

EEAC

The network of
European Environmental Advisory Councils



REPORT

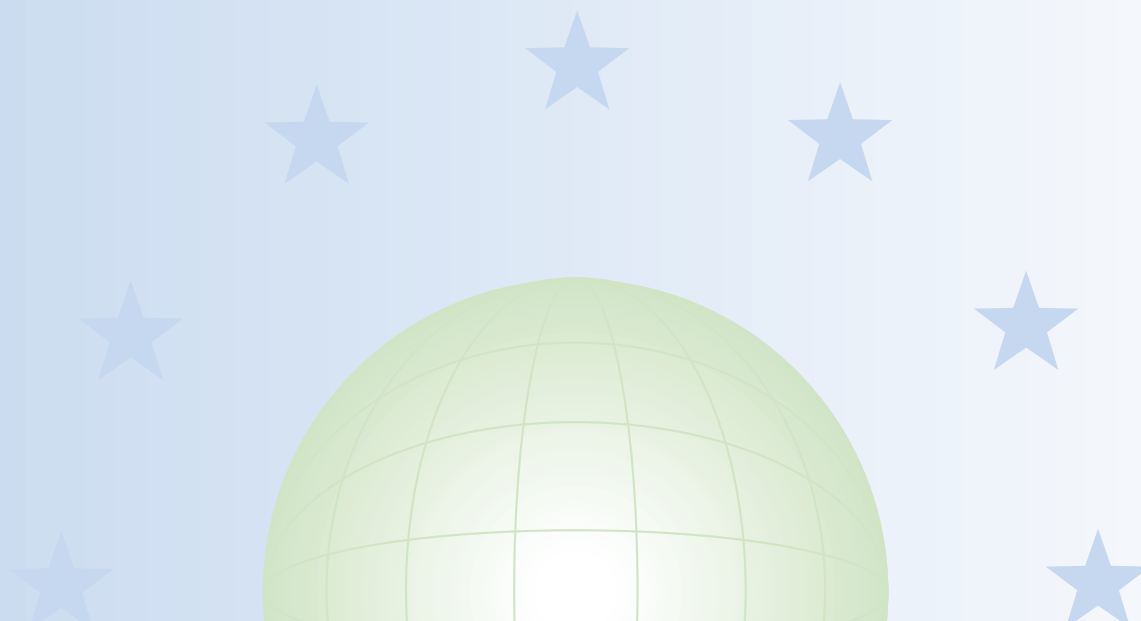
February 2001

GREENING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Proposals by the European Environmental Advisory Councils for the
EU Sustainable Development Strategy

The following EEAC councils have endorsed this report:

<i>Austria</i>	Austrian Association for Agricultural Research (ÖVAF) Clean Air Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (KRL)
<i>Belgium</i>	Environmental and Nature Council of Flanders (MiNa-Raad)
<i>Denmark</i>	Danish Nature Council (DNC)
<i>Estonia</i>	Estonian Commission on Sustainable Development (ECSD)
<i>Finland</i>	Finnish Council for Natural Resources (FCNR)
<i>Germany</i>	Council of Environmental Advisors (SRU) Advisory Council on Global Change (WGBU) Council for Land Stewardship (DRL)
<i>Hungary</i>	Hungarian National Council on the Environment (NEC)
<i>Ireland</i>	The Heritage Council (HC)
<i>Lithuania</i>	Lithuanian National Council for Sustainable Development (LNCSD)
<i>The Netherlands</i>	Council for the Rural Area (RLG) Advisory Council for Research on Nature and Environment (RMNO) Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM-Raad)
<i>Portugal</i>	National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development (CNADS)
<i>Slovak Republic</i>	Council of the Government for Sustainable Development of the Slovak Republic
<i>Slovenia</i>	Council for Environmental Protection of the Republic of Slovenia (CEPRS)
<i>Sweden</i>	Environmental Advisory Council (MVB)
<i>United Kingdom</i>	Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) English Nature (EN) Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)



**Network of
European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC)**



GREENING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

**Proposals by the
EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCILS
for the
EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

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February 2001

FOREWORD

The European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEACs) are bodies established by the national and regional governments in Member States and accession countries to provide advice on environmental issues. Some of them are expert bodies, others more in the way of stakeholder bodies, but an essential point is that they provide independent advice. That gives the EEACs a distinctive and authoritative role.

This year will see production of the European Union's first Strategy for Sustainable Development. At their annual conference held at Sesimbra in June 2000 the EEACs identified this Strategy as an issue of vital and fundamental importance. Internationally, it will form the EU contribution to Rio + 10. It will also flesh out the concept of 'sustainable development', which is now one of the EU's formal objectives and the key goal of the environmental integration duty contained in the Treaty.

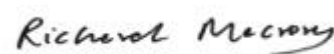
The EEACs established a working group to contribute to forming the Strategy, and consider what must be done to move the EU towards a more environmentally sustainable path. *Greening Sustainable Development Strategies* is the statement the working group has produced, following initial meetings with European Commission officials, and in consultation with all the advisory councils that make up the EEAC network. It was presented and discussed at a conference in Stockholm on 23 February 2001, hosted by the Swedish Environmental Advisory Council and attended by people from government, industry and environmental groups, as well as from advisory councils.

The EEACs are sufficiently independent that they do not lightly sign up to common statements. It is therefore very significant that the general orientation of this statement has now been formally endorsed by 23 advisory councils in 15 countries. They are listed at the end. The statement analyses the concept of sustainable development, and proposes changes in the EU's institutions and procedures. It contains examples of national initiatives, and highlights some critical areas of policy where changes are needed. Some would argue that the Strategy should also cover the EU's relationship to the Third World. The focus of this statement, however, is deliberately on EU policy-making because that lies within the expertise of the EEACs.

The underlying message is that, in the longer term, a healthy environment is fundamental to economic development and human welfare. If the peoples of Europe, including the candidate countries, are to move towards sustainability, the procedures and policies of the European Union are in urgent need of fundamental change. A crucial problem is the lack of coherence in EU policies in different fields, especially with respect to their long-term effects. The EU needs to move to a new and more sustainable concept of development.

The Heads of Government of Member States will have a decisive role, in that they will approve the Strategy and determine measures for its effective implementation. The Lisbon Process initiated by Heads of Government last year provides a mechanism for judging EU policies against economic and social indicators. At the very least, the environment needs to be integrated into that process.

The themes identified in this statement will be taken forward by EEACs individually and in our future collaboration. A further major theme will be how all elements in civil society can become fully engaged in moving towards sustainability. We look forward to continuing a wide-ranging and productive dialogue on these subjects with the European institutions and with other actors.



Richard Macrory
Chairman of the EEAC Steering Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union urgently needs to commit itself wholeheartedly to sustainable development. Adoption of a Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU will therefore mark a major step forward. This must be a substantial and influential document, which will provide a framework for integrating environmental considerations into EU policies in every sector.

The national and regional advisory bodies which make up the network of European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEACs) are putting forward detailed proposals for the scope and content of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, drawing on the experience of putting sustainable development into effect already gained in Member States.

EEACs acknowledge that sustainable development must fulfil economic, social and environmental objectives. Because survival of the natural environment is crucial for economic and social development in the long run, they have focused on the environmental dimension of sustainability.

Many current trends are not sustainable. They include the rising level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; other forms of pollution from diffuse sources; the effects of congestion and pollution on the quality of life for people in towns and cities; disruption of the water cycle; degradation of soils and terrestrial ecosystems; increasing concentrations of hazardous chemicals in the environment; increasing quantities of wastes for disposal; losses of biodiversity, and of natural and cultural landscapes; and over-exploitation of marine ecosystems. **These environmentally unsustainable trends are driven by the high, and increasing, use of basic natural resources that results from traditional patterns of economic growth.**

The basic principle of sustainability, EEACs believe, is that the natural environment has critical and unique values that can seldom be substituted by, or traded for, the economic or social products of civilisation. **Sustainable development can be achieved only if the EU adopts a new concept of development, involving far-reaching modifications in patterns of both production and consumption.** This new concept of development will acknowledge economic needs and social aspirations, but accept protection of the environment and natural resources as fundamental.

By taking the lead in technological and social innovations that decouple economic development from resource use and pollution, the EU can not only improve the quality of life for all its peoples, but also increase the competitiveness of its industries and stimulate employment.

There are many barriers to achieving such a new concept of development. **One major barrier is a general lack of coherence in the EU's existing policies, especially with respect to long-term effects.** Notable examples include perverse subsidies given under the Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds. Fundamental transformations in policies will therefore be required.

EEACs identify the essential elements for success. A sustainable development strategy must have both wide political support and strong backing at the highest levels of government. It needs to be supported by approaches to learning which make full use of people's experiences and creativity. It must look at least 20-25 years into the future. It must address the most important

long-term environmental problems, and establish clear objectives for resolving them, utilising quantified indicators and targets. It has to bridge the gap between global and local levels, and incorporate carefully designed mechanisms that will ensure effective implementation. A sustainable development strategy should have a strong research base. Once it has been adopted, its effectiveness must be monitored continuously and it must be reviewed at regular intervals.

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy must have tangible content. There must be significant changes in the procedures of all European institutions. EEACs believe that:

- The **Cardiff Process** for integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas must continue and be reinforced. The **Lisbon Process**, which aims to integrate social and economic policies through an annual report to the spring EU summit, must be extended to include environmental considerations.
- There should be an **annual review** of the Strategy at the spring EU summit. Each part should be reviewed in detail at least every four years, not least to extend the scope of the Strategy beyond the six initial policy areas identified by the European Commission.
- To secure better co-ordination of policies, the directorates-general of the European Commission should establish a programme of **joint policy reviews**.
- A **Sustainable Development Committee of the European Parliament** should keep under review the extent to which EU policies are environmentally sustainable.
- Where international obligations have been allocated between Member States, the **European Court of Justice** should have powers to impose penalties on any Member State which fails to meet its obligation.

EEACs also propose far-reaching changes to policies in particular sectors. These include:

- *Energy*: The Strategy must focus on the need for very large reductions in carbon dioxide emissions in the long term. That will require a **carbon tax**, with a minimum rate applying throughout the EU, and demanding energy efficiency standards for products and buildings. Energy markets must be structured to encourage low-carbon technologies.
- *Transport*: More ambitious targets are needed to reduce fuel consumption of vehicles. A **high minimum rate of road fuel taxation** must be set at EU level, and backed by other measures to promote less environmentally damaging forms of transport. Market-based instruments should be applied to air transport.
- *Agriculture*: The **Common Agricultural Policy** needs radical reform. Financial support should only be given to farmers who go beyond legal requirements to protect the environment.
- *Industry*: The main focus must be on the **use of materials and energy over the entire life cycles of products**, and on a new strategy for **chemicals**.
- *Nature conservation*: In all forms of land use **promoting biodiversity** should be an objective. To maintain biodiversity and overall productivity, integrated strategies must be adopted for marine ecosystems and coastal zones.

EEACs will draw on the present paper in giving advice to their national and regional governments. They also intend to use it as the basis for a continuing dialogue with the European institutions and other actors about the best ways of moving towards sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

1. The strategy for sustainable development which the European Commission will present to the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001 will be a vital document in establishing both a long-term vision for the European Union (EU) and the capability to realise that vision. It will be important as a declaration of intent. But it must not merely recite bland generalities. To be effective, it must have tangible content covering both changes in the procedures under which all the European institutions operate and changes in the substance of policies. It must also provide for regular monitoring of performance to show progress towards the targets set.

2. The European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEACs) are bodies established by the governments of Member States to provide scientifically based advice on environmental issues. They collaborate for various purposes, one of which is to produce joint statements that will have the most constructive and effective influence on policy development at European level. This paper sets out the views of EEACs about the general orientation of a Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU and also contains specific proposals about its content.

3. EEACs are strongly of the view that the integration of economic and social policies which is taking place under the Lisbon Process, and will be the subject of a report to the Stockholm Summit, must also extend to the environmental dimension of policies, because survival of the natural environment is crucial for economic and social development in the long run. The Sustainable Development Strategy can be the instrument to bring about this further integration of economic, social and environmental concerns.

4. This paper first highlights important environmental trends that are not sustainable (paragraphs 5-9). It then

- sets out basic principles for sustainability (paragraphs 10-14)
- emphasises the need for a new concept of development (paragraphs 15-22)
- discusses how to overcome the barriers that have stood in the way of adopting and implementing sustainable policies (paragraphs 23-31)
- identifies essential elements of an effective sustainable development strategy, in the light of experience already gained at national level (paragraphs 32-53)
- puts forward specific proposals for changes in EU procedures that should form part of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (paragraphs 54-69)
- comments on the European Commission's selection of six topics for initial attention, and proposes new priorities in both those and other areas of policy (paragraphs 70-91)
- considers the special issues arising in relation to the accession countries (paragraphs 92-95).

UNSUSTAINABLE TRENDS

5. The EU and Member States have achieved positive and encouraging results in protecting and improving some aspects of the environment, as the Global Assessment of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme confirms. The more obvious forms of pollution have been reduced, especially pollution from point sources. The Habitats Directive has strengthened the protection for valuable natural reserves. Nevertheless, the overall picture is that today, almost 10 years after the Earth Summit in Rio and almost 30 years after the Stockholm Conference on the Environment, the quality of the environment is deteriorating in many respects.

6. The position has been documented in detail in studies published by the European Environment Agency, such as *Environment in the European Union at the turn of the century* and *Environmental signals 2000*.

7. The unresolved environmental problems take a variety of forms:

a. Climate change poses very serious risks unless the growth in global emissions of greenhouse gases resulting from human activities can be checked and reversed. The growth in carbon dioxide emissions presents the biggest threat. Yet carbon dioxide emissions are still rising in the EU, as a result of increased use of fossil fuels, caused to a large extent by increased mobility. Globally, there has been a serious setback in the failure of the conference in The Hague to agree on the rules needed to operate the Kyoto Protocol, covering a basket of six greenhouse gases. The need is for action in the very near future: the longer the delay before concerted action is taken, the more drastic reductions in emissions will have to be.

b. Though considerable progress has been achieved in reducing emissions of air pollutants from point sources in industry and the energy sector, emissions from diffuse sources still remain at a high level. Thus the exposure of humans to ozone, and of natural habitats to acid deposition, is still far above critical levels in many parts of Europe, and concentrations of particulates remain at worryingly high levels.

c. Soil is a vital natural resource which serves many functions, but has received less attention than other aspects of the environment. Throughout Europe, soil is being lost to urban development, or degraded as a result of inappropriate agricultural methods. In one-third of Europe – notably the southern and Alpine parts – there is a high risk of erosion or desertification. Salinisation of soils is a problem in southern Europe.

d. Despite legislation on hazardous chemicals and reductions in point-source emissions there are still significant concentrations of thousands of synthetic chemicals in the environment, with potential long-term effects on human health and nature. There has been no real progress in the scientific assessment of long-term risks from chemicals – and a precautionary approach has not yet been seriously implemented in the management of chemicals.

e. There are serious problems in the management of *the water cycle*. In many parts of Europe the amount of water being used is approaching, or even exceeding, the amount available. In the southern parts of Europe abstraction is increasing. Moreover, the water table has been lowered, wetlands drained and watercourses regulated in vast areas of Europe in order to accommodate agriculture, infrastructure and urban development, resulting in the loss of many aquatic ecosystems and habitats. At the same time, the risk of disastrous floods has increased, an aspect all the more worrying because of the increased probability of heavy rainfall that will result from climate change. Pollution of groundwater with pesticides, other chemicals and nitrate remains an unresolved problem. Eutrophication of inland and marine waters caused by an excess of nutrients has not been substantially reduced, despite large reductions in emissions of nutrients from sewage works.

f. The amount of *waste* generated is still increasing throughout Europe. The unsatisfactory approach of land-filling is still the major form of waste disposal, especially in southern European countries. Most countries either do not have strategies for minimising waste or are not implementing them effectively.

g. The *diversity of flora and fauna and of natural and cultural landscapes* is still on the retreat because of loss of habitats, uniform methods of intensive agricultural production involving high inputs of fertilizer and pesticides, and widespread introduction of alien species into local ecosystems.

h. *Coastal and marine ecosystems* are an important natural resource, but receive little protection. They are suffering from overexploitation of commercial fish stocks, from large-scale developments taking place along coasts, and from being a sink for pollution from many different sources.

j. More generally, the *quality of life of people in towns and cities* across Europe is being blighted by congestion and pollution.

8. All of these problems are affecting the environment globally, as well as in Europe. But the demands for resources in EU countries, and thus in many respects the amount of damage caused to the environment, far exceed the demands which most countries of the world make on resources. In addition to the damage that present patterns of consumption and production in the EU are causing within Europe, they are also the cause of widespread damage elsewhere in the world.

9. The persisting environmental problems described above are of concern, not only because of the damage that has already occurred and is occurring now, but even more because of the consequences if present policies remain unchanged. Any extrapolation of present trends into the future shows clearly that damage would certainly become much greater.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

10. Why must the trends identified in the previous section be regarded as unsustainable? Human life and wellbeing are dependent on the natural environment and the resources and services it provides. In many cases, the continued availability of those resources and services must be regarded as *critical* for the survival and quality of life of future generations. It is a fundamental moral obligation therefore to protect the natural environment and its ability to supply such resources and services.

11. Moreover, the natural environment is our home, and the living world in all its diversity is of fundamental importance to our dignity as humans. These intrinsic aspects of nature may be termed *unique values*. Together with the *critical values* of the natural environment, they constitute a heritage that a *sustainable* society has to be able to hand on to future generations.

12. In some economic discourses the natural environment is regarded as a capital asset that can be valued on an equal footing with man-made capital. On that view, a society could be considered 'sustainable' if it increased man-made capital faster than it destroyed natural capital. EEACs do not accept that view of the natural environment, nor the inferences that might be drawn from it. The natural environment has unique values, and offers critical resources and services, which can seldom be substituted by, or traded for, the economic or social products of civilisation.

13. At present, the natural environment in the EU and elsewhere is under serious threat. Lack of access to the resources and services it provides is rapidly becoming the limiting factor for economic production. In view of the multiple values attaching to the natural environment, the absence of substitutes for many of those values, and the possibility that damage will be irreversible, it must be an overriding rule of policy to avoid any further reductions in the total amounts of natural capital available to provide resources and services. It may well be necessary to take some actions to increase natural capital, for example by recreating habitats or by reversing desertification in southern Europe.

14. Measured against these basic principles the present situation in the EU, and present trends, are clearly not sustainable. Although achieving sustainable development also involves addressing economic and social needs, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy must reflect the fundamental importance of environmental considerations by identifying and dealing with environmental problems. Even where there still remain significant uncertainties in the analysis of trends and the damage being caused, any responsible decision-maker ought to err on the side of caution in matters of such paramount importance to future generations.

THE NEED FOR A NEW CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

15. The underlying force that drives the present unsustainable trends in the EU is a high and increasing use of the basic natural resources of energy, materials, soil, and terrestrial and marine ecosystems. This correlation between the growth of European economies and expanding demands for natural resources reflects the prevalence of traditional patterns of production and consumption. An important reason why the correlation has continued to be so close is that the prices paid for natural resources do not reflect all the damaging environmental consequences from their use.

16. Because of this increasing use of resources, the overall pressure on the natural environment has not been reduced, even though environmental policies have been successful in some respects. Among the reasons for the relative failure of some past measures which the Commission identified in its Global Assessment of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme were economic and social trends that have led to increased demands for environmentally damaging products. Despite efforts that have been made to improve the efficiency of production methods, the EU's total energy consumption is rising. The same applies to its use of materials.

17. A crucial problem is a general lack of coherence in EU policies in different fields, especially with respect to their long-term effects. The efforts to integrate environmental considerations into all EU policies have made little impact so far. The fundamental importance of the environment, and the basic environmental constraints that must be respected in the interests of future generations, are not yet consistently reflected in EU policies in other fields.

18. Far from countering unsustainable trends, core EU policies have often reinforced them. This factor has received too little attention up to now. EU policies are continuing to provide perverse subsidies which are an incentive for unsustainable behaviour.

19. For example, one of the effects of the Structural Funds is to increase the demands for land. Despite efforts to designate and protect nature reserves, and introduce environmentally oriented land use planning, more and more land is being taken for various forms of development and for transport infrastructure. This gives rise to increasing pressure on nature and wildlife. At the same time, substantial areas of previously urbanised land have been left derelict, and programmes to bring them back into use have been only partially successful. Transport policies have often had the effect of increasing mobility without necessarily improving access.

20. As another example, the original purpose of the Common Agricultural Policy was to maximise agricultural production. It has encouraged agriculture to become more and more intensive in its use of resources. The damaging effects have become increasingly apparent, including most recently the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Although the need for reform has been recognised, and some modifications made through Agenda 2000, no thoroughgoing changes have yet taken place. The incentives to adopt unsustainable agricultural practices still remain.

21. At the same time, the Commission's concern to control state aids to firms has created an obstacle for Member States which wish to provide incentives for actions that would benefit the environment. However, new guidelines issued by the Commission for 2001-07 could in future help to remove this particular obstacle by permitting the provision of aid to certain activities in specific circumstances.

22. The fundamental reason why present trends are unsustainable is that, with present patterns of production and consumption, economic development is associated with an expanding use of natural resources. The challenge confronting the EU and Member States is to move to a new and more sustainable concept of development. This new concept of development will acknowledge economic needs and social aspirations, but also respect the constraints imposed by the requirement to protect the critical and unique values of the natural environment.

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE POLICIES

23. Various economic, social, cultural and political barriers have stood in the way of adopting and implementing sustainable policies. Those barriers must be confronted and overcome if unsustainable trends are to be reversed and the transition to a new and more sustainable concept of development is to be achieved.

24. There is already a broad consensus that environmental problems need to be solved. But the attitude of people generally has been that the actions needed should be taken by someone else, somewhere else, and not yet. The existence of such attitudes is not surprising, given the long time horizons of sustainable development, and the radical departure it represents from the pursuit hitherto of increased material welfare. A change in attitudes is essential however because the responsibility for moving towards sustainable development lies with all members of society and all levels of government.

25. The following have been some of the pervasive barriers to the adoption and implementation of sustainable policies:

a. Economic policies have been based on traditional, but simplistic methods of assessing wealth, such as gross domestic product (GDP); these fail to give a valid picture of the quality of life.

b. The natural environment has been as a means to achieving other objectives, with no recognition that it is also a source of aesthetic pleasure, personal fulfilment, and spiritual experiences.

c. Because the environment has been treated as a free good, the costs of environmental damage have not been assessed and internalised, and decisions have therefore failed to take such damage into account.

d. Success in removing the more obvious forms of pollution has given rise to complacency about the overall effectiveness of environmental policies. Slow processes of long-term deterioration in the environment are often underestimated because they have low visibility, especially if they are caused by emissions from diffuse sources.

e. Many of the environmental problems that remain are complex, and cannot be solved simply by applying known technology.

f. The political power of the old economy, based on intensive use of resources, is often disproportionate to its current and future importance.

g. Public debate may be badly informed, or misinformed, about environmental trends and the challenges they present.

26. All these barriers must be tackled. Success in overcoming them will require the promotion of a coherent vision of society that links together the concept of environmental sustainability with social and economic considerations. That will entail changes in the cultural values that underlie the present concept of development. The natural environment should no longer be treated as a resource that can be exploited to produce continual increases in material welfare regardless of the needs of future generations. It must in future be respected as fundamental for the quality of human life, and moreover as something that has moral standing in its own right.

27. This new concept of development will involve a progressive change in life-styles and patterns of consumption, as well as in patterns of production.

28. In economic and social terms the most forceful argument for this new concept of development is that it will avert or mitigate disastrous consequences in the long term, most obviously the consequences that will follow if effective measures are not taken to limit the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Inevitably, some actions to achieve environmental sustainability will have some adverse economic or social effects; if so, those effects must be carefully assessed and sensitively managed so that the relevant policies will continue to receive public acceptance.

29. Most often, the new concept of development will lead to win-win situations, in which actions to achieve environmental sustainability will also bring economic and social benefits. By taking the lead in technological and commercial innovations that decouple economic growth from resource use and pollution, the EU can simultaneously improve the quality of life for all its peoples, increase the competitiveness of its industries and stimulate employment. The EU Sustainable Development Strategy can, and should, provide European companies with the secure basis for long-term planning which they will need if they are to take full advantage of such opportunities.

30. Although this new concept of development can be described in outline, it is not possible to specify at this early stage what precise forms it will take. It may be brought to reality largely through successive incremental changes, but those changes will have to be in a consistent direction over a long period. The need at this stage is for a firm commitment to move towards long-term sustainability. That will provide the framework within which detailed solutions can be progressively devised and applied through dialogue and partnerships between all citizens and stakeholders.

31. The next section of this paper identifies the essential elements for any effective sustainable development strategy. The following sections make specific proposals for changes in the EU's procedures and policies.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

32. Although countries differ in their constitutions and cultures, the experiences of Member States in drawing up and implementing sustainable development strategies can give valuable pointers to features that will be essential to the success of the EU's Strategy. The EU Strategy must respect the basic principles for sustainability set out above (paragraphs 10-14) and the principles of environmental action contained in the Treaty (paragraph 59). Listed below are what EEACs regard as the other essential elements of such a strategy. Examples are given of some of the approaches that have already been adopted successfully at national level.

Commitment

33. For a sustainable development strategy to be successful, it must have *strong backing at the highest political level*. Moreover, support must be available on a continuing basis. At EU level, it is a welcome sign that the Sustainable Development Strategy has been made a direct responsibility of the President of the Commission. This recognises both that it is important and that it brings together economic, social and environmental concerns.

Experience at national level: high-level commitment in Sweden

In 1997 the Swedish Prime Minister set up a Delegation for Ecologically Sustainable Development consisting of the Ministers for environment, education, employment, agriculture and finance. They issued a report on how Sweden could become more sustainable within one generation (by 2020-25). This will be followed by annual reports on *Sustainable Sweden*. One outcome has been an investment programme of KR 47 billion to create ecological employment.

34. A sustainable development strategy must also be of such a nature that it has *wide political support*, securely grounded in extensive public discussion of sustainability issues. That can be achieved through national councils for sustainable development, high-level stakeholder conferences, joint statements on basic principles of sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 processes. Public discussion of sustainability issues can most usefully take the form of structured dialogues focusing on concrete ideas.

Experience at national level: wide political support in Belgium

An Act passed by the Belgian Parliament in May 1997 created the legal and institutional framework for sustainable development at federal government level. There are four main elements:

- the *Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development*, composed of representatives of all federal ministries under the chairmanship of the Secretary of State for Sustainable Development;
- the *Federal Council for Sustainable Development*, an advisory body composed of representatives of the major social groups and stakeholders. If the government does not follow the Council's advice, it must state publicly its reasons for not doing so;
- *Federal Reports on Sustainable Development*. Every two years the Federal Planning Bureau analyses and assesses the existing situation and existing policies in Belgium in the light of the relevant international commitments, and presents different scenarios and policy options. The first report was published in 1999;
- the *Federal Plan for Sustainable Development*, which proposes measures to be taken at federal level to achieve sustainable development. It is structured along the lines of Agenda 21 and contains indicators of sustainability.

A draft of the plan was published in January 2000. In a consultation period lasting two months more than 2000 citizens and all national stakeholder organisations submitted over 12,000 comments in total. The Federal Council for Sustainable Development also submitted advice. An amended draft was adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2000 and will guide federal government policy for the next few years.

35. There must be *effective communication* to people at large that a strategy exists, and what its key features are. To facilitate this, the EU Strategy should be clear and comprehensible, and positive and inspirational in tone. The Commission should ensure it receives maximum publicity.

Experience at national level: building consensus and raising awareness in Ireland

A National Sustainable Development Strategy for Ireland was published in 1997. To provide a consensus on how sustainable development should be delivered, a National Sustainable Development Partnership was launched in March 1999. A wide consultation exercise was undertaken to determine its structure and detailed objectives. Nominations for membership were invited from 59 national organisations; from these the Minister of Environment and Local Government appointed 25 members for a three-year period. They represent the views of government, industry, environmental and professional groups, and the public (including groups such as women, young people and the unemployed).

36. To facilitate the transition to sustainable life styles and provide a basis for continuing support in future generations, new methods must be adopted to engage people and draw on their life experiences and skills. This requires approaches to learning which bring theory and practice together in a unified process. Provision of information by technical experts is not sufficient; there must also be strong grassroots involvement.

37. As part of a sustainable development strategy, innovative approaches to learning should be incorporated into the *educational curriculum*. Programmes directed at adults should address business practices, personal behaviour and consumption, and the implications for public policy at all levels. Programmes will have to be established to train staff to adopt such approaches.

Experience at national level: educating UK children about sustainability

The UK government set up a Sustainable Development Education Panel in February 1998. In accordance with its recommendations, education for sustainable development is now one of the aims of the national curriculum in schools. Children will gain an ‘awareness and understanding of, and respect for, the environments in which they live, and [a] commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level’.

Clear focus

38. A sustainable development strategy must address the most important environmental problems and establish *clear objectives* for dealing with those problems. By doing so it sets new political agendas. Drawing up and promulgating an explicit strategy is especially important in relation to environmental problems that are of a long-term nature or not immediately apparent. The most significant environmental problems to be covered in any sustainable development strategy have been identified in the earlier section on ‘Unsustainable trends’.

Experience at national level: setting objectives for environmental quality in Sweden

In April 1999 the Swedish Parliament agreed 15 national environmental quality objectives covering, among other things, efficient use of resources, chemicals, transport, acidification, climate change, reduction of emissions, preservation of biodiversity, planning, and local and regional environmental effort. The government had appointed a Committee on Environmental Objectives to develop comprehensive proposals on intermediate targets, strategies and policy instruments to achieve the 15 objectives. The Committee co-operated for that purpose with more than 20 relevant government agencies and all Sweden’s county administrative boards. This has hopefully made the different sectors more aware of the environmental relevance of their own strategies and decisions, and increased their sense of responsibility. A separate Commission for Measures against Climate Change has dealt specifically with that key issue.

Target-setting and monitoring

39. As part of the strategy, the key environmental constraints must be identified and given tangible expression in the form of *quantified indicators*.

Experience at national level: the UK's sets of indicators

The UK has developed a comprehensive set of some 150 sustainable development indicators to measure progress towards economic, social and environmental sustainability. A group of 15 'headline indicators' has also been selected to resonate with the public and give an overview of progress. The headline indicators cover economic output, investment, employment, poverty/social exclusion, education, health, housing, crime, climate change, waste, air quality, road traffic, river water quality, wildlife and land use. Annual reports will be published on the state of the headline indicators. The first report was published in January 2001. A supplementary report showed the state of the headline indicators at regional level.

40. The *core set of headline indicators* must be of manageable size (not more than about 20). These core indicators should reflect the chosen priorities, so that policy makers and the wider public can readily understand the significance of changes. This core set must include some indicators for the functioning of ecosystems; these can provide evidence about the combined impact of different environmental pressures.

41. All the selected indicators must be reviewed at regular intervals to confirm that they continue to provide a valid representation of environmental conditions, and that their use is not in itself introducing distortions. They must include sectoral indicators that make different actors directly aware of their responsibilities for bringing about the changes in their activities that are required if sustainable development is to be achieved. The selected indicators must be accepted wholeheartedly by all sectors; they provide the framework for the crucial exercise of integrating environmental factors into other policies and the benchmarks for assessing how effective such integration has been.

42. For each quantified indicator one or more *targets* must be set, with the aim of halting and reversing current unsustainable trends. Targets may take the form either of limit values that must not be exceeded or of goals for improvements in a particular aspect of the environment that has suffered damage. Decisions about what targets to set, and the levels at which they are set, should take into account scientific, technological and economic analyses, people's values, assessed risks, and the methods available for implementation. The targets set must likewise be accepted by all sectors. At whatever tier of government they are set, targets for parameters that are crucial indicators of sustainability must be endorsed at the highest political level, to ensure they have the necessary credibility and force.

Linking the global to the local

43. Some environmental problems can be tackled effectively at local or regional or national level. Others require common action at European level for their solution. Some problems, such as climate change, cannot be solved ultimately unless concerted action is taken at global level.

44. Any government adopting a sustainable development strategy must take full account of environmental damage caused outside its own area as a result of activities carried on within its area. Developed countries have a clear responsibility to take the lead in tackling global problems which they have played a disproportionate part in causing. Moreover, international diffusion of national best practice will be an essential driving force in the development of global capacities for environmental protection.

Successful implementation

45. Successful implementation of a sustainable development strategy depends on establishing clear objectives (paragraph 38) and targets for progress towards those objectives (paragraph 42), but also crucially on integrating environmental considerations into policies in other sectors, the effective choice of instruments, and the full involvement of stakeholders. Integration and involvement can often be secured most effectively if a policy can be designed to achieve several objectives simultaneously, for example reducing environmental damage and providing new employment.

Experience at national level: boosting employment in Germany

An ambitious programme to make German buildings more energy-efficient started in January 2001. It was developed by a working group on the employment potential of environmental protection measures set up by the Alliance for Employment (*Bündnis für Arbeit*, a structured dialogue between government, industry, unions and other organisations). The primary aim is to improve the insulation of old buildings and replace inefficient heating systems. The programme, carried out by the German Reconstruction Loan Corporation (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau*), will offer loans totalling DM10 billion at a favourable rate of interest over a five-year period. It is expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 2 million tonnes a year and create about 90,000 new jobs.

46. In some contexts the crucial step will be to put in place *legally binding instruments*. There may be a need however to leave some flexibility in order to accommodate differences in circumstances, which can mean that the measures required to achieve sustainability in one situation are not the same as those required to achieve sustainability in another situation. One approach, which may be satisfactory if there are clear targets and efficient mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement, is to set a framework but leave some discretion in interpretation and implementation. Where the differences in circumstances between different geographical areas are substantial, that may well be a reason for applying the principle of subsidiarity.

47. Legislation which clarifies or extends the *legal liability* for causing environmental damage can contribute to sustainable development by reducing the scope for conflict between financial self-interest and the courses of action that would be least damaging to the environment.

48. For similar reasons *economic instruments* can make a powerful contribution to achieving sustainable development. The first priority is that both the EU and national governments should stop giving subsidies to activities that are environmentally damaging, for example in the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy. Instead, green taxes should be levied on damaging activities in order to internalise the costs they impose on the environment. In many contexts green taxes can most appropriately be levied by national governments, but in some contexts there is a strong case for EU legislation, in order to prevent distortions in competition arising between Member States and avoid any risk that activities might be transferred between states in order to avoid paying tax. It may be necessary to take measures to protect vulnerable groups in society against increases in the prices of goods or services caused by the introduction of green taxes.

Experience at national level: use of economic instruments in Sweden

The Swedish budget for 2001 is the first step in a 10-year programme to achieve a 'green tax shift'. The carbon dioxide tax on fossil fuels and the energy tax on electricity have been increased; and the additional revenue is being used to reduce payroll tax and income tax. Tax incentives in the environmental field have been used for a long time in Sweden; the carbon dioxide tax was introduced in 1991, and taxes were also introduced on sulphur in fuels and on nitrogen oxides emitted from combustion plants. Tax incentives have been given to use less polluting grades of diesel and petrol; and the tax on new cars is graduated according to their environmental classification. Sweden also levies taxes for environmental reasons on fertilisers, pesticides, waste and natural gravel.

49. *Self-regulation* can make an especially appropriate and effective contribution to sustainable development because it encourages firms to take the initiative in devising and adopting more sustainable ways of doing things. It may take the form of initiatives by firms or agreements negotiated between firms and the state. Self-regulation may draw strength from new types of standard, in areas such as eco-labelling, environmental management and green procurement. Ultimately, it is desirable that policies should be based on analysing the environmental impact of a product over its entire life cycle.

50. It is vital to find ways to speed up the development and introduction of *new and cleaner technologies*. Statutory regulation has an important role to play, in the shape of technology-forcing or commercialisation-forcing standards set to come into force at specified future dates. This approach has already been successfully applied to limits on motor vehicle emissions.

Experience at national level: legislation to promote new technologies in Germany

The German Renewable Energy Act of 1999 obliges network operators to purchase electricity from renewable sources and sets minimum prices of DM 0.99/kWh for photovoltaic cells and DM 0.13-0.18/kWh for other renewable sources. Setting minimum prices that take into account the costs of generation stimulated a massive boom in electricity from renewable sources. The present growth rate would be more than sufficient to achieve the Act's target of doubling by 2010 the proportion of electricity obtained from renewable sources. A striking feature of the Act was the broad alliances that supported it, both in Parliament (where it was first proposed) and outside (with support from the powerful German Peasant Association and the German Machinery and Plant Manufacturing Association, as well as environmental groups).

Time horizon

51. Sustainable development strategies are concerned with sustainability in the long term. They must assess trends over a period extending at least 20-25 years into the future. And many of the solutions they put forward to the problems thus revealed will also be of a long-term nature, because of the radical changes involved. These long time horizons create dilemmas for policy: forecasts for such long periods ahead are that much more uncertain, and responsibility will pass through many hands. Nevertheless, it is an essential prerequisite that policies for sustainable development should be consistent in key areas over a period that considerably exceeds the terms of office of governments or Commissions. Equally, there must be clear milestones in the form of quantified targets for intermediate dates, so that it will be possible to check regularly that policies are indeed on the right track to achieve the long-term objectives.

Evaluation and review

52. Following the adoption of a sustainable development strategy, there should be systematic monitoring of the indicators (paragraphs 39-41) to show performance against the targets set (paragraph 4). Indicators of environmental performance must be published regularly. The strategy must be evaluated at regular intervals, in the light of monitoring and in conjunction with a wide range of stakeholders. If necessary, it should be modified to make it more effective. As part of these reviews, consideration should also be given to the need to extend the strategy to cover further priority areas.

Research

53. To support the strategy there must be a strong basis of research and analysis. This must cover not only environmental trends and their causes, and the development of cleaner technologies, but the extent to which more sustainable policies have been successfully adopted and the reasons for any failures in that respect.

CHANGES IN PROCEDURES

54. The successful achievement of sustainable development will require modifications to the EU's mechanisms for governance to make them more effective. In addition to changes in the way things are done at European level, there also need to be changes in the mechanisms for articulating and co-ordinating policies between different levels of government. The Sustainable Development Strategy should include the key changes in procedures set out below. Where procedural changes needed to achieve sustainability do not fall within the current provisions of the Treaty, appropriate amendments to the Treaty may need to be promoted.

Drawing up and implementing the EU Strategy

55. In order to establish the framework within which sectoral Councils and directorates-general must operate, the key objectives, indicators and targets for sustainability must be set or endorsed by *European Summits*.

56. Monitoring and review of the Sustainable Development Strategy must be integrated with the *Lisbon Process*. The Strategy should therefore be reviewed in spring each year at a European Summit, in conjunction with the economic and social guidelines. Each part of the Strategy should be subjected to review at least every four years under a rolling programme.

57. The preparation for such reviews must be a responsibility of the *President of the European Commission*. Reviews of the Sustainable Development Strategy should cover assessment of the effectiveness of the measures previously included, the addition of further measures, and extension of the Strategy to further policy areas. The last aspect is especially important in view of the proposal that the Strategy should concentrate initially on a limited number of policy areas.

58. Many formations of the *Council of Ministers* have made progress towards integrating environmental considerations into policies in their particular sector. All Councils must be encouraged and assisted to take this work forward. That entails confronting the extent to which current trends in their particular sector are unsustainable (taking into account targets set for moving towards sustainability and the points about particular EU policies made in the following section of this paper), and fulfilling their responsibility to devise and enact policies that will set the EU on a more sustainable course for the future.

59. Existing procedures for carrying out and making publicly available *environmental assessments* of EU legislation and other EU activities should be evaluated, and if necessary modified and extended to make them more effective. Every such assessment should explicitly consider whether the relevant legislation or activity complies with the principles of environmental action contained in the Treaty, in particular:

- by contributing to the objectives of preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment, protecting human health, and the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources;

- by achieving a high level of protection;
- by adhering to the four principles of precaution, prevention, rectification at source and polluter pays.

60. Achieving sustainable development must be the concern of all directorates-general of the European Commission. Individual directorates-general should co-operate with each other to carry out a programme of *joint policy reviews* in order to ensure that particular EU policies are making the maximum contribution to sustainable development. In these reviews the assessment of sustainability must be made primarily by reference to quantified indicators. The programme for such reviews should be a central part of the Sustainable Development Strategy. The target should be that all existing EU policies will have been rigorously assessed for their contribution to sustainability within four years.

61. In developing, implementing and reviewing all policies, the European Commission should undertake *wide consultation involving the full range of stakeholders*. In particular, environmental groups should be given parity with producer groups and scientific experts in consultations in such policy areas as agriculture or regulation of pesticides or other chemicals. The Commission may well need to take further measures to raise awareness and enlist support for the EU Strategy by bringing into being deliberative fora of innovative kinds which are cross-national and/or focussed on sectors for which the Strategy has major implications. The Commission should explore the possibility of employing procedures such as citizens' juries or consensus conferences to articulate people's values and help it arrive at appropriate responses to especially complex or contentious issues.

62. A main function of the *European Environment Agency* (EEA) must be regular monitoring of the indicators of sustainability. Monitoring must be done on a co-ordinated basis across the EU and Member States. The results of monitoring, and the implications of those results, should be set out clearly in an annual report submitted by the Agency to the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Consideration should be given to extending the EEA's monitoring role to embrace the full set of indicators for sustainable development, not only environmental indicators.

63. The *European Parliament* must establish an effective capability for keeping under review the extent to which the EU's policies are environmentally sustainable. For this purpose consideration should be given to establishing a new Sustainable Development Committee of the Parliament. The Parliament should be given the formal role of nominating parts of the Strategy for review or new policy areas for inclusion in it.

64. *All European institutions* must ensure that their internal operations, for example their use of materials and energy, have the minimum impact on the environment. They should also design their procurement policies in such a way as to help create new markets for innovative, less environmentally damaging technologies.

65. *EU educational programmes* (such as Comenius, Leonardo and Socrates) should be used to raise awareness among EU citizens about the importance of sustainability and how it can be achieved.

66. The EU's *Framework Programmes for Research and Development* should be used to fund research in support of the Strategy and to accelerate the emergence of cleaner technologies. The directorates-general responsible for particular areas of policy should make a full contribution to decisions on the content of such programmes.

Allocating targets and global responsibility

67. A particular environmental parameter may be affected significantly by EU policies in several sectors. For example, emissions of carbon dioxide come from transport and electricity generation, and also from the burning of fossil fuels by end users. Losses of precious habitats have been caused by agriculture and by construction of new transport infrastructure. Overall targets for the environment must therefore be converted into achievable targets for the environmental performance of designated sectors. To allow a margin for error and prevent slippage, those sectoral targets, taken together, must be more than sufficient to ensure that the overall target will be met.

68. Where concerted global action is required to counter a particular environmental threat, the EU may have to exercise leadership in order to build a sufficient degree of consensus globally, and in order to establish an adequate international capability for co-ordinating such action and keeping it under review. The EU will then have to decide what share of the total burden it can appropriately carry. Where significant matters are the responsibility of Member States, the European Commission will have to work closely with the Council of Ministers in order to determine what targets are appropriate for the EU as a whole, and how those targets should then be apportioned between policies which are the EU's responsibility and those which are the responsibility of Member States.

69. Where an international obligation is allocated in agreed proportions between Member States (as will be the case, for example, following the ratification and entering into force of the Kyoto Protocol), the European Court of Justice should have power, on an application by the European Commission, to impose penalties on any Member State which fails to meet its obligation. However, it may not be appropriate or justifiable to allocate the whole of such a target to individual Member States if achievement of that target in practice depends to a substantial extent on EU policies and legislation.

CHANGES IN POLICIES

70. It is understood the European Commission envisages that the Sustainable Development Strategy will focus initially on six areas of policy, and has it in mind to propose the following areas as the basis for consultation:

poverty and social exclusion

public health

demography

climate change and energy

natural resources

mobility and land use.

Within each broad area the focus will be several more specific issues.

71. EEACs are strongly of the view that the Strategy must contain a list of policy changes that are priorities in order to achieve sustainable development in the longer term. They would support a proposal that it should initially cover a limited range of policy areas, if the aim is to concentrate attention and make a substantial difference to policies and trends in those areas within a short period. There must also be a clear recognition however that there are many other vital issues for sustainability in addition to those initially selected, and that the Strategy will also have to turn its attention to these at an early date.

72. It is also vital that the Strategy should take a broad view of EU policies. Although the key challenges to sustainability are usually addressed separately, they are often interdependent. The Strategy should be able to encompass, and bring about substantial changes in, the interactions and linkages that are crucial for sustainability, without being restricted by the traditional compartments into which EU policies have been divided. From this perspective the list above appears to represent a broadly sensible choice, on the assumption that the 'natural resources' area will embrace biodiversity, agriculture and fisheries. EEACs reserve the right to offer more specific comments when the European Commission consults on the selection of priority areas.

73. The six areas listed can be divided crudely into social issues (the first three) and environmental issues (the last three). But all six also have significant or major economic dimensions. Moreover, environmental problems have major implications for public health, and environmental damage may exacerbate poverty and social exclusion.

74. As the mandates and expertise of EEACs relate to environmental issues, the proposals in this section for the policy changes that EEACs consider necessary are also addressed to the environmental dimension of sustainability. They are set out below by sector.

Energy

75. Energy policies must focus on the need to make very large reductions in EU carbon dioxide emissions in the long term, while at the same time leaving scope for the legitimate aspirations of developing countries for economic growth. The reductions in the Kyoto Protocol are a modest first step, and would certainly have to be followed by larger reductions after 2012. Yet the EU will not achieve even the reductions required by the Kyoto Protocol unless this issue is taken more seriously by the European Commission and by Member States. Following the failure of the conference at The Hague, it is now more than ever necessary that the EU should play a leading role in international negotiations and in trying to find generally acceptable positions. To play such a role credibly and successfully, it must first establish convincing and robust policies to comply with the Kyoto limits.

76. To that end, further efforts must be made to establish a carbon tax, with a minimum rate applying throughout the EU. To exert further pressure for reductions in emissions, carbon dioxide should be formally classified as a pollutant for the purposes of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive. There should be new and demanding energy efficiency standards for products and for buildings, under a unified system.

77. The liberalised electricity market must be structured in a way that encourages the development of renewable energy sources and combined heat and power schemes. That may involve giving the operators of distribution networks an innovative new role as network managers and facilitators. Additional incentives will also have to be provided for renewable energy sources and combined heat and power schemes, and these should encourage development of such schemes by local communities. The environmental side-effects of renewable energy sources should be taken into account, as well as the environmental damage resulting from extraction and conversion of energy carriers, including domestic hard coal and lignite.

Transport

78. Current lifestyles are based on high levels of mobility, and therefore place heavy demands on resources. Transport policies must focus on the need for large reductions in carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions, but also respond to the other respects in which the present growth in traffic is not sustainable. Further targets must be set for reducing the fuel consumption of vehicles, beyond the levels that will be achieved under the existing voluntary agreements with car manufacturers. However, technical changes in vehicles will not be sufficient on their own; an evolution in business practices and personal lifestyles will also be necessary. Taxes on road fuels reflect the other external effects of vehicle use, over and above the carbon dioxide emitted: EU legislation should set a high minimum rate for such taxes in all Member States. There is an urgent need to control the environmental impact from growth in air transport; and a fuel tax or emissions trading could play a vital role in that respect.

79. Use of less environmentally damaging modes of transport must be increased. The EU can encourage a transfer of freight from road to short sea routes or to rail. The environmental impacts of big infrastructure projects (road, canal or rail) should be thoroughly assessed, and comparisons made between alternative modes, before specific proposals are put forward. Transport projects supported by the Structural Funds must be critically examined to determine whether the outcome can be regarded as sustainable.

Industry

80. Emissions of pollutants to the environment from industrial processes have been reduced. The need now is to focus on the use of materials and energy in industrial production. That should be assessed over the whole life cycles of products, including the wastes produced when they reach the end of their life. European industries have much to gain from leading the way in devising and applying production methods, and designing and marketing products, that are less resource-intensive and which do not involve toxic substances. Their future competitiveness in world markets may depend on their ability to do so. Clear and far-sighted environmental policies can be a major factor in fostering that ability. The Commission's Green Paper on integrated product policy marks an important step forward in this area. Hopefully, it will be followed quickly by legislation.

81. There is considerable scope for improving the management of risks from chemicals. The present EU assessment procedure is inefficient and an alternative approach has to be found. This must be based on the precautionary principle, and may incorporate deadlines for phasing out certain substances currently used. It should be possible to place restrictions on groups of chemicals, rather than individual substances, if they have certain inherent properties, for example carcinogenicity or a combination of persistence and bioaccumulability. There are, however, a large number of less dangerous substances for which individual assessments will continue to be appropriate, and there is therefore also a pressing need to improve present rules and models for risk assessment and risk management. Statutory backing should be given to 'product stewardship' programmes; stringent requirements should be placed on chemical companies for data collection on health and environmental properties of chemical substances and for preliminary risk assessment and risk management. All regulatory procedures for the marketing and use of chemicals should include the criterion of comparison with the risk presented by other available substances.

Agriculture

82. The Common Agricultural Policy is a glaring example of an EU policy which provides perverse subsidies that encourage damage to the environment. The basic principles of future policies should be to give farmers financial support if they go beyond the legal requirements to protect nature and the environment, but no longer provide general support. Agenda 2000 should be seen as only a start; more radical changes are needed for the longer term. Agricultural policy should give support to maintaining regional and local landscape character, to sustaining local communities, to protecting and extending biodiversity, and to protecting soils and aquatic ecosystems. In the last respect, agricultural policy should operate within the framework of wider policies aimed at reducing acidification of soils, limiting concentrations of heavy metals and persistent organic compounds in soils, preventing eutrophication of water caused by excess nutrients, preventing physical impacts such as erosion or compaction of soils, and limiting emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere. EU agriculture, energy and environmental policies should be co-ordinated in exploring the potential for encouraging cultivation of energy crops, and in assessing environmental side-effects and the overall energy balance.

83. The risk assessment procedure for GMOs should be reformed according to the following principles:

- a. the long-term ecological risks from GMOs must be included in the overall risk assessment, and there must be a permanent system for ecological monitoring of GMOs and their impacts;
- b. the precautionary principle must be applied in the regulatory process;
- c. the views of citizens must be introduced and respected in the key stages of the regulatory process, in parallel with sources of scientific advice;
- d. risk assessment and regulation must be transparent to the public, with reasons given for every decision.

These principles are not met to a sufficient degree in the new proposal for risk assessment now negotiated in the EU.

84. There are some signs that the response to the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) could be a fundamental reappraisal of the approach adopted in agriculture, with a resulting shift to methods that are less damaging to the environment. The Commission should be alert to opportunities to take advantage of, and foster, any such trend.

Nature conservation

85. Policies in all fields must have regard to the EU Biodiversity Strategy; and indicators, targets and timetables must be established to promote biodiversity in the longer term. The promotion of biodiversity is desirable as an objective in all forms of land use. The provision and maintenance of green spaces in towns and cities can make a significant contribution to increasing biodiversity as well as improving the health of people living in urban areas. It will be important to achieve the target in the draft Sixth Environmental Action Programme that Natura 2000 should be fully implemented on 15% of EU territory by 2004; but that should not detract from the importance given to conservation on other land, especially forests and other semi-natural habitats outside designated areas. Policies to promote biodiversity must not be so designed that they cause social problems of depopulation in remote areas. To complement Natura 2000, a trans-European network of 'green frontiers' should be created along the political frontiers within the EU, with the aim of simultaneously promoting nature conservation, sustainable development, and social and cultural contacts. Future nature conservation policy will have to take into account the possible migrations and transformations of ecosystems as a result of climate change.

Coastal zone management

86. The Council and the Parliament should give their full support to the Commission's recommendation on strategy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management. This will commit Member States to take stock of their policies and develop national strategies for sustainable development in coastal zones. They are invited to submit progress reports two years after the recommendation is adopted; and the Commission must consider how it can best promote

effective implementation of best practice by Member States. For its part, the Commission should ensure that all proposals affecting coastal zones which it puts forward, in particular under the Structural Funds, will be fully compatible with sustainable development. The promotion of biodiversity should be seen as a desirable objective throughout the territorial waters of Member States; and nature conservation should be the prime policy objective in areas which are crucial to the life cycle of rare or threatened species or in which a valued habitat is at risk.

Fisheries

87. Fishing activity and the capacity of fishing fleets must be brought into line with resources. That will require a reduction of at least 40% in total activity, and more drastic reductions in the case of some fisheries. The review of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2002 may be the last opportunity to achieve sustainable solutions to this longstanding problem. Relating conservation measures primarily to individual fish stocks has proved to be insufficient. Commercial fish stocks are unlikely to recover unless an integrated approach to conservation is adopted, designed to maintain the overall biodiversity and productivity of the marine ecosystems on which they depend. Adequate measures must be put in place to deal with the social and economic issues involved in transition to a sustainable fishing industry.

Tourism

88. Over and above the adoption of sustainable transport policies and specific measures to protect coastal zones, the European Commission should promote a sustainable approach to tourism. This should embrace sound territorial and land use planning, determination of carrying capacities, consistency with related urban and rural developments, respect for the distinctive characters of natural and cultural areas, and tackling seasonality. There must be a narrowing of the gulf between the customer countries (where most of the profits from tourism are realised) and the destinations for tourists, where the bulk of environmental damage from tourism occurs.

89. The EU should press for full implementation of the Alpine Convention and its protocols in order to protect Alpine landscapes, flora and fauna against aggressive tourist development and exploitation of natural resources.

Trade policy

90. The EU must continue to take the lead in trying to secure a better integration of environmental issues into international trade negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Environmental policy objectives should also be taken into account when trade promotion instruments are being applied. The EU should bring about a reform of the export credit guarantee system based on a minimum list of common environmental standards and criteria. A list of categorical prohibitions on financing through EU export credit agencies has to be established.

POSITION OF THE ACCESSION COUNTRIES

91. The position of the accession countries needs special consideration. In some respects they have suffered more severe environmental damage than the existing Member States. Their countryside on the other hand has often been less affected by the kinds of pressures for intensive production that have caused so much damage elsewhere. At the moment they are facing severe and acute pressures on the environment, in the form of construction of new infrastructure, increases in private transport and in energy consumption for other purposes, and a general rise in consumption and resource use.

92. One aim of the Sustainable Development Strategy should be achieving equity in quality of life throughout the enlarged EU. The implication is that increases in production, resource use and transport within the accession countries might have to be offset by reductions within existing Member States; and that the European Commission and present Member States may have to provide assistance to the accession countries to help them towards sustainable development.

93. It may be possible for the accession countries to move more rapidly from the traditional conception of economic growth, based on heavy consumption of energy and materials, to the new concept of development advocated here. In the countryside, it will be crucial to protect the present biodiversity and cultural values by promoting environmentally sustainable models of integrated rural development.

94. In some respects existing Member States may be able to learn from the accession countries. In the long run the most valuable forms of assistance the accession countries can receive may well be access to innovative technologies that make fewer demands on resources and enhancement of their capabilities for full participation of stakeholders and citizens in all aspects of policymaking.

CONCLUSION

95. This paper sets out the reasons why EEACs believe a fundamental transformation is needed in order to put Europe on the path to a sustainable future. There are fundamental problems threatening the future of the European environment, and therefore the future economic and social development of Europe. Because those problems are of a long-term nature, and in many cases are not easily observable, their significance is not always sufficiently appreciated. There are solutions available, but they will depend on adopting a new concept of development. By taking that route, the EU can increase the competitiveness of its industries and stimulate employment, while at the same time improving the quality of life for its current population, and fulfilling the moral obligations that exist towards nature and towards future generations.

96. The full commitment of Member States will be needed, and in many spheres the measures required to move towards sustainability may fall primarily to them. But, as this paper has demonstrated, the European institutions have a crucial role to play in promoting this new concept of sustainable development. They are in the position to create appropriate legal frameworks and transform markets. They must also remove the barriers to sustainability that are inherent in the EU's own present strategies and policies.

97. Moreover, EEACs see the EU Sustainable Development Strategy as a major input to the Rio + 10 process at global level. By charting the progress towards sustainability being made by the world's largest economic grouping, it will contribute to the decisions that have to be made about the priorities for global action in the years ahead.

98. Over and above the immediate purpose of this paper in setting out their views about the scope and content of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU, EEACs hope that it will form the basis for a wide-ranging and productive dialogue with the European institutions and with other actors, extending well beyond the Gothenburg Summit, about the best ways of moving towards sustainability.





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