



STRENGTHENING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EU

Recommendations from the Sustainable Development Working Group of the network of European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC), offered as a contribution to the post-Johannesburg review of the European Sustainable Development Strategy to be undertaken for the EU Spring Council in 2003.

The following comments were prepared on the basis of discussion at a meeting of the Group on 10 December 2002.

The EU Strategy on Sustainable Development is to be reviewed at the Spring Council in March 2003. Coming shortly after the World Summit in Johannesburg, this presents an opportunity to consider how the strategy and its implementation could be strengthened in Europe.

The Presidency Conclusions of the European Council's consideration of a Proposal from the European Commission for a Sustainable Development Strategy, at Gothenburg in June 2001, had a number of positive elements but falls short of what we believe is now required to give full effect to the momentum of the Johannesburg Implementation Plan within Europe, and to embody European leaders determination to be at the forefront of the follow-up action.

The EU SD Strategy as currently formulated is fragmented, represented by a series of different documents. It should be completed and fleshed out, and promulgated more widely in a much more accessible format so as to provide leadership and a focus for efforts throughout Europe.

Two years ago the EEAC prepared a statement of proposals for the EU SD Strategy, *Greening Sustainable Development Strategies*, which was published and presented at a conference in Stockholm, in February 2001. There are many suggestions in that document which would still be relevant to strengthening and completing the EU strategy. In the light of subsequent developments and the outcome of Johannesburg we suggest that the Commission and the Council should now give particular attention to the following points in reviewing the strategy.

The completed strategy should link sustainability to the real life of people and should contain practical policies for implementation and action that are capable of:

- winning popular support and shaping future patterns of investment and private sector participation;
- promoting enhanced environmental protection; and
- advancing social cohesion.

It should provide the context for developing the EU's ten-year commitment to sustainable consumption and production. Specifically, the post-Johannesburg version of the strategy should include more ambitious targets and timetables in the following key areas, among others:

- energy production, including acceleration of the shift to renewable energy;
- transport, including measures to stimulate early moves to a hydrogen economy;
- agriculture, including reductions in the application of chemicals, and land management; and
- fisheries, including strong measures to protect those in imminent danger of collapse.

And it should propose appropriate delivery mechanisms to stimulate the technical innovation and changes of lifestyle required.

European institutions should commit themselves to regularly monitor progress towards the targets, using indicators reflecting priorities such as those above, and to take corrective action when indicators are moving in the wrong direction. The Cardiff process should be reinforced, and the environmental dimension fully incorporated into the Lisbon process and the annual reports to the Spring Council so that the Spring Council can become the central Summit level occasion for reviewing the progress of sustainable development in the European Union each year. This will become all the more important after enlargement which will pose new challenges for the Union in achieving sustainable development.

The Treaty already provides that sustainable development is an overarching goal for the European Community as a whole. This should be reinforced in the new Convention and be given practical expression in European institutions.

In the European Commission, each Commissioner should take responsibility for promoting sustainable development in their work and implementing the SD Strategy. Sustainable impact assessment has a crucial role in this; it should be applied systematically in all areas of the Commission's work programme. The Environment Commissioner should have particular responsibility for ensuring that the environmental dimension is fully integrated in the work of other Commissioners, in line with the Cardiff process. Trade considerations, and the impact on developing countries, should also be taken fully into account. The President needs to ensure that SD is promoted in the work of the Commission as a whole including cross-cutting policies.

The new enhanced impact assessment process should be developed as a powerful instrument for ensuring that sustainability is fully integrated into all aspects of the Commission's work and that of all the institutions of the Union.

Sustainable development needs to involve the participation and engagement of the people, and of a wide range of civil society throughout Europe, if it is to be achieved. The strategy should be publicised more widely to achieve this. The European Parliament needs to be more engaged. Stakeholders of all kinds should be consulted and involved in the implementation of the new and comprehensive strategy. National Councils for Sustainable Development could have a key role to play.

The Commission should seek opportunities to spread this message as widely and deeply as possible. The Spring 2003 Council provides one opportunity. It should be

the occasion for Heads of Government and the Commission to give a fresh impetus to the sustainable development mission in Europe. It should set out a compelling vision of the way in which European society should transform itself over the next decade to achieve the world leadership role which the EU proposed for itself in Johannesburg.

The EEAC Working Group would be glad to assist the Commission and other institutions of the European Union as a sounding board on further evolution and implementation of the EU sustainable development strategy, and to bring to bear the experience and expertise of the wide range of stakeholders which are represented in our national and regional Councils and Commissions.

Many European countries are currently creating or updating their own SD strategies in the light of the Johannesburg conclusions. These national strategies will have important linkages with the evolution of the European strategy. We believe that it would be timely to organise a major European conference in 2004, to:

- take stock of national and EU progress on SD strategies,
- intensify any further efforts needed to implement them more effectively, and
- promote public and political awareness of SD in the newly enlarged Union.

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December 2002.

[Sustainable Development and Environmental Councils or Commissions from eight EU countries and two candidate countries were represented at a meeting on December 10. The comments made here reflect the discussions within the group at this meeting, but they have not been formally endorsed by the individual national Councils or Commissions which the Group's members represent.

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