessing the RCC activities and work program until 2020 against selected foresight visions developed by well acknowledged EU teams and institutions) to 1,000,000 euro – a one to two year SEE wide small scale foresight on a particular theme or thematic re-consideration for RCC activities.

The ViReFor would not replace the wider foresight hubs (i.e. IPTS at EU-level and globally at UNIDO) and hence should look for ways to add value without duplicating the efforts of serving as a knowledge hub. UNIDO runs several regional virtual initiatives targeting at bringing a more technology-oriented focus to the relevant national and regional knowledge-based institutions. The Eurasian Virtual Centre (EVC) is run in partnership with Hungary and Czech Republic and runs a regular training program in technology foresight. The geographical scope of EVC is a bit different from SEE, covering CEE and NIS (new independent states). Present (2014) member countries of EVC are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine. Since UNIDO is based in Vienna, Austria is also covered, but important SEE countries like Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovia, Montenegro, Kosovo and even Bulgaria (although UNIDO partners with ARC Fund from Bulgaria) are missing from the institutional setting. Another difference between the proposed ViReFor and EVC is the focus (all kinds of foresights in the ViReFor vs *technology foresight* in the case of the EVC) and thematic orientation (more foreign policy, cultural and historical issues in the ViReFor compared with more

industrial/sectoral approaches in UNIDO).

IPTS is a JRC at the European Commission with the foresight and prospective studies being in the centre of the mandate of the institute. Although almost everything on its web-site is of ultimate importance to the foresight, there is a special sub-section at the JRC foresight website<sup>5</sup> that serves as a one-stop entry-point for newcomers to the field who wish to gain an overview of who is doing what in the field, or what the knowledge and best practices generated are (cf. Forlearn<sup>6</sup>).

### **3.2 Foresight as a tool for policy making/planning and review at the RCC**

The Regional Cooperation Council, established in 2008 in Sofia, Bulgaria, with a permanent secretariat based in Sarajevo, Bosna i Hercegovina, as the successor of the Stability Pact within the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) is a focal point for guiding, monitoring and supporting cooperation in SEE. The RCC is an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led framework, which works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards cooperation, with a view to enabling the implementation of programmes of regional character aimed at economic and social development to the benefit of the people in SEE. The horizon of planning is set to 3 years within the broader context of South East Europe 2020 Strategy. The RCC is currently (2014) in midst of the initial major time-frame of planning (2008-2020) and still has the same priority areas of activities:

- Economic and Social Development
- Energy and Infrastructure
- Justice and Home Affairs
- Security Cooperation
- Building Human Capital
- Parliamentary cooperation
- Media development
- Gender mainstreaming
- Involvement of civil society

So far foresight has not been used at the RCC level, neither by the respective ministries of foreign affairs. This could be easily explained by the fact that foreign policy traditionally is very much closed to the public (both at the stage of definition and implementation) from one side, and, from another, the RCC was seen initially as an operative arm of the larger SEEC political process, which had more short-term challenges to resolve than long-term visions to develop and follow. The six years of operation of the RCC though are enough to prove that the initial short-term challenges might have been already resolved and the next six years until 2020 could be more long-term oriented (beyond 2020 horizon) and allow more visionary and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://foresight.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

<sup>6</sup> <http://forlearn.jrc.ec.europa.eu/index.htm>



ambitious undertakings. Although certain non-EU countries from SEE have prospects to become closer to EU membership to 2020, it is unlikely that all or even most of them will succeed in that process, hence the RCC would remain an important regional policy framework at least another dozen or more years. Hence is the window of opportunity for foresight practitioners to contribute to strengthening the relative positioning of the RCC in SEE. Strengthening might be achieved through **better or more adequate anticipating of trends and developments** that affect SEE, **building and communicating visions** for the SEE region that are appealing and motivating and **engaging in partnerships** that improve the quality of life and/or standing of SEE in the world.

The European Commission has already employed foresight methodology to inform and consult policy making at EU level (i.e. SPRING project informed EC on the future plausible scenarios of EU-China relationships in the area of environment research) or funded various pilot foresight policy-making projects in selected EU countries in the last decade. The spread of foresight implementation increase the **acceptance levels, confidence in validity** and **attractiveness** of the instrument among policy making and usually conservative ministries of foreign affairs. So, 2014 is way better timing for foresight implementation at a foreign policy level, compared to 2008 or before.

Foresight could be used (internally) at the Regional Cooperation Council in **three major ways**, which could be implemented independently or combined:

- **Re-considering the issues** (themes) of strategic/priority interest for the RCC vis-à-vis these at the time of establishing the *council*. By conducting a participatory and action-oriented foresight, the RCC could be seen as a pioneer in citizen-led foreign policy and democracy. Based on the unique modular regional foresight methodology, the RCC could run its own decision-preparatory process aimed at its constituencies' policy-makers. The foresight might raise the stakeholders' commitment to joint actions by sharing a same commonly developed vision for the future. The time-horizon here is a bit shorter than the normal foresights but it aims to develop alternative strategy and action plan along the same major guideline of the SEE 2020 strategy.
- **Review and assess** the work of the RCC so far, based not only on the initial milestones and benchmarks set at the time of establishment of the RCC and first two triennial strategies but also based on a refined set of future images/scenarios that affect the region, which were developed by other foresight or other participative visionary exercises. This process skips the SWOT and PESTLE analysis and builds on existing scenarios. The other blocks of the methodology remain the same. The major goal of the exercise is to check the validity of current strategy and results against different alternatives of the future.
- Conducting a **full-scale regional foresight** aimed above the 2020 horizon (say with a horizon of 2030). It should be adequately planned and preceded by a proper capacity building at the RCC's secretariat to run such foresight. The foresight would be aimed at

improving the strategic planning of the RCC and the SEECP in the context of evolved governance of the European Union and overall technology and societal trends.

There are various ways these three major ways could be followed. For example, the easiest and quickest (and safest) implementation would be *review and assess* option. Along with it a capacity building program could be run at the RCC secretariat to prepare for a full-scale foresight or mid-term reconsidering of the issues. Or a combination of the first and second options could be initiated, focusing on an area that intersects the major priority areas but is narrow enough to allow to be conducted with limited resources and within a shorter time frame. One such option is to conduct a thematic foresight in the area of preservation of cultural and historic heritage. The area is both consensual in terms that all countries should cooperate, preserve and exhibit the heritage, there is already a lot of work done, agreements signed, funds invested, technologies applied and so on, but controversial as well in terms of different historic interpretations to the same artefacts.

Consequently, a mini-foresight might benefit both the construction of a consensual vision of how to deal with controversies, provide ideas of how to create new products attractive for region outsiders that build on complementarities and differences in interpretations and not trying to transform the tourist into a judge of whose history is truer. So, the famous saying “agree to disagree” could be easily transform into a guiding principle in dealing with the problematic past of the SEE region from the point of view of a future in 10-15 years from now.

### **3.3 Foresight as a facilitation tool/service provided to (and with) stakeholders**

The Secretariat of the Regional Cooperation Council could utilise the foresight intangibles of the ViReFor by providing facilitation tools and services to three different layers of regional stakeholders – parliaments, member governments or line ministries, and SEE regional networks/associations.

#### **3.3.1 Parliaments**

Parliaments have a prominent role in the 2014-2015 work plan priorities for the RCC and are very important in SEE regional policy-making and should be considered separately. Working with parliaments might provide the avenue for further institutionalisation of foresight at country level (instead of being part of the executive power it could be at parliamentary level as it provides more long-term commitment). Although parliaments have rather short-term life (4 years usually), many politicians have a long-lasting membership in the parliament (10 or more years) and even if the average number of years in the parliament might be close to 4 years, the most influential politicians stay much longer and often hold important parliamentary positions (speaker of parliament, heads of committees). Consequently, it is difficult but feasible to convince parliamentarians with a longer-term planning horizon about the necessity of having a centre or unit responsible for future trends analysis and foresight. This will position themselves as early adopters of modern policy-making practices and might guarantee a unique competence specialisation among their peers.

The practice of the European Parliament on technology assessments is well appreciated by various European parliaments and the respective offices for parliamentary technology assessment could easily serve as foresight centres as well. Even if the RCC limits its activities to coordination and facilitation services related to the technology assessments related to new legislation discussions in South East Europe in major areas of activities of the RCC such as energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, and media, the scope for foresight implementation is enormous.

While the diffusion of best practices in terms of future oriented thinking and policy making in EU member states from South East Europe is facilitated through the membership in the European Parliament, participation in overall policy making process at EC level and participation in FP7 and Horizon 2020 projects, the non-EU countries from SEE might still need additional support provided by the RCC.

### **3.3.2 Members of the RCC (separate governments or sets of ministries)**

Individual governments from the SEE region might have a political interest to work together with the RCC under a foresight framework to try to build consensus and legitimise a way out of a particular negative scenario or issue with another country. Particular set of ministries that would generally work together but would have their individual barriers and hurdles overcoming issues at their respective ministries of foreign affairs might be willing to by-pass the MFAs and work directly with the RCC's secretariat on a foresight project to build a participatory consensus over a particular theme or topic. Last, but not least, if funding is available ministries might be interested in increasing capacity in foresight under the RCC auspices.

In particular cases there might be an option the concrete client to be a large state undertaking (technopark, innovation strategy, energy project) and a stakeholder not per se a ministry from one country that would be motivated to run a foresight that would help him/her planning the project (i.e. the Techno park in Montenegro).

The unique example of the CAPS (Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy), formerly known as *Direction de la prospective* (the French term for foresight), a think-tank at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, might be used as a best practice for implementing of foresight in the area of foreign policy. France, as a member to the RCC could be used to back-up the introduction of foresight implementation both at the RCC and later on at other Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

### **3.3.3 SEE regional networks/associations**

There are increasing number of SEE regional (or regional parts of wider constituents) networks, associations and initiatives that either put an emphasis on foresight or aim at increasing regional cooperation in their respective fields, try to influence the regional policy-making and complement the RCC's goals and objectives from the private sector side. For all of these



private sector organisations some sort of commitment and partnership from a regional organisation as the RCC would be a huge benefit and they could effectively fundraise for the necessary activities.

The Eastern European and Central Asian Business Incubators and Technology Parks (ECAbit) Network has members from most of the SEE countries (state technoparks as in Montenegro, academic incubators as in Serbia, NGOs and private companies) and is in existence since 2005. ECAbit had coordinators from Bulgaria and Romania, held important regional events in Macedonia, Kosovo, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. In 2012 the regional gathering of the network (in August in Tambov, Russia) was focusing on foresight and in 2014 (again in Tambov) would have a dedicated session of foresight related to social entrepreneurship. At various moments of time ECAbit members from SEE have discussed the necessity to conduct a foresight study on the innovation and start-up ecosystem in the SEE region to inform regional policy making aimed at improving the conditions for technopreneurship. Several of the Steering Committee members of ECAbit has been exposed and involved in foresight projects and one of them, currently serving as director at a college in Kosovo is providing foresight related services to the governments in Central Asia.

EcaHack, a spin-off network of hackatons built on partnership between ECAbit and Mobile Monday Central and Eastern Europe is also pro-foresight oriented, mainly through the influence of corporate foresights in the mobile industry (i.e. Nokia/Microsoft, DoCoMo and others). An affiliated Foresight Camp will be held in August, 2014 in Romania, targeting mobile developers and entrepreneurs and would be ready to cooperate with thematic hackatons targeting future-oriented services to be provided on a regional scale provided adequate regional policy making.

The European Software Institute<sup>7</sup> regional chapter (ESI Central and Eastern Europe<sup>8</sup>) is located in Sofia, Bulgaria but are very active in the whole SEE region, mainly providing certification and consultancy services to the ICT sector. Yet, most of the people employed at ESI have been actively taking part in the first pilot foresight in Bulgaria and Romania in 2002-2004 under the ForeTech project.

Various other business associations from different sectors (IT, telecommunications, construction, biotechnology, environment technologies) from the SEE region have been exposed to or involved in foresight exercises and would be willing to cooperate on a regional basis aimed at strengthening the regional policy making.

Regional hubs and partnerships between more global networks as StartUp Weekends, Coder Dojos, Game Jams, Mobile Mondays, TEDx and others could easily partner to ViReFor to take the popularity of foresight to the next level among younger generation – both in terms of pure dissemination of results, highlight trends and scenarios but also involve their communities in developing visualisation or product/service response to the respected future image.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.esi.es>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.esicenter.bg>

There are plenty of stories from the corporate foresight that could be attractive for telling the next generation and also could motivate to experiment and build upon the foresight results in the region. The startup community is already going in this direction with a few regional workshops focusing on foresight but this could be institutionalised further by agreement of co-hosting wider consultation events within the foresight methodology and hackatons (also using other technologies than pure programming) for fast prototyping and responding with early product designs to the micro-trends identified within the foresight.

The institutional structure for the ViReFor should allow for flexible partnerships with regional networks as they might be willing to contribute to the ViReFor's vision and regional identity. Regional identity of regional sub-networks of global networks is always a solid point of attraction of interest as people in the region tend to prefer to build regional identities and thus increase the value of the social capital in the region.

## 4 Action plan

### 4.1 Capacity building

The capacity building will involve the following main elements:

- Foresight as a future-oriented decision support and visionary consensus building instrument – different approaches, differences between corporate and policy making foresights, differences with other scenario-based methodologies;
- Specifics of regional foresights – cases of national and regional foresights. Specifics of the FORSEE vs ForeTech methodology;
- Budgeting a foresight project – what are the hidden costs not usually foreseen when reading only the narrative of the foresight methodologies;
- Managing a foresight project – what are institutional traps and risks.

The capacity building should target both the RCC secretariat at Sarajevo, but also several of the major constituent ministries of foreign affairs and eventually some of the line ministries with zero foresight experience so far that might be expected to have higher motivation for implementing foresight projects.

### 4.2 Sequencing of institutionalisation

The ViReFor would start with setting-up of a Steering Committee that is formed on the basis of the FORSEE project and **the Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport** would serve as the **first secretariat** (just after the closure of the project). Then, throughout the initial first (and, if not successful, also second) quarter, the Steering Committee would fundraise for foresight capacity building at the RCC and will be networking among the respective ministries of foreign affairs to attract support for foresight. Then, with the first joint project implementation a transition of the secretariat to the RCC and renewal of the Steering Committee will take place.

After the **pre-institutionalisation phase** (setting up the secretariat, the Steering Committee, upload the web-sites) comes the **soft-institutionalisation**, where the RCC will declare interest and later engage with foresight. The **hard-institutionalisation** (be it a CAPS-like unit or formal decision by the RCC management) includes in all cases more complicated partnership between different stakeholders.

### 4.3 Proposed list of actions with a timeline, stakeholders, resources and if possible potential funding/resources needed.

Table 4.1. List of proposed actions

No.	Activity	Time-frame	Stakeholders /Resources	Potential Funding
<b>Pre-institutionalisation phase</b>				
1	Steering Committee formation	July – September 2014 July – draft list September - finalisation	FORSEE project partners and RCC	In-kind
2	Web-site update	September 2014	ZSI or a similarly competent partner	Commitment through the FORSEE project
<b>Capacity building and networking</b>				
3	Foresight Capacity building at the RCC and selected ministries project proposal	July 15, 2014 (deadline for application)	ZSI, RCC, ECAbit, other invested FORSEE project partners	CEI KEP (40,000 € upper limit for the grant, 50 % co-funding needed)
4	Networking and MoUs with different regional networks	August – December 2014 Transylvania Foresight Camp, August, 2014 ECAbit regional meeting/foresight social entrepreneurship, Tambov, August, 2014 Bled Futures Forum, November, 2014	Steering Committee members	In-kind
5	Capacity building for foresight at the RCC	2015	Selected experts	IF CEI KEP proposal is not successful will look for additional funding.

Pilot implementation of foresight projects				
6	Review and assessment based on existing scenario/visions	2015-2016	RCC	30,000 – 50,000 € estimated. Fundraising needed. In case of a good planning and successful CEI KEP application the amount could be reduced with 15,000 € (if preparatory actions planned within the project).
7	Mid-term prioritisation and re-considering the thematic areas/issues and preparing beyond 2020	2016	RCC	100,000 + €

#### 4.4 Contingency planning and risk assessment

The current sustainability plan has been based on the underlying assumption that the Secretariat of the Regional Cooperation Council might be interested in utilising the regional foresight methodology for implementation of its responsibilities. In particular the unit responsible for the civil society's involvement in RCC activities has shown an interest in regional foresight as a way for sustainable long-term participatory involvement of civil society in regional policy-making. It acknowledged the priority given to longer-term planning by the European Commission (both on strategic but also on operative planning level), the preference towards foresight framework by the European Commission, even in cases where other terms are used (i.e. smart specialisation strategy) or research projects funded (FP7 and Horizon 2020) and the gradual shift in policy making even in the region (i.e. the best case of Romanian foresight in science policy) towards foresight. Countries like Austria, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania and their ministries of foreign affairs are expected to understand and back the usage of foresight as a policy making tool within the RCC, not to speak about the other EU member countries that are part of the RCC but not from SEE (like Finland and UK) or UN institutions.

However, even in situations that look like perfect, one should plan for risks. There are two major risks identified for the institutionalisation of the regional foresight developed under FORSEE project.

- **Moderate risk/Low Impact.** The RCC and other stakeholders decide to buy-in the regional foresight, but does not like the methodology (and alter it significantly) and/or the initial Steering Committee and experts (and build their own).

**Response/discussion:** Even if this happens, the very fact that FORSEE project was instrumental to kick-off such discussions and changes/upgrades in the methodology is enough positive impact, as it was highlighted in the methodology outline [1], it does depend on the implementing actors, timing, themes and so on. Already the team behind includes the European and regional top foresight thinkers, but in order to safeguard against this risk the proponents of the sustainability plan would try to publish papers and articles in peer-reviewed policy journals, foreign-policy journals and the press, which will further legitimise the FORSEE project results.

- **Low risk/High impact.** For some reason RCC decides not at all to implement foresight. Part of the reasons might be quick political downgrade for the SEECF, major internal conflicts between the countries or other. Even if the Secretariat of RCC is interested in implementing regional foresight, the political process behind it might not be conducive to open involvement of public-at-large or civil society organisations and the political views about RCC shift towards small representative body rather an active policy-making arm to SEECF.

**Response/discussion:** In this case it will be private sector organisations and regional networks and hubs that will sustain the regional foresight momentum gained through FORSEE project. This scenario has definitely no prospects for hard institutionalisation; institutionalisation will remain soft. However, the readiness of the implementation of foresight by regional networks such as ECabit is unconditional to the RCC decision. Yet, in this case there will be a lower level of standardisation (as the power of the Steering Committee would be very limited in terms of enforcing standards), but this has never been an issue within the foresight community. To increase the RCC engagement with the regional foresight and its partnership with private sector organisations in the field of foresight a joint project proposal within a short time-frame (2014) would be envisaged. It will aim at capacity building of the RCC in the area of foresight and transfer of foresight know-how from EU to non-EU countries in SEE (under the CEI KEP framework).

## 5 Abbreviations, Glossary, References

### 5.1 Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full name
SEE	South East Europe
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
WP	Work Package
RIS	Regional Innovation Strategy
ViReFor	Virtual Regional Foresight Centre
SEECF	South East European Cooperation Process
FP7	Framework Programme 7
MFA	Ministry of foreign affairs
ECAbit	Eastern European and Central Asian Business Incubators and Technology Parks Network
CEI KEP	Central European Initiative Knowledge Exchange Programme

### 5.2 References

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**Annex 1: Timeline of the Strategy Roadmap**

