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"Greening Sustainable Development Strategies"
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Presentation by John Hontelez, Secretary General EEB

The environmental movement has been the strongest supporter of the Brundtland Commission and of earlier advocates of sustainable development. For us it has been clear for many years that an isolated environmental policy cannot cope with the continuous increase of pressure on the environment due to the production and consumption patterns that are so characteristic for the industrialised countries. It is essential for the survival of mankind that these patterns change, and in order to have a chance of public acceptance and involvement, the policies to make this change must be based on social fairness, inclusiveness and global solidarity.

The EEB has therefore been a leader in the "Greening the Treaty" campaign leading to the Amsterdam Treaty. This Treaty introduced Sustainable Development in the objectives of the Union. And we have been pushing afterwards for concrete steps to go from words to action. The call from the Helsinki Summit for a Strategy clearly was a success in which we claim to have played a role, through our work with the Environment Council and the Presidency.

As EEB we are not impressed by the progress made so far in the Commission preparing for this Strategy. President Prodi has made it clear to us, on two occasions, that he has problems with this theme. It is not concrete enough, he told us. In response, we have, as EEB and in coalitions, tried to support the Commission in 2000. We did this in three ways:

- Challenge the Commission as a whole to move on with this. We have addressed ourselves to all Commissioners, as they have a collective responsibility in this.

- Present options to connect the Strategy with the 5year Strategic Objectives the Commission presented at its inauguration in 1999, in particular in the document: "Shaping the new Europe, Working towards sustainable development", September 2000.
- Mobilise non-environmental stakeholders for this strategy, this includes trade-unions, social and consumer organisations, churches, public health institutions, as well as industrialists. An example is their involvement in a two-day seminar the EEB organised together with the Swedish Environment Minister in Stockholm, mid November. At the moment we are collecting contributions from such stakeholders for publication end of March, also to see to what extent we have common views and demands, for presentation to the Commission in April.

SOME KEY ISSUES FROM THE EEB'S VIEWPOINT

I would like to present nine important elements to you today:

1. We want the Goteborg Summit to clearly confirm that an economically and socially sound European future is dependent on the long term availability of natural resources, and this includes clean air, clean and sufficient water, fertile soils, fishstocks and other elements of biodiversity. This means that one cannot simply say that Sustainable Development has three pillars of equal importance. It is important that the Summit confirms the specific nature of the ecological pillar, in fact more of a fundament for the other two, because in particular representatives of industry tend to abuse the three pillars approach by calling for integration of economic concerns into environmental policies, that they find too extreme. Also in Commission documents one finds all too often still a reduction of sustainability to an issue of "quality of life". So the point I am making is not superfluous.
Consequence of our position is that we want the principles of prevention and precaution to be strengthened, together with the reversal of the burden of proof.
2. We need a very clear declaration that all policies of the EU need to be turned towards sustainability. This is the so-called "coherence" requirement, unfortunately lacking in the plans of the Commission currently. We see as priority areas for such coherence:
 - agriculture policies: target: the 2003 mid-term review of the CAP
 - Structural Funds/Cohesion Policy: in particular changes are needed in the infrastructural projects: to be realised by 2003
 - Public Procurement: complete integration of environmental and social objectives in the EU-legislation, and not related to products but also production methods. Exemptions should be based on an open and fair debate with regards to interests of developing countries, and granted for a limited period only.
 - Reform of subsidy policies on the EU and National levels so that they work for instead of against the environment. Apart from agriculture the energy sector is a special target.
 - Fully integrate sustainable development objectives in EU's research programmes.

3. Recognition of a lead role for the Union and its governments in changing consumption patterns. This means priority for demand side management, environmental tax reforms, labelling, land-use management. An initiative to fight the negative impact of advertisement. The Swedish example of a ban on commercial advertisement addressed to children of less than 12 years old needs copying.
4. The Strategy should have an explicit "external affairs" dimension. The EU is an economic and technological worldpower. Its decisions on agriculture, industry, climate policies have global consequences. In particular the international agreements on trade and the growing domination of a small group of gigantic corporations, many of them rooted in the EU, are themes one needs to take into account here. We want to see a clear action programme leading to real integration of environmental interests into EU trade policy.
5. The Strategy can only change something if it is actively supported and co-implemented by authorities on all levels, as well as the general public. It will not be possible to reach full consensus, but one needs to have a critical mass that actively participates. Therefore it is regrettable that in preparation for Goteborg there are just a few weeks available for public discussion with the Commission. To compensate for this, Goteborg should be a clear presentation of the conviction of Europe's political leaders that the Strategy is needed and attractive. An event that shows that these leaders share a vision and are prepared to fight for it. Something comparable with their leadership role in realising the Euro and the crucial decisions that triggered off the current enlargement process. Goteborg should as well be a clear invitation for a transparent and inclusive follow up.
6. Something more on the follow up: in principle we agree with the idea to blend the Strategy follow up with the Lisbon process of social and economic modernisation. We consider it however meaningful if the proposal would be to integrate the Lisbon process into the (wider) Sustainable Development Strategy, and not the opposite.
7. A very important point is the fact that this Strategy is focussed at an EU of some 27 countries, not the current 15. That has big consequences. If one looks at the 6 themes the Commission wants to concentrate on, you can see that immediately. Poverty and social exclusion mean dramatically different things in Romania than in Austria or Sweden. The same goes for the ageing society, as most CEE countries already now take care of their elderly. And also the environmental themes need special treatment in the accession countries. So it is regrettable the Commission does not include this. As EEB we have proposed to at least invite the heads of government of the accession countries to the debate in Goteborg.
8. "Greening the Economy" should be one of the strongest messages of Goteborg. This brings together several issues I have mentioned already: environmental tax reforms, subventions, public procurement, labelling, etc. The market should start working FOR the environment and social objectives, not against. This needs strong leadership, in visionary and practical terms.

9. Finally: The four environmental related themes the Commission is focussing on for the Strategy can one find in the 6th Environmental Action Programme, published in January, as well. This Programme is somewhat disappointing. In most areas the Commission does not propose the Parliament and Council to fix clear targets and timetables. We need such clear benchmarks, like Factor 4 and Factor 10, to create the necessary political pressure. Given the parallels between the Programme and the Strategy, the same approach should be part of the Strategy.

