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*Challenges and Opportunities for
Sustainable Development in EU 25*

Sustainable Development Conference

Kinsale, County Cork, Ireland

15 - 16 April 2004

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

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I The Conference in Context

1. Enlargement of the European Union to 25 member states in May 2004 presents new challenges and opportunities for revitalising and refocusing sustainable development policy. At EU level, there is a commitment to review the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) in 2004 and there will be a mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005; at national level, most EU 25 countries have prepared national sustainable development strategies and, in the remaining cases, work in this regard is underway. (The Annex to this Summary contains general information from the Commission on progress with national sustainable development strategies in EU 25). Accordingly, now is the time to forge stronger and closer connections between national and EU policies to make sustainable development more of a reality. This will, *inter alia*, serve to demonstrate the EU's international leadership on sustainable development.
2. Against this background, and as part of Ireland's EU Presidency, the Irish Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and *Comhar*, Ireland's National Sustainable Development Partnership, hosted a conference on sustainable development – entitled *Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development in EU 25* – in Kinsale, County Cork, Ireland on 15-16 April 2004. The conference was organised with valuable assistance from the European Commission, the UK and Netherlands Governments, and the European Environment Advisory Councils (EEAC) network.
3. The conference addressed the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in an enlarged EU. It built on the outcome of earlier related events in The Hague on *National Strategies for Sustainable Development: Facts, Faces and Future Challenges* (June 2002) and in Vienna on *Sustainable Development in an Enlarged Union: Linking National Strategies and Strengthening European Coherence* (April 2003).

II Purpose of the Conference

4. The purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity to:
 - consider the planned review of the SDS, explore linkages between EU and national sustainable development strategies, take stock of progress in implementation, and highlight best practice and innovative processes;
 - examine ways of moving towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production and greater decoupling of economic activity and growth from environmental degradation;
 - consider ways to promote increased public and political awareness of, and to communicate, sustainable development in the newly-enlarged EU; and
 - provide a platform for Sustainable Development Councils, participating in the EEAC network, to input into the review of the SDS.

5. It was intended that important conference outcomes would include exchange of experiences and information among the participants and strengthening of the informal EU SD network.

III Participants

6. The conference had over 100 participants, including national and EU level sustainable development co-ordinators, and representatives from the European Commission, the EEAC Sustainable Development Working Group and national sustainable development councils.

IV Documentation

7. Documentation related to the conference included:
 - the Conference Programme
 - the Conference Issues Paper,
 - the List of Participants,
 - the opening address,
 - keynote speeches,
 - reports from 3 workshop sessions,
 - posters: some 10 posters were displayed during the conference showing innovative sustainable development processes or institutional arrangements,
 - this Conference Summary.

Conference documentation is available at: www.comharconference2004.ie.

V Proceedings

8. The conference consisted of an opening address, 3 keynote speeches, 3 workshop sessions, and a structured exchange of good practice examples by way of posters.

Opening Address

9. In his opening address, Mr. Martin Cullen T.D., Ireland's Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and President of the EU Council of Environment Ministers, emphasised in the context of the forthcoming enlargement that the Accession States will bring a fresh viewpoint and energy to many of the issues surrounding sustainable development in Europe.

10. The Minister went on to say that sustainable development is a central concern of the Irish Presidency. Seeking to give a renewed momentum to the environmental dimension of the Lisbon Strategy and to exploit the positive synergies between environmental protection and competitiveness, the Environment Council conclusions on sustainable development adopted in March 2004 provided a strong contribution to the Spring European Council and set the scene for much of the work that lies ahead. Alongside the new perspective of the enlarged EU, Ministers have drawn attention to: the desirability of a new sustainable development impetus in Europe, including new sectoral objectives and decoupling targets; better means of measuring progress; building on the results of a stocktaking of the Cardiff environmental integration process; linkage between national and EU strategies; and better coherence between internal and external EU policies and measures.
11. Building on this, the conference provided an opportunity for participants to identify and consider the key issues for the upcoming review of the SDS in the perspective of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005.
12. The Minister drew particular attention to the challenge of communicating the concept and practice of sustainable development, it being vital to examine ways to communicate sustainable development better to different audiences so that we get the fuller buy-in that is needed. He endorsed calls for the revised SDS to be summarised in a single, self-contained document, which explains clearly to the citizens of Europe where we are going and how we intend to get there.
13. Referring to where Ireland stands on sustainable development, the Minister said good progress had been made in a number of areas. But, like others in Europe, Ireland needs deeper integration of environmental considerations into the activities of the economic sectors and into individual lifestyles.
14. Concluding, the Minister highlighted the need for rededication to the task of getting a better balance between the 3 pillars of sustainable development by seeking out and exploiting areas where the environment and the economy can work hand in hand for mutual benefit.

Keynote Speeches

15. The conference keynote speeches were made by Catherine Day (Director General, Environment DG, European Commission), Professor Franc Lobnik (EEAC Chairman), and Derek Osborn (Co-chair of the EEAC Sustainable Development Working Group - EEAC SD WG).
16. Ms. Day confirmed that the conference was seen by the Commission as a valuable input to the review of the SDS. The Lisbon Strategy concentrates on the medium term; the SDS addresses the long-term. In this context, it is essential that there is a comprehensive and full review of the SDS to reinvigorate sustainable development in Europe and avoid being overshadowed by the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy. The Spring European Council 2005 will be of the highest importance in this regard.

17. While sustainable development may be difficult to define, identification of unsustainable trends is easier to do. Noting that the SDS review will have to debate our common vision for the future of Europe, Ms. Day stated that Europeans favour economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection going hand in hand. Of course, concerns about competitiveness cannot be ignored but it must be remembered that a poor environment may adversely affect competitiveness. Not acting now will involve higher future costs and there are real economic benefits to be gained from progressive environmental policies.
18. To win back attention for the environment and secure the necessary (deep) structural change, Ms. Day saw at least 5 requirements. We need to:
- argue the case well for environment policy,
 - highlight positive synergies between environment and competitiveness, (including in the area of environmental technologies),
 - make clear that there are costs of inaction,
 - communicate better what sustainable development involves,
 - involve civil society more in the journey to sustainable development.
19. Ms. Day went on to say that the SDS review should identify where original objectives have not been fulfilled and why this has been the case - while there have been achievements, there is a delivery gap. The SDS review should also work for better linkages with national sustainable development strategies and encourage intensified implementation, and further development, of those strategies.
20. Concluding, Ms. Day noted that the SDS review is an opportunity to reinvigorate sustainable development and to show that sustainable development is vital for Europe; enlargement reinforces the need for sustainable development. We must continue our efforts to mobilise the necessary political and societal support to make development more sustainable. In going forward, we need greater focus on SDS content rather than process.
21. The contributions from Professor Franc Lobnik (EEAC Chairman), and Derek Osborn (Co-chair of the EEAC Sustainable Development Working Group) are reflected in the EEAC output from the conference detailed below.

Workshops

22. The workshops were designed to allow not only the discussion of their assigned topics, but also the optimum engagement between participants on the relationship between the issues being addressed in the differing workshops.

The workshops considered:

- (a) Strategic Issues for Sustainable Development in Europe
 - Priorities for the review and development of the SDS, including in the context of the Lisbon Strategy.
 - Strengthening linkages and coherence between national and EU policy levels.
 - Measuring and monitoring progress through the use of indicators, sustainability impact assessments, models and other tools.

- (b) Sustainable Consumption and Production
 - The positioning of sustainable consumption and production policy - *bridging the SDS and the Lisbon Strategy*.
 - Decoupling economic growth from the key environmental impacts and from the unsustainable use of resources - *promoting sustainable production and environmental technologies*.
 - Encouraging more sustainable patterns of consumption - *influencing the behaviour of suppliers and consumers right through the supply chain*.
 - The role of Integrated Product Policy - *making best use of a tool-box of economic, voluntary and regulatory instruments*.

- (c) Communicating Sustainable Development in an Enlarged EU
 - How to improve participation/civil society engagement in SD and strengthen connections to the political process in an enlarged EU.
 - Communicating SD at different levels to different audiences, e.g. policy-makers in the environmental and other sectors, stakeholders and the general public.
 - The role of corporate social and environmental responsibility.

Results from the workshops are set out below.

VI Poster Session

23. A feature of the conference was the display of posters showing innovative sustainable development processes or institutional arrangements in the context of national sustainable development strategies. Some 10 posters were on display as follows:

Austria

- *Conference of Sustainability Coordinators*: an information, communication and coherence mechanism for sustainability policy in Austria.

- *Governance for Sustainable Development*: a workshop creating a market place for innovative approaches in implementing the Austrian NSSD.

- *Triple Bottom Line Reporting in the Public Sector: the Sustainability Report of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW).*

Finland

- The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO).

Ireland

- *Comhar* – The National Sustainable Development Partnership: Communicating *Comhar*'s Principles for Sustainable Development.
- The Cork Environmental Forum - Local Agenda/Action 21 umbrella organisation.
- ENFO – The Environmental Information Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The Netherlands

- Experiments for sustainable development.

Switzerland

- Sustainability Impact Assessment.

The United Kingdom

- English Nature - Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 - Meeting the Gothenburg target.

VII Workshop Results

24. The workshop results are as follows:

(a) Strategic Issues for Sustainable Development in Europe

25. Priorities for the review of the SDS were discussed in terms of challenges, obstacles and solutions.
26. Challenges identified by the workshops covered a wide spectrum of policy issues ranging from strategic issues such as the need for a paradigm shift to accommodate the sustainability agenda to more thematic issues such as transport and biodiversity. It was argued by some that economic growth is needed to drive the sustainability and environmental agenda while others were of the view that the current economic model together with the emphasis on competitiveness is incompatible with sustainable development and that sustainability cannot be achieved without a fundamental shift towards a new model of development which questions the current imperative for growth. While these views represent the extremes, there was probably more general agreement on the decoupling issue.

27. *Lisbon Strategy and SDS Review:* There was significant discussion on the interrelationship between the SDS and the review of the Lisbon Strategy which in many ways reflected the wider debate on appropriate development strategies. No consensus was reached on the most appropriate way forward but to a large extent the path is in any case pre-determined by decisions already taken or in train. It was argued strongly that in an ideal world the SDS should underpin the Lisbon Strategy to such an extent that a separate strategy would be redundant. In other words, sustainable development should be mainstreamed. Others, however, were of the view that it was more important that the SDS remained a separate process, to ensure its continued visibility. Others put forward the view that the Lisbon Strategy should be informed by the objectives and goals of the SDS. However, in reality, the 2 processes will be taking place in parallel.
28. *Enlargement:* The imminent accession of 10 new member states raises new challenges and brings new aspirations to bear. The significance of the diversity of an EU 25 – in terms of culture, economy, society, heritage, biodiversity and landscape - as opposed to the current 15 should not be underestimated. The cohesion gap and welfare differentials are a huge challenge. A specific issue raised was that of transport with a likely scenario emerging of a trend towards mobility levels in accession countries on par with that currently enjoyed in other EU states, with all the consequences in terms of environmental degradation that such a scenario implies.
29. *Global context:* The role of the EU on the international stage was to some extent reflected in the discussion, especially in the context of the ecological footprint. There is a need to ensure that the SDS addresses adequately the global footprint of the EU on the rest of the world and that international commitments are fully taken into account. It was pointed out that drivers are needed to bring issues to the table and that bringing development organisations into stakeholder SD fora would help to place the global dimension more firmly on the EU SD agenda.
30. *Relationship with other sectors:* A key issue for sustainable development is the integration of policies. Cross-sectoral integration remains a significant challenge. According to the participants, part of the solution lies in closer involvement of other sectors with the SD agenda. There is clearly a need to strengthen links with trade councils at global and European levels and to work much more closely with business interests across the spectrum, from large corporations to SMEs.
31. The 3 pillars of sustainable development, economic, social, and environment, need to be taken forward together. There is a concern that the sustainability agenda is often seen as predominantly about the environment and that sometimes social and economic issues are not given sufficient weight to ensure full integration of policies.
32. *Thematic issues:* In addition to strategic overarching issues, a number of other more thematic challenges were also raised. These included climate

change, transport issues, biodiversity losses, resource depletion (particularly energy), waste, cultural issues, consumption of resources through tourism and leisure activities, sustainable settlement and housing, and social equity (including employment/unemployment), and issues relating to aging and migration as well as access to housing.

33. Obstacles that must be overcome in order to meet the challenges and arrive at solutions include the lack of political commitment and political will to tackle difficult issues, the problem of adopting a short-term time horizon and the difficulty of mobilising support for long term goals. Competitiveness and economic growth are perceived as more important. In addition, governments tend to be self-centred and often are unable to 'think outside the box'. A further obstacle identified by some participants is the wielding of power by vested interests (such as European Federations) where relatively small groups can have significant influence on outcomes. Coupled with such imbalance is the perceived lack of citizen engagement. Part of the solution may lie in the furtherance of dialogue especially with civil society.
34. Communication and ecological education are important tools to facilitate a better understanding of the issues in order to overcome some of the obstacles. Impact assessment is an important means for providing evidence-based arguments for change. There is also a need to ensure that the outputs from research programmes can feed into policy formation and that the research agenda reflects policy needs.
35. At the same time, it is necessary to build positive scenarios for the future based on sustainable development goals and a set of principles for sustainable development; this is in order to persuade all sectors of society of the need to change patterns of behaviour and consumption and overcome some of the inertia, which fosters resistance to change. Political leadership to bring about institutional reform, and the introduction of fiscal measures and incentives to achieve identified targets and goals, are required in order to move from rhetoric to action.
36. Changes in process are the key to bringing about solutions, particularly in respect of public policies, government and governance, the role of the constitutional framework, the role of the EU in promoting the international order and the role of civil society – citizen responsibility.

(b) Sustainable Consumption and Production

37. The workshop focused on discussing the key aspects of EU policy in order to achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP). The following main areas were identified as the most important:
 - a clear statement of SCP within the revised SDS,
 - strong EU leadership and framework,
 - fiscal instruments and price setting,
 - environmental technology and innovation,
 - product policy (with accreditation),
 - societal infrastructure and planning.

38. *Strong Statement in SDS:* The revised SDS should include a clear statement on SCP to put focus on the need to change unsustainable consumption and production patterns and the need for a comprehensive approach to meet the commitments from WSSD and achieve more sustainable development.

39. *Strong leadership and framework:* In order to achieve SCP, strong EU leadership and a framework are necessary to achieve a coherent approach, as well as co-ordinated and effective tools and instruments.

40. One of the most important tools identified was public procurement: the Commission and Member States should lead progress by example. Proposed measures were to review procurement strategies, address barriers, place the burden of proof on producers and involve NGOs in independent assessment.

41. Integration of SD (including SCP) policy in other policy areas is most important, as is dissemination of best practice applications of SD (i.e. exchange of information on what worked, what did not, and the development and use of indicators for evaluation, for example on economic growth, welfare, and quality of life). It is also important to define what are sustainable products and services to have a clear vision.

42. *Fiscal instruments and price setting:* Pricing and taxes to include environmental costs (in order to reflect the “environmental truth” and to move consumption to more sustainable systems) should be considered to a greater extent and, if possible, on the EU level. The Lisbon Process and “success stories” could be used as support. It is also important to provide incentives (to citizens and business) for SCP, to use the supply chain to encourage SCP, to reduce subsidies with negative environmental impacts and develop related energy policy and taxation. Some examples are:

- shift taxes from labour to materials,
- tax on aviation, transport of goods and tourism,
- use VAT incentives e.g. repairs, greener products,
- encourage non-monetary systems of exchange,
- incentives for combined services,
- distributed production systems (food miles, packaging),
- environmental technology development and use,
- loyalty cards/tax “vouchers”.

43. *Environmental technology and innovation (ET):* ET should be used more to provide sustainable products and services and create opportunities for innovation. Some requirements are:

- standards and tests/assessments (e.g. EMAS/ISO),
- research and development,
- support and funding for innovation from public sources and risk capital for innovation (use the SCP statement in the revised SDS as a “push” in this regard),

- technology development of local/regional small scale sustainable solutions for energy, water supply etc.

44. *Product policy*: The objective is to minimize the environmental impact from products and services. In order to do so, there is a need for a clear strategy and a life-cycle perspective, and to develop or revise product policies which consider aspects such as: standards/accreditation, product information/labelling to make environmentally sound choices of products possible for consumers, assessment of gaps and co-ordination of different product labelling. There is also a need to consider procedures/specification of product life-cycles to provide information about the substances in products, the end of life impact, product manufacture, markets for recycling/reuse and the promotion of locally produced goods and services. (Examples here are the corporate strategies of supermarkets and the health impact of unsustainable food products.)

45. *Societal infrastructure and planning*

There are major opportunities for SCP in the delivery of urban services.

Important sectors identified are:

- housing,
- transport,
- utilities (e.g. energy, water and waste),
- land use reform.

46. Finally, we need to be innovative and courageous to make real progress – for example, in the context of the forthcoming EU Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment.

(c) Communicating Sustainable Development in an Enlarged EU

47. Three questions were examined

- How should we improve participation/civil society engagement in sustainable development and strengthen connections to the political process in an enlarged EU?
- What needs to be done to better communicate sustainable development at different levels to different audiences (e.g. policy-makers in the environmental and other sectors, stakeholders and the general public)?
- What is the role of corporate social and environmental responsibility?

48. The workshop discussed the first 2 questions together and then went on to discuss the role of corporate social and environmental responsibility. The Group also discussed briefly the implications for communicating sustainable development in an EU of 25. Finally, each member of the Workshop in the course of a *tour de table* spoke on what he/she believed should be the principal communications message to be given to the European Commission in the review of the SDS.

49. The Group found that better communications began with earlier consultation with stakeholders and, in particular, with those who are most directly affected. It was agreed that National Sustainable Development Councils could and should be used in a two - way dialogue before the adoption of proposals by the Commission. Earlier consultation would lead to ownership of the policy by the sectors involved and therefore lead to better implementation. It was said that a representative of the economic pillar could sell an environmental policy better to its members (e.g. farming leaders to farmers), than could Government or other actors. Put another way, the message and the messenger must be credible and defined according to the audience.

50. It was also agreed that sustainable development as an abstract concept could not be communicated to the general public. It is necessary to make the term meaningful in identifying how it impacts on an individual's own lifestyle. This can be done by showing practical examples and by engaging in pilot projects. It was important to identify the positive and negative outcome of a policy proposal and the costs arising in not taking action. It was stated that radical changes to lifestyle requires a range of different communication instruments to be used including TV, radio, advertising, education, taxes and fiscal incentives and the removal of damaging subsidies.

51. It was felt that corporate social responsibility (CSR) should be encouraged by national and European authorities by giving incentives to industry. CSR should remain a voluntary initiative though authorities could assist in setting out models for auditors and so increase the transparency and credibility of the process. Particular attention would have to be paid to awareness raising among the vast majority of industry, including small businesses, who still do not see themselves as part of the problem or as part of the solution.

52. EU 25 being a major player on the world stage should drive the sustainability agenda internationally. However, instead of talking about leading the world environmental agenda, the EU should act. We should let our actions speak for us.

53. Many interesting ideas were put forward for consideration by the Commission in the review of the SDS, including:

- the EU itself must become a good role model. For credibility purposes, the Commission should always practice what it preaches. Rigorous impact assessment should be carried out on all EU policy proposals,
- for all policy proposals the costs of not taking action should be quantified in terms of their impacts on human health and the environment and set out alongside the benefits of taking action,
- some flexibility should be given to individual Member States to reflect local circumstances. This will become more critical in EU 25,

- specific groups should be targeted and appropriate language and simplified messages used in communicating sustainable development policies,
- the full range of instruments should be used in communicating SD e.g. economic instruments, indicators, footprints, eco-labels,
- in introducing new SD policies, generally a positive message should be given though it was noted that industry is putting competitiveness at the top of the agenda by giving a doomsday message about jobs and economic growth. Sometimes, it will also be more appropriate to give a negative message about the environmental outlook,
- the social pillar should be emphasised more in setting out SD policies. The European value system based on social cohesion should be set out more clearly,
- European sustainable development policy should be available in a single document.

VIII Conclusions from EEAC Work

54. The EEAC SD WG referred to earlier recommendations it had made to the Commission which:

- emphasised that the SDS is still unfinished business. That is not only because of its fragmented character but also because of outdated concepts of economic growth and social welfare and because of the insufficient attention that is paid to the environmental dimension,
- advocated use of the windows of opportunity that open up once Europe makes a meaningful political move towards a redirection of growth and competitiveness into paths that take full account of both environmental needs and of social and intergenerational welfare,
- proposed to:
 - reflect sustainability in the new EU Treaty by adding a Protocol to the Constitution,
 - re-focus the EU strategy by introducing the goal to make Europe the world's most eco-efficient area by 2010,
 - link national and EU Sustainability Strategies,
 - focus sustainability on the enlargement process,
 - better communicate sustainability on the EU level,
 - introduce a sounding board on the EU level that contributes to agenda setting, monitoring and the participation process.

55. Preliminary findings from an EEAC survey indicate that national SD strategies vary greatly across Europe. They do not yet exist in all countries

of the Union, and some are much better established than others. They vary as to the range and scope of the subjects covered; the extent to which they simply describe a range of existing Government activities, or are themselves the vehicle for generating challenging new goals and targets inspired by the sustainability vision; and the process by which they are created, monitored and updated.

56. There is considerable scope for an EU initiative to enhance the effectiveness of national strategies; such an initiative might form an important element to emerge from the review of the SDS. It might:
 - encourage the creation of national strategies in every country in the Union so as to achieve comprehensive coverage,
 - define a common vision of sustainability in Europe and propose some shared goals and targets,
 - promote best practice in the way in which strategies can be created, and engage a wide range of actors and stakeholders in making their own commitments,
 - reinforce monitoring of progress.
57. There is a wide diversity of practice across Europe in relation to National Councils of Sustainable Development. They do not yet exist in every country but where they do exist they provide valuable support for the process of creating, implementing and monitoring national strategies. They work best and have most positive influence where they are established as independent bodies drawing in many stakeholder interests and able to comment publicly on emerging issues and Government policies from a sustainability perspective. At the same time, they need to be responsible bodies that build trust and can earn the respect of Government and the wider public and be given good access to influence the process of policy formation and decision-taking.
58. An EU initiative in the context of the review of the SDS might promote the formation of National Councils in every country of the Union and propose some informal guidelines as to their mode of formation and operation.
59. The Lisbon Strategy should be closely interlinked with the SDS process. There is only sense in one integration process on the European level if the issue of policy integration is to live up to expectations. Thus, the SDS review should be used to boost the incorporation of sustainability into the Lisbon Strategy.
60. In order to give sustainability a higher profile and to present a stage for European leadership in this regard, the EEAC SD WG proposes that the Commission takes the initiative to host a European Conference on Sustainability.

61. Among EEAC priorities for the SDS review are: energy use, transport and the environment, climate change, biodiversity, environmental research and environmental taxation. Finally, National Sustainable Development Councils stand ready to assist in addressing relevant issues, including sustainable lifestyles and communicating sustainable development.

IX Future Perspectives

62. In being the third of a series, the Kinsale conference consolidated the momentum towards creation of an EU network concerned with sustainable development at the national, EU and global levels. Consideration should be given to future networking in the context of the SDS review.
63. In preparation for the SDS review, the Commission intends to issue a preliminary paper by June 2004, taking stock of efforts to date and progress made, and to propose changes to accommodate changing circumstances. Subsequently, a stakeholder consultation will take place: in this regard, reference was made to the possibility of a stakeholder event being organised by ECOSOC. The SDS review is to be adopted by the new Commission in November/December 2004.
64. The Irish Presidency will forward this Conference Summary to the European Commission as an input to the SDS review process.

Annex

Progress in Preparing and Implementing National Sustainable Development Strategies

According to a review recently carried out by the Commission, 19 of the 25 MS and AC have developed national sustainable development strategies and are currently implementing them. This includes nearly all current Member States (with the exception of Portugal and Spain), and 4 of the 10 accession countries (Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia). The other countries are in the process of preparing their NSDS. Cyprus and Slovenia do not have a NSDS but touch upon the 3 dimensions of sustainable development in their National Development Plans (NDP).

From an environmental perspective, it is also worth mentioning that all AC, with the exception of Malta¹, have developed National Environmental Action Programmes (NEAP) whose aim is to integrate environmental considerations in other policy fields and to adopt and implement the European Union's Environmental *acquis*.

Some Member States, such as The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and the UK, developed a NSDS at a very early stage - before or shortly after the 1992 Rio Conference and have since regularly updated them. Initially, these were mainly focused on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, but gradually encompassed more elements of the social and economic dimensions.

Table: Date of Adoption of NSDS in relation to the Adoption of EU SDS in 2001

	Before 2001	After 2001	Under preparation / revision
Member States	The Netherlands (1), Sweden, Finland, Ireland (1), United Kingdom (1) and (2), Luxemburg, Belgium (1)	Austria, Denmark, Ireland (2), Germany, Sweden, Italy, France, The Netherlands (2)	Spain, Portugal, Belgium (2)
Acceding Countries	Poland	Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus	Hungary, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Malta

Despite this relative success, too often NSDSs remain declarations of intent. They are not always well integrated into a coherent policy framework so that NSDSs fail to pick up on or make use of interlinkages. Many decisions that are contrary to the aims of the NSDS also prevail. This is also reflected in the OECD's country review of NSDSs², which concluded that "*in most cases ... goals pertaining to each dimension of SD are simply listed alongside each other and can hardly been described as integrated into a single strategy*".

¹ Malta has a number of strategies for specific environmental issues, such as pesticides control, animal welfare and fisheries conservation. The Rural Development Plan also addresses environmental issues.

² OECD (2004): "Draft Final Report to Ministers, Ad hoc Group on Sustainable Development », §121.