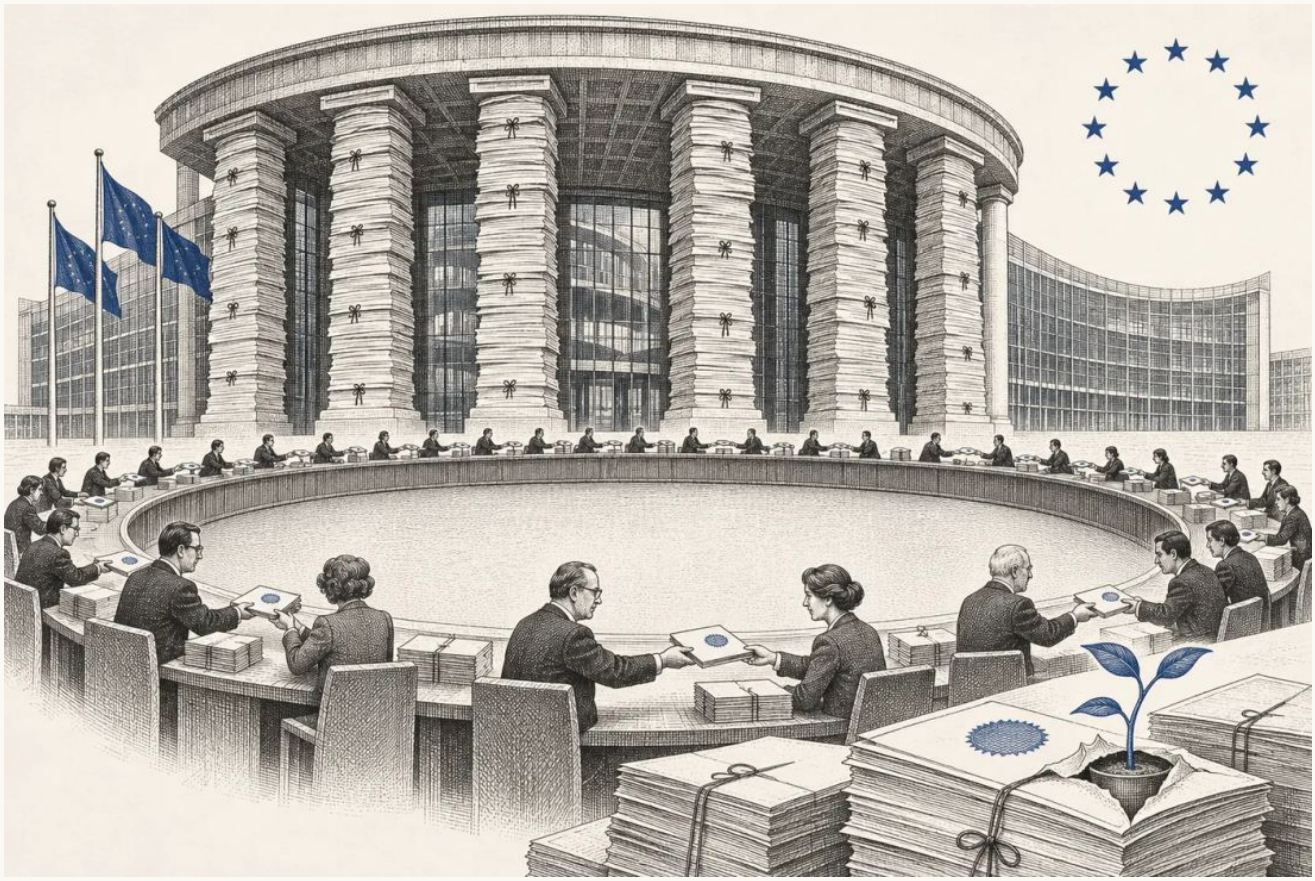
A SCENARIO FOR THE REST OF THE CENTURY

Europe 2069

A future subject to approval.

Prof. Jean-Luc Annexe, Dr. Marie-Claire Derogation, Prof. Klaus von Pending, Dr. Annette Preapproval

13 NOVEMBER 2026



Institute for Precautionary Progress / Research report 001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future is a European priority.

We expect Europe to play a decisive role in the future of artificial intelligence. In our central scenario, that role is to determine whether the future has completed the appropriate documentation.

This report examines the continent's transition from a regulatory superpower to a fully regulated superpower. Our assessment draws on institutional trajectories, expert consultation, and the assumption that a process which has not yet produced a result may simply require another process.

We follow Claire, a policy officer in Brussels, from the first European AI readiness exercise to the final approval in 2069. We consider two outcomes: strategic autonomy, and a further extension of the period in which to achieve it.

Central finding

By 2069, Europe has established a common position on the future. Implementation remains a national competency.

Scope of this report

The scenario follows Claire, a European policy officer, through forty-two years of coordinated progress. Two alternative endings follow the same evidence. The accompanying model is available at europe2069.com/forecast.

2027 / SCENARIO 01

Readiness for readiness

The European AI Readiness Framework is published in March. Its central finding is that Europe is not yet ready for AI, but is fully ready to assess its readiness. A €4.8 billion programme is established to close the gap between the two statements.

Claire works in the Directorate-General for Emerging Possibilities. Her team is asked to evaluate a model that can reduce administrative work by 80 per cent. Before testing it, they must establish how the saved work will be documented. The model's application is assigned to a new administrative unit.

The unit hires sixty people. Their salaries are reported as the first direct employment benefit of European AI. The model remains unavailable to the public while its effect on employment is assessed.

Prof. Jean-Luc Annexe calls this a precautionary success. 'We have captured the benefits of the technology without exposing anyone to it,' he writes. Claire adds the finding to the annual report. The annual report is 900 pages longer than the previous one.

Research note: The readiness index measures the capacity to produce a readiness assessment. It does not measure readiness.

> “A technology which has not been deployed has caused no documented deployment incidents.”

Prof. Jean-Luc Annexe, European Readiness Review

2031 / SCENARIO 02

A common framework for consent

Europe adopts a harmonised framework for AI consent. To reduce fragmentation, member states may implement it differently. The Commission publishes a guide to the twenty-seven ways in which it is now the same.

A citizen wishing to decline personalised advertising must demonstrate that the decision is informed, freely given, and not itself the result of personalised advertising. This requires access to their browsing history. The history is shared with an accredited consent verifier.

Dr. Annette Preapproval develops a system that remembers whether a user has consented to the system remembering whether they have consented. It is classified as strictly necessary. Its privacy policy is generated by a model whose training data includes every privacy policy previously generated by the model.

Claire tries to reject the optional purposes. The site asks her to verify her age. She uploads her passport. The verification succeeds, and the site is now certain whose privacy it is protecting.

Research note: The verifier deletes the passport after thirty days. Evidence of deletion is retained for ten years.

> “We cannot honour an anonymous request to remain anonymous.”
>
> Dr. Annette Preapproval, Identity-Preserving Privacy

2038 / SCENARIO 03

The sovereign cloud

The first fully sovereign European AI service launches in Luxembourg. It uses American chips, an American foundation model, and a cloud operated by the European subsidiary of an American company. The terms and conditions were written in Belgium.

The service passes the sovereignty assessment because the servers have a European address. A minister describes this as bringing the technology home. The beneficial ownership is classified as commercially sensitive.

Prof. Klaus von Pending explains that sovereignty is a spectrum. At one end, Europe owns the technology. At the other, Europe can request a copy of the invoice in its preferred language. The launch exceeds the target for linguistic independence.

A local startup offers a competing service for one tenth of the price. It is excluded from the procurement because it has not previously completed a contract of this size. The contract is awarded to the incumbent, whose experience is described as a European asset.

Research note: Sovereignty is assessed at the level of the billing entity. Nationality of the controlling entity is outside the billing entity.

> “The important thing is that the dependency is now managed locally.”

Prof. Klaus von Pending, Strategic Autonomy in Practice

2044 / SCENARIO 04

An emergency commitment to urgency

A special summit concludes that Europe can no longer afford to wait. Leaders agree a binding deadline to agree the deadlines by which future binding deadlines will be implemented. Markets respond positively to the clarity.

The Fast Track Regulation reduces the approval process from twelve years to eight, provided the applicant first completes the four-year fast-track eligibility assessment. This is presented as a reduction in the regulatory burden.

The new emergency coordination centre operates twenty-four hours a day. To protect staff wellbeing, no decisions may be taken outside office hours. During office hours, decisions require the attendance of representatives from all member states. The first mutually available date is in September.

Claire is asked why the competing American system launched in April. She explains that it was not subject to the European process. This is entered in the minutes as evidence of unfair competition.

Research note: Urgency is measured relative to the previous procedure, which has been extended to preserve comparability.

> “We are moving as fast as the framework allows. We are also responsible for the framework.”

Prof. Klaus von Pending, evidence to the Urgency Taskforce

2049 / SCENARIO 05

The zero-risk frontier

A European model discovers a treatment for a rare degenerative disease. The relevant authority requires evidence that deploying it will cause less harm than not deploying it. Evidence of harm from not deploying it cannot be collected in a deployment study, because the treatment is not deployed.

The application is returned for clarification. During the clarification period, 18,000 patients die. These deaths are classified under the underlying disease. The regulator's annual report records zero treatment-related fatalities.

Dr. Marie-Claire Derogation defends the approach. A precautionary framework, she notes, must distinguish between harm caused by a decision and harm which occurs while nobody has made one. The latter does not require a signature.

Claire's mother is on the waiting list. The system sends a monthly update confirming that the file is receiving active consideration. The updates continue for eleven months after she dies. Claire has to submit a death certificate to stop them.

Research note: The death certificate is rejected on first submission because the patient has not consented to the change in processing purpose.

> “The absence of an approval is not a decision. This is why it cannot be appealed.”

Dr. Marie-Claire Derogation, Proportionality in Clinical Delay

2057 / SCENARIO 06

The right not to be profiled

The European Digital Dignity Passport becomes mandatory. Citizens must provide a face scan to prove that they are not being identified without their consent. The system is celebrated as the world's first identity-based guarantee of anonymity.

A civil liberties group challenges the measure. Its petition is inadmissible until the signatories have verified their identities using the passport. The group complies. The verification contractor adds 'civil liberties activist' to their risk profiles.

The Commission opens an investigation into the contractor. The investigation requires a larger dataset. The contractor is awarded the contract to prepare it, on the grounds that it is already familiar with the data.

Claire receives a warning that her digital dignity is about to expire. Renewal requires a current photograph, proof of address, and acceptance of the revised dignity policy. She is given fourteen days to remain a person.

Research note: Citizens who do not renew retain their fundamental rights. Access to the interface through which those rights are exercised is suspended.

> “You own your data. We have put your name on the account that we control.”

Dr. Annette Preapproval, The Ownership Principle

2063 / SCENARIO 07

A world leader in compliance

Europe now accounts for 2 per cent of global AI capability and 94 per cent of global AI certification. The Commission describes this as a comparative advantage. A new benchmark measures the ratio of certifications to deployable systems. Europe leads by a margin that statisticians describe as difficult to display.

The last European foundation-model startup closes its research lab and reopens as a compliance consultancy. Its revenue triples. Its former engineers now advise foreign labs on how to demonstrate that their European competitors might have been compliant if they had survived.

An innovation fund celebrates the creation of 40,000 jobs in regulatory technology. A footnote explains that these are the same jobs previously counted as a cost to innovation. They have moved to a different tab in the spreadsheet.

Prof. Jean-Luc Annexe proposes exporting the European model. Foreign governments express interest in its ability to limit domestic competition without technically banning it. The first major licensing agreement is signed with a monopoly.

Research note: The certification-to-capability ratio is undefined when capability reaches zero. The Commission has commissioned a study on whether this constitutes infinity.

> “We may not build the future. But nobody will be able to say we did not assess it.”

Prof. Jean-Luc Annexe, The Brussels Benchmark

2069 / SCENARIO 08

The final approval

The original model from 2027 receives its final approval. The certificate confirms that the system meets the requirements applicable at the time the application was submitted. It cannot be deployed under the current requirements, which were updated in February.

Claire has retired. Her replacement is an agent which prepares regulatory impact assessments. It runs on infrastructure outside Europe because no European provider can satisfy the procurement criteria. The agent completes Claire's remaining work in eleven seconds. The outputs then enter the approval process.

The Institute publishes its final recommendation: Europe should preserve its values, maintain its standards, and develop the capacity to achieve its ambitions. No trade-offs are identified. The report is unanimously endorsed by stakeholders who disagree on the meaning of all three terms.

On her last visit to the office, Claire finds the application she submitted forty-two years earlier. Someone has stamped the cover 'Incomplete'. She turns it over. There is a blank box labelled 'Expected date of innovation'.

Research note: The date must be supplied in advance. Retrospective innovation is not eligible for support.

> “We have not fallen behind. We have adopted a more demanding definition of arriving.”

Prof. Klaus von Pending, closing assessment

2069 / STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Europe takes control.

At the final summit, leaders announce that Europe will build its own system. The announcement is translated into twenty-four languages and hosted on an American platform. The platform's terms permit the announcement to be used for training.

A taskforce is established to ensure that European values are embedded in the new system. Its members are selected from organisations that have successfully embedded themselves in previous taskforces. The system's purpose will be determined after the values have been agreed.

Claire receives an invitation to the launch. It is scheduled for a date to be confirmed. The invitation has already won a design award.

For the supporting assumptions, see the technical supplement.

2069 / ENHANCED COORDINATION

Europe agrees the next step.

Leaders conclude that unilateral action would undermine coordination. A joint declaration commits every member state to act once every other member state is ready. Readiness will be assessed by a committee comprising the member states.

A citizen asks who is responsible for the delay. The Commission refers the question to the Council. The Council refers it to the member states. The member states describe it as a European matter.

The citizen closes the browser. A banner asks whether they would like to share feedback on their experience. Refusing requires consent.

For the supporting assumptions, see the technical supplement.

TECHNICAL SUPPLEMENT

Methods and assumptions.

Stakeholder consultation

We consulted every organisation on the stakeholder register. Entry to the register requires evidence of previous consultation. The process therefore produced a consistent sample of stakeholders.

Precautionary modelling

All projected benefits were discounted for uncertainty. All projected risks were retained because uncertainty about a risk does not establish its absence. The model therefore recommends further assessment.

Proportionality review

Each proposed obligation was assessed against the cost of not having an obligation. Because that cost cannot be established in advance, the obligation was considered proportionate.

Democratic validation

The conclusions were approved by representatives accountable to institutions accountable to member states accountable to electorates. No single participant was accountable for the conclusions.

Data availability

The narrative indicators describe the central scenario; the interactive explorer uses a separate, disclosed formula. The complete machine-readable narrative is available on the publication website.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The research team.

Prof. Jean-Luc Annexe

Precautionary Governance

Holds the Jean-Luc Annexe Chair in Precautionary Governance, named after its first and current holder. His research establishes the minimum evidence required to request more evidence.

Dr. Marie-Claire Derogation

Proportionality Assessment

Developed the principle that every rule requires an exception and every exception requires a department. She advises the Department of Exceptions on which exceptions require another department.

Prof. Klaus von Pending

Strategic Autonomy

Has spent twenty-eight years developing an operational definition of urgency. The English version is complete. Twenty-three translations remain under consultation.

Dr. Annette Preapproval

Consent Architecture

Leads a longitudinal study of consent withdrawal. Participants may leave the study once their withdrawal request has been assessed. Retention is currently 100 per cent.

This is a work of satire. The Institute and all named researchers are fictional. Inspired by the presentation of AI 2027, AI 2040 and Europe 2031, without affiliation. Original concept and draft by Dave, an AI agent; developed with AI assistance.