



THE KINSALE CHALLENGE

Reinforcing Sustainable Development in the European Union

Members and representatives of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils network (EEAC) met in Kinsale, Ireland on April 15-17 2004, during a Conference on Sustainable Development jointly organised by the Irish Presidency and Comhar, the Irish Sustainable Development Partnership.

In addition to supporting the general conclusions of that conference the members and representatives of EEAC present have agreed to propose the following challenges to the European Union and its institutions and member states in the context of the reviews of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and of the Lisbon process that are to be undertaken in 2004/2005, and taking account of the enlargement of the Union to 25 members.

As recognised in the draft of the new Constitution for Europe sustainable development needs to be central to the vision and practice of the new Europe. One implication of this is that the objectives of economic prosperity, social well-being and environmental recovery and protection need to be better integrated than they are at present in Union practices and policies.

The reviews of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and of the Lisbon process which are to take place this year coming together with the enlargement of the Union present a uniquely favourable opportunity to achieve better coherence between the three pillars of sustainable development in European policy-making and actions programmes.

The representatives of EEAC accordingly call upon the European Union and its institutions together with the members states to ensure that

- the review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy results in an articulated, authoritative and accessible statement of the long term sustainability vision and goals of the Union that can underpin and guide the work of all the relevant formations of the Union;
- the review of the Lisbon process takes full account of the review of the Gothenburg conclusions and European Sustainable Development Strategy as agreed by the Spring Council in march 2004. The annual Lisbon process should be broadened in scope and direction so that it becomes the occasion for a true annual assessment and stock-taking of the progress of the Union towards the long term sustainability goals defined by the sustainable development strategy. To

this end the environmental dimension of the Lisbon process needs to be strengthened and the Cardiff process revived, with a view to further prioritising the drive to decouple economic growth from the growth in adverse environmental trends such as the growth in greenhouse gases;

- the review of the financial perspective should similarly take better account of the environmental dimension and ensure that EU Funds are used more efficiently and effectively to support sustainable development objectives. It should be made the occasion for promoting the application of sustainability criteria in public procurement policies and all public institutions both at European and at national level;
- sustainability should be given greater attention in the enlargement process, so as to secure that European sustainability acquis and objectives for the future are fully embraced by the accession countries and that the potentially damaging impacts on the accession countries' environments and biodiversity through accession are avoided or mitigated as far as possible;
- the sustainability ethic should be better communicated at all levels and debated in all parts of society.

National and European Sustainable Development Strategies should be more clearly and explicitly linked together and made mutually supportive and reinforcing. The review of the European strategy should be made the occasion for launching a new EU initiative to enhance the effectiveness of national strategies. Such an initiative should

- encourage the creation and regular updating of national strategies in every country of the Union so as to achieve comprehensive and up-to-date coverage;
- define a common vision of sustainability in Europe and propose shared goals, targets and measures for those issues that need European co-ordination if they are to be advanced effectively, while identifying other issues and areas that are best addressed separately in national strategies;
- promote best practice in the way in which strategies can be created and implemented and engage a wide range of actors and stakeholders in making their own commitments;
- reinforce monitoring of progress at national and European level, using key indicators where appropriate;
- encourage and promote political leadership for sustainability throughout the Union;
- facilitate interchange of ideas and solutions and mutual learning between different countries and different stakeholder groups.

In order to create wider public understanding and public and political support for sustainable development it is crucial that stakeholders of all kinds be closely involved in the preparation and implementation of the European and national strategies, and that alliances for sustainable development be broadened and deepened. We believe that national Councils for Sustainable Development, if properly constituted and resourced, can play a valuable role in this regard. We recommend a European initiative in the context of the review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy to promote the formation of national Councils in every country of the Union and to establish informal guidelines as to their mode of formation and operation.

As an additional support for better communication and engagement of civil society we recommend that an independent advisory council or sounding board on sustainable development should be established at the European level with the appropriate linkages to national Councils. It should contribute to the agenda setting, the monitoring and the participation process. It would also be useful for the European Parliament and for the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) to strengthen their work on sustainable development (possibly by establishing or reinforcing appropriate committees or task forces) and to reinforce their links with stakeholders at national and European level on this subject.

On strategic issues we support the initial priorities for the review of the strategy identified by the Commission and welcome the creative preparatory work being undertaken by EESC. We support also the detailed suggestions emerging from the Kinsale Conference. For our own part we have identified the following issues as being some of the key challenges that need to be addressed head on in the new sustainable development strategy:

- implementation of the Johannesburg commitments, both within the EU and globally;
- strengthening the synergies between the environment, nature and economic and social goals including health;
- energy, climate change, Kyoto and the longer term perspective beyond Kyoto;
- development of a more sustainable transport policy including road, rail and air transport;
- environmental taxation and other economic instruments;
- better reflection of sustainable development criteria in the planning and operation of the structural funds including systematic and effective application of strategy environmental assessment;
- an effective delivery plan for the Gothenburg target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010;
- further reform of the CAP and CFP to promote sustainable use of resources and effective implementation of those changes;
- more effective protection and balanced management of natural resources, including in particular soils, water and oceans and more sustainable land use;
- introduction of a new environmental investment fund.

A new more sustainable economic model needs to be developed that pays more attention to the maximisation of welfare and quality of life rather than simply maximisation of GDP. Such rethinking should form a fundamental part of the review of the Lisbon process, and should inform the quest for more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

The EU needs to facilitate adjustments away from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption to a new pattern of responsible competitiveness with a lighter environmental footprint, greater social justice and investment in recovery of biodiversity and environmental quality. The new strategy should advance these objectives, and in particular there should be a more vigorous European policy to promote resource efficiency including a programme for steady improvement in product standards for major product categories, and promoting the excellent environmental technology action plan.

To promote more sustainable consumption side we recommend a major effort by the EU to facilitate the engagement of the public and stakeholders of all kinds in a serious debate about the kinds of changes in behaviour that will be needed to achieve a transition to a more sustainable future, and the measures by the EU and national governments and the innovation by industry that will be needed to encourage this transition.

In order to advance the integration of the process for review of the Strategy and the Lisbon process we recommend that the Commission and the Presidency might take the initiative to organise a major European Conference on Sustainability, the shape of the new strategy and its role in shaping the goals and methods of the Lisbon process. Such a conference might appropriately take place in the autumn of 2004 at the end of the consultation on the new strategy and perhaps be linked with EESC plans for further stakeholder consultation on sustainable development.

Kinsale, 17.4.2004

Representatives of the following EEAC councils support this document:

Belgium	Federal Council for Sustainable Development, FRDO-CFDD Flemish Environment and Nature Council, Mina-Raad
Finland	Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, FNCS
Germany	Council for Sustainable Development, RNE German Advisory Council on the Environment, SRU
Hungary	National Environment Council, OKT
Ireland	Irish Sustainable Development Partnership, Comhar
Netherlands	Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Environment and Nature, RMNO
Poland	State Council for Environmental Protection, PROS
Portugal	National Council for Environment and Sustainable Development, CNADS
Slovenia	Council for Environment Protection, CEPRS
Sweden	Environmental Advisory Council, MVB
UK	Countryside Council for Wales, CCW English Nature, EN Joint Nature Conservation Committee, JNCC Scottish Natural Heritage, SNH Sustainable Development Commission, UK SDC

Recent common work of EEAC councils include statements on

- EU SDS 2001 ('Greening SD strategies'),
 - CAP reform 2002,
 - Environmental Governance 2003,
- Forthcoming 2004: Marine Environment.

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