



Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD)

Opinion on the European Sustainable Development Strategy Review

- Requested by the State Secretary for Sustainable Development, Els Van Weert
- drafted by the by the working group *strategies for sustainable development*
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Ten force lines of the opinion

1. Any number of documents and declarations suggest that the European Union sees sustainable development as a frame of reference for its different policies. The concept is also written into the draft European Constitution. It is still not fully clear, however, precisely what is meant by the European sustainable development strategy (EUSDS). What documents and political processes form part of the strategy? How are the Lisbon and Gothenburg processes related? What do the general objectives for specific sectors and fields entail? There are still a lot of open questions the Union needs to answer in the course of its review of European sustainable development strategy so that European citizens can finally know just what sustainable development strategy entails.
2. Explaining the strategy is one thing, implementing it is yet another. And the implementation of European sustainable development strategy leaves room for improvement. A number of objectives have been (partially) attained but the six priority non-sustainable trends identified by the Commission in 2001 have not changed direction. Conclusions should not be drawn too hastily, though: European sustainable development strategy was launched only three years ago and a strategy sometimes needs more time to produce results. One cannot help but observe, however, that sustainable development is not always, in practice, the leitmotiv of different EU policies. This is due to the way the EU institutions operate and to the lack of political will and conviction to implement sustainable development consistently across the board. The European Commission, Council and Parliament need to adjust their approach at this level.
3. Coordinating the Lisbon and Gothenburg processes is a crucial condition for improving interpretation and implementation of the European sustainable development strategy. The European Council in spring 2005, which will debate both the European sustainable development strategy review and the Lisbon process, should explain what these two processes have in common, how they can be addressed coherently, the (potential) areas of tension between the two processes and the choices that consequently need to be made. This could represent an important step towards developing a European Union that is outstanding economically, socially and ecologically, i.e. the most eco-effective economy.
4. "Win-win" relations between social, economic and environmental concerns are not always possible in every case, however. Sometimes political leaders have to make choices and set priorities. This requires acting with due consideration and transparency. This is where impact assessments can be an important tool. In recent years, the EU has stressed the importance of impact assessments, for both horizontal policy integration and the principle of good governance defended by the EU. The impact assessments published to date do not always come up to expectations, however. The process should be made more flexible during the European sustainable development strategy review.
5. Indicators are needed not only to effectuate impact assessments but also to monitor policy. The structural indicators on which the Commission bases its arguments in the spring European Council report do not give a balanced picture of progress to date on sustainable development. The FCSD is of the view that the list of SD-indicators currently being drawn up under the auspices of Eurostat can make an important contribution to the new European sustainable development strategy.
6. Member States' sustainable development experience can also contribute to the European strategy. Indeed, each EU country has its own strategy and it would be useful to pool this know-how and to share *best practice*. Such an approach based on vertical consistency between EU, Member State, regional and local policies should be part and parcel of the European sustainable development strategy.
7. National sustainable development councils could serve as intermediaries. Their contribution is obviously also vital for involving all the different stakeholders in sustainable development policy. Indeed, participation is an important principle of sustainable development. Permanent and structured consultation with civil society through a sustainable development council should also be established at European level.
8. Such consultation is essential if the public is to be involved more closely in European sustainable development strategy. EU citizens tend to be unfamiliar with the EU institutions and policies, and do not trust them very much – especially when the "difficult" concept of sustainable development is concerned. So an appreciable effort will have to be made in terms of communicating effectively to the public both EU policies in general and European sustainable development strategy in particular. The idea is to transpose sustainable development, in concrete terms, into a long-term social project based on the quality of life of both present and future generations.



9. To conclude, the FCSD sets out certain considerations on the content and implementation of EU policy for the six sustainable development priorities identified by the Commission in 2001: climate, mobility and transport, combating poverty, the ageing of the population, natural resources and public health. The FCSD considers it appropriate to emphasise the issue of "sustainable production and consumption" in these six themes.

10. A sustainable development policy in these different areas must attach sufficient importance to the global aspect. In the European sustainable development strategy as it currently exists, the relation between the external and the internal dimensions is not always clear. The strategy review should provide clarification of this point. Indeed, the Union must work towards sustainable development in Europe that is compatible with sustainable development in the South. Furthermore, the EU must work to ensure that sustainable development becomes a core issue in multilateral negotiations and organisations. This is important to integrate environmental and social objectives in these processes, without endangering the competitiveness of the European Union.



Context of the opinion

- [a] Sustainable development was written into the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 and recognised as a priority for the European Union. Two years later, the Helsinki European Council (December 1999) asked the Commission to "*prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy dovetailing policies for economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development to be presented to the European Council in June 2001*". After putting out a consultation document in March, the Commission published its Communication in May 2001: "*A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European Union strategy for sustainable development*".¹ Based on this Communication, in June 2001 the Gothenburg European Council established a sustainable development strategy for the EU. This strategy forms part of an international process: in the UN Rio Declaration (1992), the EU made an undertaking to draw up a strategy for sustainable development in the run-up to the World Sustainable Development Conference in 2002. Following the Johannesburg conference, the Commission added an "external dimension" to the European sustainable development strategy with its Communication entitled "*Towards a global partnership for sustainable development*".²
- [b] Before confirming the sustainable development strategy in Gothenburg, the European Council had already approved the Lisbon Strategy (March 2000). This strategy gave the EU the objective of becoming "*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.*" In March 2001 the Stockholm European Council added: "*Lisbon has successfully integrated economic and social matters. The sustainable development strategy, including the environmental dimension, to be adopted at the Gothenburg European Council in June will complete and build on the political commitment under the Lisbon strategy. All dimensions of sustainable development should be reviewed in the context of the annual Spring European Council*".³ In this approach, both the Lisbon and Gothenburg processes form an integral part of the European sustainable development strategy, with Lisbon based primarily on the economic and social aspects while Gothenburg focuses more on the environment and long-term sustainable development. Certain EU documents, however, liken European sustainable development strategy to the Gothenburg process alone and view Lisbon as a separate strategy. This can give rise to a confusion of concepts (see paragraphs 2 and ff.).
- [c] The basic document of 2001⁴ states that the EU sustainable development strategy will undergo a comprehensive review "*at the beginning of each Commission's term of office*". Simultaneously, the Lisbon strategy has already reached its five-year "mid-term review". Both reviews are thus in progress and the results will be disclosed at the forthcoming European Council in spring 2005. The Commission decided to organise a public consultation as part of its review of the Gothenburg strategy. It published a consultation document⁵ on 30 July 2004. Individuals and organisations had until 31 October 2004 to respond to a number of questions on EU sustainable development policy, the progress achieved on the six priorities, and so on. The FCSD also took part in the consultation, basing its answers on this opinion and on previous consensual opinions.
- [d] This opinion was drawn up at the request of the State Secretary for Sustainable Development. In her letter of 9 September 2004, Mrs Van Weert refers to the Gothenburg and Lisbon strategies and to the reviews of both processes currently under way. She asks the FCSD to examine, among other points, the updating of the content of the European SD-strategy, coordination of the Lisbon process with the Gothenburg process, impact analysis of measures, institutional adjustments and procedures that may be necessary to achieve sustainable development, coordination between European and national sustainable development policies and communication of European sustainable development policy.

¹ COM(2001)264

² COM(2002)82 (13/2/2002)

³ Stockholm European Council Presidency Conclusions 2001/01

⁴ COM(2001)264 (19/6/2001) : "*A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European Union strategy for sustainable development*"

⁵ SEC(2004)1042: "*Public consultation – review of the EU Sustainable development strategy*" (30/7/2004)



Assessment of the European sustainable development strategy

- [1] “The Union is dedicated to the sustainable development of Europe, based on well-balanced economic growth and price stability, on a social market economy of large competitive capacity that is oriented towards achieving total employment and social progress, and on a high level of protection for and improvement of the quality of the environment”. As one example amongst many, this article, taken from the draft of the European constitution (part 1, Title I, article 3) gives the concept of sustainable development a legal base as a framework for the EU policy.⁶ The FCSD emphasises how fundamental this commitment by the Union is for proceeding towards a sustainable development, notwithstanding the critical reflections about the task of fleshing out the process that follow in this opinion. The European Union sees sustainable development as a reference framework and effectively develops a strategy in this area, and gives thus a positive example to some other major players in the global arena.

Fleshing out and clarifying the strategy

- [2] What precisely is included in this strategy? The European strategy for sustainable development (EUSDS) is actually the whole ensemble of documents, directives, and processes. It is not always clear what exactly should be counted as part of the EUSDS and what the cohesion is between the various policy components. For instance, the consultation document of the Commission for the EUSDS review⁷ holds that the EU has two important collateral strategies that complement each other: the Lisbon strategy and the strategy for sustainable development. Yet, in contrast, other documents by the Commission describe the Lisbon process as a part of, or even as being equal to, the European SD strategy.⁸
- [3] Likewise, there is already some confusion about the content of the Göteborg process. For instance, the 2001 basic document by the Commission⁹ mentions six priority domains for tackling the non-sustainable development; the Göteborg European Council has retained only four of these (the topics of poverty and greying have been dropped).¹⁰ The consultation document of the Commission for the current review¹¹ holds that reference is made to the Council’s conclusions rather than to the Commission’s original document, but it does reinstate the six priority topics.
- [4] There thus exists a problem of definition in what concerns the European strategy for sustainable development¹². The FCSD considers that, for reasons of consistency, both the Gothenburg and the Lisbon processes need to be placed in the context of a European sustainable development strategy. In order to avoid confusion between concepts, the reviews of the Lisbon and Göteborg processes should produce one summary document that mentions all policy texts and policy processes with relevance to the EUSDS and that clarifies their mutual coherence. This is also of importance from a communication’s point of view: in effect, the EU citizens’ ignorance of the precise meaning of the European strategy for sustainable development may, amongst other reasons, be blamed on the diffuse information that is being disseminated about it. We shall return to this point later in §§ 45 and following.

⁶ Sustainable development is one of the characteristics of a European community model, thus the pronounced opinion of Dominique Strauss-Kahn in his final report of the round-table discussion “A sustainable project for tomorrow’s Europe” (Building a political Europe. 50 proposals for tomorrow’s Europe”, April 2004)

⁷ SEC (2004)1042, p.5

⁸ For example, see the latest spring report COM (2004) 29 p. 15, document COM (2004)101 concerning the “Policy challenges and budgetary resources in the expanded Union 2007-2013” pp. 4 and 6

⁹ COM (2001) 264 (15/5/2001): A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European Union strategy for sustainable development

¹⁰ Göteborg European Council Presidency Conclusions 15/6/2001 (200/1/01)

¹¹ SEC (2004) 1042

¹² The FCSD notes that this confusion between the concepts is sometimes already evident where it concerns the description of the term “sustainable”: sometimes, the term is not used in the context of a sustainable development but rather employed as a synonym for ‘stable’ or ‘permanent’. The reference to “sustainable growth” and “sustainable economy” is often meant and/or understood in that sense.



- [5] The document about the new EUSDS should not only offer a better integrated presentation of the strategy for sustainable development in the EU but also clarify a number of other issues. Indeed, the FCSD is of the opinion that the current strategy is too vague in several aspects: certain objectives are not precise enough and it is not always clear what their relevance is to specific sectors. Where feasible, objectives ought to be quantified and made measurable, fixed within a time frame. It is further important to elucidate the implications of certain long-term goals for the medium and short term, and to indicate who will be responsible for the implementation of the proposed measures.

Promises not yet realised

- [6] Little overall progress has been achieved in the approach to the non-sustainable trends in the EU. In a number of sectors we do indeed note some positive evolution (for instance, in agriculture), but the problematic developments in the six priority domains as mentioned by the 2001 Commission have not been restructured. This should not lead to hasty conclusions on the European strategy, which has only been in force for three years: more time is sometimes needed for a strategy to produce results. It must nonetheless be noted that ecologically, economically and socially, the results generally cannot be considered satisfactory. Likewise, the external dimension of Göteborg defined in 2002 has thus far seen very little results. All of this is made evident in the Commission's own report and by an array of other sources¹³. Consequently, the added value to be realised by the EUSDS is for different sectors all but clear (we shall return to this point in §§ 53 and following). In the domain of mobility-transport, where non-sustainable development is taken on ever larger proportions, the strategy has barely an impact.
- [7] This unsatisfactory implementation of the EUSDS is the result of a number of inherent shortcomings, namely the lack of clarity referred to in § 2 and 3 qua concrete objectives and timing, but likewise of a number of defects in terms of the conduct of the policy. The structure and the functioning of the EU institutions, on the one hand, and the absence of political will, on the other, complicate and delay the implementation of a sustainable development strategy. The EUSDS is not the encompassing long-term strategy of the EU it should be: the principles and instruments of and for sustainable development are not applied with sufficient coherence in the Union's various policy domains. Horizontal integration, an important principle of sustainable development, clearly falls short.
- [8] Both within the Commission, the Council, and in Parliament, a different approach is called for, plus greater *leadership* and engagement, to give the general importance of a sustainable development priority over sectoral and national interests. This same sentiment was already pointed out in the same terms in the 2001 basic document¹⁴: the change in policy deemed necessary did not materialize.

Towards a coordinated approach and more engagement in the EU institutions

- [9] As far as the **Commission** is concerned, the FCSD is of the opinion that the EUSDS has in the past years received too little active support from the Commission as a whole. This lack of backing may partially be attributed to historical precedent: the 2001 strategy document was worked out within the Directorate-General Environment of the Commission, and this DG remained more or less the driving force for the process. The other DGs did accept the concept either barely or to a much restricted degree only. This is a point that calls for rectification in the new EUSDS.

¹³ European **Commission**: Spring report 2004 (Delivering Lisbon - Reforms for the enlarged Union), 2003 Environment Policy Review (Consolidating the environmental pillar of sustainable development) ; **European Environmental Agency**: Europe's environment: the third assessment (2003) ; **European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions**: The European Foundation and the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy ; **European Economic and Social Committee**: Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy – exploratory opinion

¹⁴ COM (2001)264 p 15: "At all stages of the Community legislative process, policy proposals in individual sectors are developed and discussed without paying sufficient attention to the linkages between different policy areas. The way the Commission, Council and Parliament are organized reinforces this narrow, sectoral approach. All three institutions should consider what steps they can take to overcome this weakness". p 4: "Too often, action to achieve objectives in one policy area hinders progress in another, while solutions to problems often lie in the hands of policy makers in other sectors or at other levels of government. This is a major cause of many long-term unsustainable trends."



- [10] Sustainable development is a collateral concept oriented towards the integration of economic, social, and environmental components. The responsibility for this should, ideally, not rest with a party that is in charge of one of the components (for instance, the environment), but rather with a party that is in charge of the policy in toto. The FCSD thus insists that in the new Commission, the responsibility for sustainable development be explicitly assigned to the president (eventually a vice-president with a collateral set of responsibilities might be considered as well).
- [11] The problem of a coherent approach in function of a sustainable development is even more sharply evident within the **Council**. Theoretically, within the Commission different Directorates-General can collaborate via interservice-working groups, which makes horizontal consultation possible. In contrast, within the Council, this appears to present more of a problem. It appears that too little consultation is going on between the various Council sectors that have involvement in the EUSDS (Environment, Ecofin, Employment opportunities & social policy...). This presents an enormous problem from an organisational point of view for introducing the collateral character of sustainable development.
- [12] In theory, the **European Council** (the council of the Heads of State and Government of the Member States) could and should exercise this coordinating task but, here also, the political will appears to be absent for placing sustainable development at the top of the agenda. At least, so it appears from the treatment accorded the EUSDS during the last Spring Summit. In the conclusions of the Presidency following Göteborg¹⁵, it was mentioned that the European Council would during the Spring meetings evaluate the development and the implementation of the EUSDS and, where necessary, make adjustments on the political level in order to arrive at a greater policy coordination (it would be the responsibility of the Council of General Affairs to ensure this horizontal integration). Concretely, there has been little evidence of this: during the Spring Summit of 2004, the European Council paid particular attention to some current issues, and advancing the Lisbon process was not a great priority and the Göteborg process even less. There has been no true evaluation of the progress in both processes, and the Spring Summit thus does not create new stimuli in terms of sustainable development.
- [13] It is noteworthy that the Spring report drawn up by the Commission for the Spring Summit of the European Council itself devotes but little attention to the EUSDS's environmental and external dimension, or to the progress of the Göteborg process. In fact, the current list of 14 structural indicators used for the Spring report offers no balanced picture of the progress on sustainable development in the EU (see § 35).
- [14] The third European institution, namely **Parliament**, only occupies an insignificant place in the EUSDS picture. The announced commission on sustainable development never materialized¹⁶, nor has it been replaced by some other mechanism in order to enable Parliament to better monitor and follow-up on the EUSDS. Moreover, Parliament is not involved in the current review either. The FCSD finds this regrettable, especially since a contribution from the members of parliament as "representatives of the citizens" could bring a broader scope and greater official credibility and authority to the sustainable development strategy.
- [15] The inclusion of the EUSDS in the future European Constitution underlines its importance for the EU and forms not only a legal but also a moral basis for further development. However, the FCSD notes that in the draft of the constitution, adopted during the European Council of 17-18 June 2004 in Brussels, the EUSDS is given but short shrift, its presence being too general and too limited. The principle of a sustainable development for the EU is indeed stated (art. 4 of part III, art.3 of part 1) but is not reintroduced in many of the policy domains (commerce, transport, agriculture, developmental collaboration). The policy's encompassing umbrella character and its horizontal integration into a sustainable development perspective thus is not adequately addressed.

¹⁵ Gothenburg European Council Presidency Conclusions 15/6/2001 (2001/01), § 24 and 25

¹⁶ Cf. COM (2001) 264 (15/5/2001): A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European Union strategy for sustainable development, p. 15



Greater coherence between the Lisbon and the Göteborg processes

- [16] The FCSD notes that the Göteborg and Lisbon processes function independently from one another. There exists barely any coordination between both approaches at the level of either the Commission or the Council. If the Lisbon and Göteborg processes are already being addressed during the Spring Summits, it is nonetheless in an isolated manner only. Both processes are currently in an evaluation and review stage, and the European Council will during the Spring Summit in 2005 discuss the Commission's proposals in this area. For a number of reasons, it would be advisable if on that occasion both approaches were to be attuned more closely to each other.
- [17] In the first place, there exists an inherent argument in favour of this. The two strategies overlap one another in a number of points in terms of the treatment of identical topics such as economic growth, innovation, scientific research, fiscal matters, energy provision, employment, greying... In the process we notice a number of existing and potential tension fields that are not addressed in the policy documents. For instance, in the transport sector, the objective for sustainable mobility (Göteborg) stands versus some planned investments in the European road network (Lisbon); in agriculture, it pertains to broadening our competitiveness of our agriculture versus unlimitedly opening more markets for products from the South; in the industrial sector, the growth of energy-intensive companies stands versus a reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases. In more general terms, there often exists a tension field between returns in the short and the long terms, and between the three pillars of sustainable development.
- [18] The Commission could in a review of the Lisbon and Göteborg processes point out such tension fields and clarify the choices that need to be made in this regard. For, indeed, a policy in these domains can only become effective when the policy is clearly and unequivocally formulated.
- [19] Furthermore, more coherence between both processes is also inherently desirable since each strategy as a separate entity demonstrates a number of lacunas that can be filled in by the other strategy. Numerous synergies are possible - for instance, in the area of ecological technology, sustainable production and consumption, innovation and research - that currently are inadequately put to use. In the Göteborg strategy, the social and economic pillar is underemphasized in comparison with the environmental dimension, and there is a lack of quantified goals for the short and medium terms; in the Lisbon strategy, in contrast, there is a neglect of the environmental component, even though the European Summit of June 2001 had decided to add that dimension to the content. The Lisbon strategy further lacks an encompassing umbrella framework for the proposed policy. Such an umbrella framework can as a broader social project create more public understanding for unpopular measures in fields as mobility, greying and public finances.
- [20] A synthesis is, in effect, also desirable from a communication's point of view. In order to motivate the citizens in favor of the European Union, it would have to be made clear that Europe advocates a coherent policy of sustainable development directed towards the quality of life for our own and future generations. Ideally, the EU would propose in one comprehensive and comprehensible document (see § 4) a model of sustainable development for the European Union, wherein both the Lisbon and the Gothenburg processes are addressed with other relevant policy options. We shall touch upon this topic later in §§ 45-50 on communication.
- [21] In this respect, the position expressed by the FCSD concerning the cohesion between the Lisbon and the Göteborg process fits into the EESC/CESE opinion on the subject: *"The two strategies must be coherent under the overarching objective of long-term sustainable development. This means that sustainable development objectives must permeate all policy areas of the Lisbon strategy. In this way, the Lisbon strategy can and should be an important intermediate step on the way to sustainable development, but cannot be a substitute for a long-term sustainability strategy. The economic growth generated by the Lisbon strategy must be qualitative and decoupled from resource use to a greater extent, so that it is compatible with sustainable development. However, this also means that the Lisbon strategy can make an important contribution to the sustainability strategy if it helps refocus the economy on a more sustainable model."*¹⁷

¹⁷ NAT/229 – CESE 661/2004 (28/4/2004): Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy – exploratory opinion, 2.4.4 and 2.4.5



- [22] The Commission's above-mentioned Communication on the financial perspectives 2007-2013 seems to show that the Lisbon and Göteborg processes are not yet coherently integrated in a strategy for sustainable development as frame of reference for all EU policy¹⁸. This Communication is an important policy document that sets out guidelines for the future and describes the priorities to which the EU wishes to allocate financial resources. The document treats sustainable development as one of the three priority themes but interpretation of the concept is vague and ambiguous, points out the European Economic and Social Committee in the above-mentioned opinion: *"It is not enough merely to press ahead unchanged with current policies that have raised difficulties for sustainable development, and to pursue them in future under the "Sustainable Growth" budget heading. "Sustainable development" and "sustainable growth" are two different things, which should be mutually reinforcing but may indeed conflict. Hence a clear distinction is also needed in the financial perspective.*¹⁹
- [23] This is not simply a question of semantics. By using "sustainable development" as a pass-key, the Commission Communication gives the impression that sufficient means are being allocated for the pursuit of a policy in this area. Closer examination nevertheless reveals that this is not the case and that a greater effort is needed, as the EESC points out in its recent opinion on the Financial Perspectives: *"...to achieve sustainable development, there is an urgent need to devote to it greater financial resources than those currently allocated and those foreseen in the financial perspectives for 2007-2013."*²⁰

Economic, ecological, and social performance: the EU as the most eco-efficient economy

- [24] The coordination of the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives as advocated in the previous §§ figures as a significant step on the road to a sustainable development policy oriented towards the simultaneous realisation of economic, social, and ecological performance levels. "Ecological and social" themes such as reducing the consumption of energy and natural resources, or the protection of the environment and public health, can in their turn exert a positive influence on "socio-economic" objectives such as growth, competitiveness, and employment opportunities. Diverse studies have demonstrated that, generally seen, where countries build up a commendable record in one criterion, they also tend to perform well in another.²¹
- [25] This points to a process of interaction. Economic performance can generate the necessary means and resources to make it possible to implement a social and environmental policy, while, conversely, environmental concerns can give rise to an important economic impulse. With this vision in mind, the Dutch EU presidency (second half of 2004) initiated a campaign construed around eco-efficiency innovation. The most relevant question here is how innovations in the field of environmental technology can contribute to the realisation of the economic and social objectives enunciated in Lisbon. Already at the start of 2004, the Commission proposed an ambitious action programme for this domain.²²
- [26] It is the opinion of the FCSD that eco-efficiency can make a fundamental contribution to a sustainable development of our economy when, via fixed goals, instruments, and a time frame, the action plan can be concretely translated into a policy. Moreover, the environment presents an economic opportunity in the sense that ecological amenities are necessary conditions for economic viability in diverse sectors, for example, in tourism and leisure activities, agriculture and fisheries²³. In that context, it is important, when evaluating the cost of action in the area of environmental protection, to try evaluating at the same time the cost of doing nothing, which – albeit in a somewhat longer term – is likely to be much higher.

¹⁸ COM(2004)101 (26/2/2004)

¹⁹ NAT/229 – EESC 661/2004 (28/4/2004), 2.1.11

²⁰ EESC 1204/2004 (15 September 2004), 3.2.1.4

²¹ See a.o. OECD, "Innovation and the environment" (2000), "Technology policy and the environment (2002); Porter and Van der Linde, "Green and competitive. Ending the stalemate", Harvard Business Review (Sept. 1995), Jenny E. Ligthart, "The macro-economic effects of environmental taxes: a closer look at the feasibility of "win-win" outcomes", IMF Working Paper (May 1998), Peter Van Humbeeck, "Naar een industrieel beleid voor het milieu – technologie en innovatie als sleutel voor een duurzame welvaart", SERV (november 2002)

²² COM (2004)38 (28/1/2004)

²³ Cf. draft opinion European Economic and Social Committee NAT/255 – CESE 917/2004 (21/9/2004): "L'environnement comme opportunité économique" (The environment as economic opportunity) §§ 2.1 and 2.2



- [27] With eco-efficiency innovation, we achieve a win-win relationship between economic, social, and environmental concerns. This kind of approach, however, is not possible for all aspects of the sustainable development strategy, and, as such, must not be entertained as the sole source for the policy's content. In effect, if that were the case, themes such as the protection of the bio-diversity or public health might well be phased out, and the needed changes in our production and consumption behaviour would cease to be a priority. In a number of cases, win-win situations are not feasible in the short term and priorities must be fixed for the policy. Or, as the Commission expresses it in her basic document of 2001: "*While sustainable development will undoubtedly benefit our society as a whole, difficult choices will need to be made between conflicting interests. The balancing of such choices needs to be conducted in an open and honest manner. Changes must be implemented in a just and equitable fashion and private interests may not receive preference over public interests.*"²⁴

Finalising an impact assessment

- [28] To achieve an "open and honest" balancing of the social, economic, and ecological aspects of the sustainable development issue, finalising an evaluation of the effects by means of an *impact assessment* constitutes an important instrument. By using this kind of an assessment, the policy's quality and coherence can be improved, as the Commission notes in a Communication on Impact assessment: "*Impact assessment contributes to effective and efficient regulation and coherent implementation of the European strategy for sustainable development. By means of this instrument, we are able to evaluate the positive and negative consequences of the proposed policy measures, which in turn enables us to knowledgeably formulate a political assessment about the proposal and make a trade-off between incompatible objectives.*"²⁵ As impact assessment contributes to a transparent, effective, and coherent policy, it is also a valuable communication instrument and figures as an important part of the "governance"-approach favoured by the EU (in this respect, see §§ 43-50 about communication and participation).
- [29] In its opinion on the Gothenburg-document in 2001²⁶, the FCSO already pointed to the importance of an impact assessment and thus considers it a positive development that this approach has in the meanwhile been worked out further by the Commission. The process entails two steps: there is a *preliminary impact assessment* of the initiatives proposed by the Commission in its annual policy strategy or working program. From that list, the Commission selects a number of initiatives that qualify for an *extended impact assessment*. The FCSO finds the previous impact assessments that were first published this year²⁷, of uneven quality: their finalisation varies with the Directorate-General that is responsible for the assessment and in numerous instances fails to offer an adequately integrated approach based on a vision of sustainable development. Furthermore, the selection of the extended impact assessment appears arbitrary in places. These shortcomings are most likely teething problems of a process in its inception phase and more consultation and the addition of further know-how are bound to optimize the assessment process. Nonetheless, and irrespective of the above caveats, an "assessment of the impact assessments" would not be amiss, not only for the current review of the sustainable development strategy, but also later on as part of the impact assessment procedure. In this respect, within the context of the EU's "governance" approach, also the social stakeholders ought to be enlisted in order to broaden the transparency and the scope of the process.

²⁴ COM(2001)264: "264 (15/5/2001): A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European Union strategy for sustainable development", p. 4

²⁵ COM (2002)276 (5/6/2002), p. 2

²⁶ 2001a16 "Second opinion on the strategy for sustainable development of the European Union", § 8

²⁷ COM(2003)645 (29/10/2003) "The Commission's legislative and work programme for 2004" annex 2, and Background document "Preliminary Impact Assessments"



- [30] An impact assessment is an interesting and much-needed instrument; nonetheless, it does have certain limitations. The Commission justly notes: *“Impact assessment is an instrument to assist in decision-making but it is not a substitute for the political assessment.”*²⁸ An impact assessment introduces information about possible choices and the consequences of those policy options but does not itself encompass a decision. The impact assessment is focused on one initiative, whereas the policy also needs to take into account the broader picture. In this respect, the Cardiff-process has made an important contribution, since - in contrast to the impact assessment process - it pertains to a holistic and structural process for policy integration with a view to a sustainable development. Therefore, *“The process of integration of environmental concerns in sectoral policies, launched by the European Council in Cardiff, must continue and provide an environmental input to the EU Sustainable Development strategy, similar to that given for the economic and social dimensions by the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the Employment Guidelines”*²⁹
- [31] Both processes are complementary, as the Commission correctly states: *“The more global and long-term approach of the strategy to integrate environmental concerns into the sectoral policy fleshes out the impact assessment, which becomes applicable when specific policy measures and initiatives are being proposed. Both instruments are important for reaching a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, thus to arrive at a better integration of environmental objectives within the policy.”*³⁰
- [32] Consequently, the FCSD advocates that the review of the EUSDS take into account the conclusions and opinions of the afore-mentioned document that follows up on the Cardiff-process and evaluates it. For instance, the process needs to be implemented in a consistent manner by the various council segments, and procedures are required for the implementation and the follow-up of the measures. It is, moreover, important that the European Council support the process by confirming its commitment to policy integration of environmental objectives.

Working out a balanced set of indicators

- [33] For an impact assessment, and the reviewing of the EUSDS in general, indicators are required; without indicators, it is not possible to calculate the impact of the measures, just as we cannot estimate problems, evaluate the current situation, identify trends, and work out future scenarios. In her first opinion about indicators, the FCSD stated: *“Indicators must be scientifically pertinent and, at the same time, the drafting and the choice of the indicators have to be made transparent and the subject of a consultative/participatory process”*³¹. The FCSD, in its opinion for the preparation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg³², added to this that the European structural indicators do not satisfy that latter criterion: *“... the selection of these indicators, and thus also of the priorities, has not been conducted in a sufficiently transparent manner. It is possible to achieve this transparency through participatory processes”*.
- [34] In § 44 of the same opinion of 2002, the FCSD stated that in the list of the structural indicators for the Spring report (at the time numbering 36 in total) *“the social and environmental indicators are under-represented (...) or unsuitable within the context of sustainable development. In addition, important dimensions are at this moment absent or inadequately represented on the list of indicators (...): the external dimension of the EU, North-South relations, unequal access to natural resources; the impact of the consumption and production patterns; public health and food security.”* The FCSD further added that it would be useful *“to work out at the level of each European country, and at the international level, a composite indicator such as the ecological footprint or the Environmental Utilisation space”*.³³

²⁸ COM (2002)276 (5/6/2002): “Communication on impact assessment” p. 3

²⁹ COM (2001) 264 (15/5/2001): A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European Union strategy for sustainable development”, p 14

³⁰ COM(2004)394 (1/6/2004): “Integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas – taking stock of the Cardiff process” p 2

³¹ 2002a03 (16/4/2002): Opinion on indicators for sustainable development, § 2

³² 2002a06 (16/4/2002) § 43

³³ 2002a06 (16/4/2002) § 45



- [35] As already mentioned § 13, the FCSD reiterates that the indicators on which the Commission bases its findings for the Spring report (in the meantime reduced to fourteen), fail to offer a balanced view of the progress made in the area of a sustainable development. In this, the FCSD agrees with the Conclusions of the Council (General Affairs) about the Commission Communication on the structural indicators³⁴: *“Progress is also needed in reinforcing the balance of the indicators in keeping with the priorities of the strategy for sustainable development established by the EU and the sixth environmental action programme. It is recommended that indicators on bio-diversity and health be introduced as soon as possible, certainly by the time of the next review of the EU’s strategy for sustainable development (expected in 2004)”*³⁵.
- [36] In this connection, it should be noted that, within Eurostat, a working group has become active on the subject of indicators for sustainable development (SDI). This working group will propose a list of SDI for review of the European strategy for sustainable development and formulate a number of opinions. The FCSD believes that this is an interesting initiative that can make a contribution to the renewal of the EUSDS. For example, it appears from the already available information that this project also is paying attention to the interaction amongst the indicators, something of great significance in order to be able to arrive at a policy strategy in terms of sustainable development. Already in its second opinion on indicators, the FCSD pointed out that the EU’s structural indicators are lacking in this respect: *“There is too much segregation in the way (they) are treating the different pillars of sustainable development”*³⁶.
- [37] Finally, it should be mentioned that indicators are instruments to assist in decision-making, and not substitutes for the political assessment. In fact, the choice and ponderation of indicators are as such often the result of policy options.

Coherence between EU and Member State policy

- [38] When reviewing the European sustainable development strategy, attention also needs to be directed to its relationship with sustainable development strategies in the Member States. Recent studies³⁷ show that practically all Member States have introduced such a strategy but that there is a marked difference in their respective content, approach, and political framing. These different orientations are the result of political and cultural traditions or of economic, ecological, or social situations specific to those countries. The FCSD nonetheless finds it useful to compare the various approaches, both mutually and vis-à-vis the European sustainable development strategy. For that reason, the Council participated in a study by the European Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC)³⁸ that analyses the approach to sustainable development in eight EU countries and from this comparison draws lessons useful on the national and European levels.
- [39] This can contribute to greater coherence between the EUSDS and the sustainable development policy of the Member States and their regional and local levels, in other words, to vertical integration of the policy. As the FCSD noted in a recent opinion³⁹, vertical integration is not a one-way street where decisions are only being downloaded from the European to the national, regional, and local levels: *“The reverse direction, that is to say, decisions being uploaded from the local, regional, and national levels, is equally essential for the policy. It is thus a two-way process, and in the context of vertical integration the FCSD wishes to underline the importance of bottom-up actions alongside top-down actions.”*

³⁴ COM(2003)585 of 8/10/2003

³⁵ Conclusions of the Council 15875/03 of 8 December 2003, p.3

³⁶ 2004a01 (19/2/2004) “Opinion on the participatory drafting of an instrument panel for sustainable development for Belgium”, § 77

³⁷ Commission staff working document: “National Sustainable Development Strategies in the European Union” (April 2004)

³⁸ EEAC : “Sustaining Sustainability” (December 2004)

³⁹ 2003a9 (18 December 2003): “Opinion on the vertical integration of sustainable development and multilevel governance”, § 3



- [40] The key themes of the EUSDS can be found again in most of the national and regional SD- strategies, and those levels sometimes operate with certain objectives or instruments that are established at European level. Policy coordination in this area is consequently very important. In its opinion on the EUSDS review⁴⁰, the EESC mentions energy and transport policy, plus fisheries and agriculture as points of attention. Inconsistencies may indeed hamper the process, as a policy that is not complementary on different levels is bound to pay a price in effectiveness.
- [41] The FCSD therefore agrees with the EESC opinion that, at the Spring Summit, the Member States should report on (the implementation of) their sustainable development strategy⁴¹. This could well contribute to greater coherence between European and national policies. For specific objectives, one could resort to broader access to the open method of coordination, which is already strongly manifest in the Lisbon process, and to instruments such as conventions and tripartite contracts for local governments. In all these cases, it pertains to an approach whereby infra-community levels (countries, regions, urban centres) can set up their own policies in their specific contexts, oriented towards the achievement of objectives set at Community level.⁴²
- [42] The above-mentioned Commission working document summarizes a number of Community challenges for the sustainable development policy of EU countries and notes the areas where the EU and its Member States can collaborate, among others, by garnering know-how, exchanging experiences, and defining “best practices”⁴³. The FCSD insists that the Commission use the review to establish this approach to vertical coherence as part of the EUSDS, and to provide for a procedure and the necessary means for its finalization. The national councils for sustainable development can play an important role in this process.⁴⁴

Sustainable development as multi-actor process

- [43] The input of national sustainable development councils is obviously also essential to allow *civil society* to play its role in policy formulation. Participation is an important principle of sustainable development⁴⁵: greater involvement by citizens and their organizations, via consultations, deliberations, and other mechanisms, brings policy closer to local needs and objectives, contributes to its democratic nature and broadens social support for sustainable development. Indeed, participation is one of the principles of *governance*, meaning the appropriate policy the EU wishes to conduct.⁴⁶ The other European governance principles are: openness, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence (the pursuit of vertical and horizontal integration, a.o. via impact assessments, is thus part of this policy approach).

⁴⁰ European Economic and Social Committee NAT/229 – CESE 661/2004 (28/4/2004): “Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy – exploratory opinion”, 5.3

⁴¹ European Economic and Social Committee SC/021 – CESE 289/2003 (27/2/2003): “The Lisbon strategy and sustainable development”, 6.5

⁴² See, among others, SEC(2004)1153 (22/9/2004) : “Rapport sur la gouvernance européenne 2003-2004”, 2.9.2, COM (2002)709 (11/12/2002) : “A framework for target-based tripartite contracts and agreements between the Community, the States and regional and local authorities” and the report of working group 4a for the white paper on Governance: “Involving experts in the process of national policy convergence” (June 2001)

⁴³ “National Sustainable Development Strategies in the European Union” (April 2004), 7.1 and 7.2

⁴⁴ Cf. International Institute for Environment and Development, Environmental Planning Issues No 27 (Jan. 2004): “The EU strategy for sustainable development: process and prospects”, 7.1: “Multi-stakeholder National Councils for Sustainable Development (...) could play a key role in building synergy between the EUSD strategy and national strategies.”

⁴⁵ Declaration of Rio de Janeiro on environment and development (1992), principle 10

⁴⁶ See COM (2001)428 (25/7/2001): “European governance, a white paper” and SEC (2004)1153 (22/09/2004): “Rapport sur la gouvernance européenne 2003-2004”



- [44] The FCSD therefore considers the consultation being organised to review the EUSDS an excellent initiative and, in general, appreciates the initiatives taken by the Commission in the past years in terms of consultation as follow-up to the White Paper on governance⁴⁷. Nonetheless, apart from consultation, more permanent and global deliberations with citizens and their organizations is also desirable. In its opinion on the EUSDS of 2001, the FCSD stated *“that consideration needs to be given to the organisation of a Community consultation on sustainable development at the EU level. The FCSD notes that the EU-working document in this regard mentions the possible formation of a “council” for sustainable development (p. EN-52, point 4.5), without clarifying precisely what this means. Clarification of this point is needed. A preliminary survey is needed to determine whether and how existing forums can play a role in the Community consultation on sustainable development at the EU level.”*⁴⁸

Improved communication on Europe and sustainable development

- [45] On top of consultations and deliberations with stakeholder organisations, an effort will be required in relation to communication aimed at involving citizens more closely in this policy. A dual problem arises in this respect. On the one hand, citizens are not sufficiently aware of what Europe stands for and generally do not have enough confidence in the EU institutions and their policies. This has been made evident by Eurobarometer opinion polls: on average, a mere 29% of European citizens are of the opinion that they are well informed about EU institutions and policies, while only 48% of those polled are convinced that EU membership is beneficial to their country.⁴⁹ Furthermore, sustainable development as a concept is far too little known to the population⁵⁰, so that the social base for meaningful changes in the area of consumption and production remains limited.
- [46] The EU is aware that citizens are neither sufficiently informed about its policy nor do they appreciate it. For that reason, it has worked out a communication strategy to rectify this shortcoming as part of its global approach to governance (see above § 43). This strategy⁵¹ is oriented towards the coherent propagation of a European image by using a number of values (e.g., freedom, well-being, solidarity, etc.) as guiding principles and by advancing a number of important themes. These priority information themes are specifically the enlargement and future of the EU, the area of freedom, security and justice, the euro and Europe's role in the world. To this end, the EU is deploying communication resources with the aim of improving dialogue with the different target groups. The FCSD appreciates the efforts made by the EU during the past years to make information and documents available via a variety of portals and to kick-start a dialogue with citizens (the “Your take on Europe” portal).
- [47] The EESC issued an opinion on the EU communication strategy and the FCSD endorses the latter's position that sustainable development should also be treated as a priority communication theme, especially because: *“Environment and sustainable development are issues that are closely related to everyday life of the EU citizens. (...) Even if such issues are tackled in more specific information efforts by various DG of the Commission, or by other EU institutions, they should also be integrated in the total information and communication effort. Every-day issues provide the concretization at individual level of EU activities. Their value should not be underestimated.”*

⁴⁷ We might also mention here the consultations of the parties involved in the extended impact assessment procedure, cf. COM (2002)276 (5/6/2002)

⁴⁸ 2001a08 (24/4/2001): “Advies over de strategie voor duurzame ontwikkeling van de Europese Unie”, § 21

⁴⁹ Standard Eurobarometer 61 (Spring 2004), p.7 and p.19

⁵⁰ The FCSD believes that further studies in this regard are useful. The Eurobarometer could in its periodical analyses (Standard) look into knowledge of and the attitude to sustainable development, and/or, after the May 2002 Flash (123) on sustainable development, conduct a new (and more extensive) one-off study on this topic.

⁵¹ See among others COM(2002)350 (2/7/2002): “COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on an information and communication strategy for the European Union” and COM(2004)196 (20/4/2004): “COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union”



- [48] This means that the EU needs to profile itself in its communications as a Union that promotes a policy of sustainable development, and that this should be translated in a concrete manner towards a wide audience. Sustainable development must not be seen as a theoretical concept but rather as a project connected with living, working, consumption, transport and so on, a project of inherent interest that makes sense since its ultimate objective is to safeguard and to improve the quality of life for citizens and their children. In such an approach, the accent lies more on the positive aspects than on disaster scenarios: the main theme is that sustainable development offers new opportunities, for instance, to make environmental concerns, employment opportunities and well-being compatible with one another (see § 24). This needs to be illustrated with sample projects and “best practices” in the Member States. The constant starting point, within feasible limits, should be the citizen’s day-to-day world, which means that much attention will also be devoted to local and regional initiatives (local Agenda 21, achievements via the Regional Funds, etc.).
- [49] This kind of communication, however, is only possible if the EU can build up a coherent approach to sustainable development in which the Lisbon and Göteborg processes are attuned to one another and the areas of tension between the two are clarified rather than ignored (see § 18). The strategy must be transparent so that it becomes clear to everyone the kinds of choices with which the government, the various actors, and the citizens in our society are being confronted. What is not clearly thought out cannot be communicated clearly either.
- [50] A second condition for successfully communicating sustainable development is linked to the implementation process. *“The best way to demonstrate and communicate what sustainable development means is to effect tangible improvements to people’s lives”*.⁵² Words are credible only when confirmed by deeds. The EU’s sustainable development policy must for that reason also state concrete objectives, establish a time span, define responsibilities for the implementation of the measures, and organize monitoring and the follow-up of the policy.

EUSDS priority themes

- [51] In its source document of 2001⁵³, the Commission proposed focusing sustainable development strategy on six areas where problems present a serious or irreversible threat to the well-being of European society. These priority themes are: climate change, public health, poverty and social exclusion, ageing, management of resources, and mobility/transport. In the consultative document for the EUSDS review, the Commission summarizes the measures that have been undertaken in the meantime and outlines the progress already achieved in each. Paragraphs 53- 77 comment on these findings: they are based primarily on past FCSD opinions on the different themes.
- [52] The FCSD believes it would be useful to pay more attention to the issue of “sustainable production and consumption”.⁵⁴ Obviously, this is addressed under “management of natural resources”, but treating it as a transversal concept in all six priority themes would give greater emphasis to the imperative need to change production and consumption practices in the drive to sustainable development. Moreover, this is formulated in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation⁵⁵: *“Encourage and promote the development of a 10-year framework of programmes in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carryingcapacity of ecosystems by addressing and, where appropriate, delinking economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and production processes, and reducing resource degradation, pollution and waste. All countries should take action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development needs and capabilities of developing countries through mobilization, from allsources, of financial and technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries.”*

⁵² EEAC Sustainable Development Conference, Kinsale 15/4/2004, Report Work Group “Communicating SD in an enlarged EU”

⁵³ COM(2001)264

⁵⁴ Cf. also the point of view of the Federal Planning Bureau at the FCSD/CEC/NLC hearings on the review of the European sustainable development strategy 10/09/2004

⁵⁵ Plan of Implementation (September 2002) III, 14



A long-term approach to climate change

- [53] The FCSD is of the view that the European Union's Kyoto commitments (8% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2008-2012, in comparison to 1990 levels) is only a first step forward and that it is vital to adopt without delay a strategy for stabilising climate change within acceptable limits, i.e. limiting the global temperature increase to 2°C (see, among others the European Parliament and Council Decision laying down the *Sixth Community Environment Action Programme*, 22 July 2002). In this framework, the FCSD supports the Commission's action aimed at initiating a debate on reduction commitments post 2012, which will have to be followed by concrete commitments underpinned by a sound medium-term (2020-2030) and long-term (2050 and beyond) strategy. The FCSD will publish an opinion on this subject in November 2004.
- [54] Climate change is a worldwide problem. Therefore it has to be addressed globally. The European Union should be active in international institutions as to take forward work on climate change. The EU can take the lead in this field in order to convince other major players in the international arena to participate in the strategy addressing climate change. In particular, the European Union has a key role to play in solving the potential conflict between the vital necessity of safeguarding climate stability and existing international trade practices. This is important to better integrate social and ecological targets on international level, and to maintain the competitiveness of the EU adopting a SD-strategy.
- [55] The FCSD concurs with analyses demonstrating that to date there has been only very limited progress in the fight against climate change. Total emissions of the European Union of 15 did admittedly decline by some 3% between 1990 and 2000 (the figure amounts to 6% for the Europe of 25). Yet these reductions have primarily been due to economic cyclical trends (mostly industrial conversion and restructuring in the United Kingdom, Germany and certain new EU Member States). The FCSD therefore considers that the current policy could be insufficient to attain the Kyoto objectives⁵⁶.
- [56] There is considerable unexploited potential in the area of energy efficiency improvement and in the new technologies that release little or no CO₂. The FCSD calls for determined measures to address the development of this potential through an ambitious action programme for new technologies and through actions aimed at the improvement of energy efficiency where technically possible and economically beneficiary.
- [57] In the field of renewable energy, European objectives (renewable sources for 12% of Europe's gross domestic energy consumption and 22% of total European electricity consumption) are not likely to be reached in 2010. The FCSD calls on the European Union to draw the necessary conclusions from this failure and to adapt its policy.

The need to rethink mobility and transport

- [58] For the FCSD, the European strategy does not call into question the principle of ever-growing demand for transport. Growth of transport is not being uncoupled from economic growth and demand is continually on the rise⁵⁷. Indeed, CO₂ emissions from transport rose 19% between 1990 and 2001⁵⁸. The FCSD therefore considers that the European Union's current policy has only limited effects on CO₂ emissions, even though it has contributed to a sharp reduction of other pollutants. Stemming demand for mobility must be a political priority for sustainable development.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See for example the analysis of the Federal Planning Bureau, FCSD/CRB/NAR hearings on the EUSDS Review, 10/09/2004

⁵⁷ See for example the analysis of the Federal Planning Bureau, FCSD/CRB/NAR hearings on the EUSDS Review, 10/09/2004

⁵⁸ *Outstanding Environmental Issues, a review of the EU'S environmental agenda*, by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, at RIVM in cooperation with the EEA (September 2004), available on <http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/digitaaldepot/OutstandingEnvironmentalIssues.pdf>

⁵⁹ This paragraph and the following on mobility are taken from the "Opinion on the preliminary draft Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2004-2008" 2004a04 (12/05/2004), par. 202, 203, 204 and 206.



- [59] Thus, the "polluter pays" principle should be applied to all modes of transport. Indeed, it is high time for the external costs of different means of transport to be internalised. An effective policy of road pricing could be useful here.
- [60] In parallel, the FCSD favours an appreciable improvement of alternatives to air and road transport. The drive to develop, harmonise and modernise rail networks should particularly be taken further. The European Union's policies must be steered in that direction. Major investments will be required. The FCSD also considers that demand for air mobility should be reduced, notably by means of proposals relating to airport taxes and taxation on kerosene.
- [61] The FCSD considers it necessary, in a sustainable development approach, to attune mobility and spatial planning policies.

Battling poverty: paying more attention to the framework for sustainable development⁶⁰

- [62] The battle against poverty and social exclusion is an essential aspect of a sustainable development policy (cf. principle 5 of the Rio Declaration). Consequently, the Commission has done well making it a theme of the European sustainable development strategy.⁶¹ The FCSD considers it a positive sign that poverty and social exclusion are thus presented in a broader context, yet is of the opinion that too little use is made of this broader perspective for sustainable development.
- [63] This has undoubtedly to do with the fact that the Göteborg European Council endorsed only four of the six themes originally proposed by the Commission as priority concerns for the EUSDS: poverty and ageing are not mentioned. However, both themes are stated in the Lisbon Strategy. By better attuning the Lisbon and Göteborg processes to one another within a framework of a comprehensive sustainable development strategy for the EU (cf. §§ 16-23), the policy can develop further emphasis with respect to the themes of poverty and ageing.
- [64] In this way, the cross-sectional nature of these themes can be more prominently addressed. The problem of poverty is indeed tied in with other sustainable development themes such as the environment⁶², public health, the use of natural resources, sustainable consumption, the global dimension and so on. Those interconnections are not adequately elaborated in the current EU policy to combat poverty⁶³. In fact, no reference to them can be found in Belgium's National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2003-2005⁶⁴.
- [65] The best way of helping people out of poverty and exclusion is to create jobs. What is also important, however, is to create quality jobs in terms of working conditions, job content and employment relations. As the Central Economic Council and the National Labour Council rightly point out, "*the qualitative dimension of European employment policy is essential. It forms the cornerstone of the Lisbon strategy.*"⁶⁵ Accordingly, these Councils also call for job quality indicators to be established at European level.

⁶⁰ For comments on the themes of "poverty" and "ageing", special consideration was given to the FCSD opinion on the draft Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2004-2008: 2004A04 (12/5/2004), § 89 to 139

⁶¹ COM(2001)264

⁶² The relationship between environmental burdens and poverty is a central theme in the "environmental justice"-movement. Cf. seminar FCSD 12/02/2004

⁶³ Cf. also the analysis of the Planning bureau during the FCSD/CRB/NAR hearings on the EUSDS review, 10/09/2004

⁶⁴ In the context of the open method of coordination, the Member States draw up bi-annual national action plans to achieve the EU objectives for combating poverty: see the Resolutions of the European Councils of Lisbon (March 2000), Nice (December 2000), Stockholm (March 2001), Laeken (December 2001) and Brussels (March 2003)

⁶⁵ CEC/NLC Opinion 2004-901 on the European sustainable development strategy (p.17), with reference to CEC/NLC 2002/240 of 13/02/2002



[66] The fight against poverty cannot be limited to Europe alone. An approach to sustainable development also has to attach importance to the global dimension of the problem. The Commission Communication on the external dimension of the Göteborg strategy⁶⁶ provides real stimulus in this respect. However, the relation between the external and internal dimensions of the European sustainable development strategy is not always clear, although the integration of the two aspects is considered a priority (e.g. for agricultural policy and fisheries policy)⁶⁷. Policy implementation as announced also sometimes leaves room for improvement. The European Economic and Social Committee points this out in its opinion on European sustainable development strategy⁶⁸: “*The Committee does not feel that adequate consideration has so far been given to the issues of distributive and intergenerational justice. The fact that development aid is running at less than half of the promised levels is just one sign that a great deal remains to be done before a coherent policy may be said to be in place*”.

Ageing: giving form to a multigenerational society

[67] In the view of sustainable development, demographic developments have always figured as important determinants (see, for instance, *Agenda 21, section 1, chapter 5*). A characteristic feature of current demographic evolution and that of the coming decades is the ageing of the population. At the European level, the theme is given particular prominence in the Lisbon process, although the Commission has also proposed it as a priority issue for the EUSDS (see § 63). Here as well, an approach originating from a comprehensive view of sustainable development can lead to new insights into the problem.

[68] The ageing population brings about an important financing problem. The Member States have to develop policies to maintain their ability to keep paying pensions and health care systems while the percentage of the active population is on the decline. This is a fundamental question, but it would be useful also to pay greater attention to the socio-cultural aspect: How can we give form in a positive way to a “multigenerational” society? How can we safeguard solidarity between generations? How can we improve our use of the social and cultural capital offered by our senior citizens' know-how and experience?⁶⁹

[69] In a sustainable development approach, the cross-sectional nature of the ageing problem needs to be given greater prominence. There are clear links to themes such as environment and climate-related health⁷⁰ and sustainable consumption.

[70] Likewise, we should not lose sight of the global dimension of ageing. Southern countries will experience the phenomenon at a later date than Northern ones, but the consequences will be more severe.⁷¹ Indeed, the North has been able to prepare itself for the problems that follow in the wake of ageing, while the South cannot have recourse to a well-developed social security structure (pensions, public health care) to accommodate the needs of an increasing number of seniors.

Natural resources: uncoupling still a long way off

[71] The uncoupling of growth from the use of natural resources and waste production is essential to achieve sustainable development. The Commission mentioned this as a priority objective in its EUSDS source document of 2001, and in recent years action has in fact been taken, for instance, with the integrated product policy. Nonetheless, it seems limited to the level of intentions: implementation leaves a lot to be desired as all too few concrete and quantifiable objectives have been established; likewise, no time limits have been set.⁷²

⁶⁶ COM(2002)82 (13/2/2002)

⁶⁷ COM(2002)82 (13/2/2002), 3.4. Concerning possible tension between the internal and external dimensions, see also par. 17 and 79 of this opinion.

⁶⁸ European Economic and Social Committee NAT/229 – CESE 661/2004 (28/4/2004): “Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy – exploratory opinion”, 3.2

⁶⁹ Cf. the FCSD hearing of 25 March 2004 with Prof. Loriaux (UCL) about demography and ageing

⁷⁰ In this respect, seniors are, like children, a vulnerable group; cf. the mortality rate during the heat wave of 2003

⁷¹ Cf. “second world assembly on ageing” of the UN (2002)

⁷² Cf. analysis of the Planning bureau during the FCSD/CRB/NAR hearings on the EUSDS review, 10/09/2004; EEAC opinions “Strengthening sustainable development in the EU” (November 2003); Publication “Green Eight Review of the EU sustainable development strategy” (August 2004)



- [72] It is likely that in time a further reduction in material and energy flows in the economy, and in all products and production processes, will be required. In its opinion on the Commission's Green Paper on Integrated Product Policy, the FCSD mentioned that the Commission could have taken position regarding notions such as *factor 4* and *factor 10*. *"Within the context of factor 4, the industrial countries should in the medium-term become four times more efficient in the area of raw products and materials. In the longer-term, factor 4 would not even be adequate and factor 10 ought to be aimed for."*⁷³
- [73] An important instrument leading towards more sustainable production and consumption is the internationalisation of external costs. In a number of opinions, the FCSD has already pointed to its importance.⁷⁴ On the European level, little progress appears to have been made in this area. This also holds true for taxation policy, which *"(is) an important instrument in the policy mix that has to be used to achieve the uncoupling crucial for a sustainable development"*⁷⁵. The fact that taxation is seldom used has to do with the unanimity requirement in the EU for decisions in this respect.
- [74] This situation makes it difficult to stimulate a more sustainable consumption pattern via a price policy, while prices nonetheless play an important role for the consumer. In its opinion on the Green Paper on Integrated Product Policy mentioned above, the FCSD points out that *"it is not enough to inform the public better. The Council asks that, when necessary and possible, and taking into account the economic, ecological, and social dimensions, sustainable products should be made more attractive than traditional products. The differentiation must be effected to the degree possible, in keeping with objective criteria that take into account the feasible external costs."*⁷⁶

Public health: more attention required for global problems

- [75] The EU has in the past years managed to make some progress in this area, more specifically on food safety (e.g. creation of the European Food Safety Authority) and consumer information and labelling. The proposal for a new EU regulatory framework for chemicals (the REACH project) is another step in the right direction. The aims of this proposed new regulation are to improve the protection of human health and the environment while maintaining the competitiveness and enhancing the innovative capability of the EU chemicals industry.
- [76] Here also the transversal aspect needs to be given more attention. The health priority, for example, is tied in to other aspects of sustainable development. The relation between health and environmental factors (including climate change) needs to be analysed further⁷⁷. The relation between health and poverty should also be addressed. Inhabitants of poor districts, for instance, generally have more health problems, especially as a result of insalubrious housing. Tackling public health problems like these will take much more than statements of intent: an effective policy with quantified objectives and an implementing calendar is needed.

⁷³ FCSD 2001a09 (22/5/2001), § 19

⁷⁴ FCSD 2004a04 (§163), 2002a07 (§44), 2001a08 (§25) ...

⁷⁵ FCSD 2004a04 (12/05/2004), § 66

⁷⁶ FCSD 2001a09 (22/5/2001), § 23

⁷⁷ Cf. Report by the FCSD delegation to the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Budapest 23/6/2004



[77] As for the external dimension, more attention could be paid to the impact of infectious diseases in the third world: scourges such as AIDS and TB present an obstacle to sustainable development in the southern nations.⁷⁸ In this connection, the FCSD refers to the commitments on health made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg). The Action Plan adopted in Johannesburg devotes an entire chapter (chapter 6) to health and sustainable development. *“Other chapters of the Action Plan also contain decisions on health, for instance: chapter 2 §8: to safeguard people’s health, the objective is by 2015 to reduce by half the segment of the population without access to drinking water and basic sanitary facilities; chapter 3 §23 states that by 2020 efforts must be undertaken to ensure that chemical substances, and especially persistent organic pollutants (see §23a), should be used and produced in such a manner as to result in minimal negative consequences for people’s health and for the environment.”*⁷⁹

The external dimension: promoting sustainable development at global level

[78] In general, the EUSDS review needs to take into account the multilateral context that is fitting to the European sustainable development strategy. European policy needs to be coordinated with that of institutions such as the UN (major events, CSD, UNEP, etc.), the G8, the WTO (Doha development Round) and the OECD, and with processes such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Marrakech process, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and so on⁸⁰. In these international institutions and processes the EU can promote the sustainable development strategy in various ways.⁸¹ For instance, in the OECD the Union could argue for the permanent status of the expert group on sustainable development, currently set for a term of only two years.

[79] The EU further needs to exert its influence in the World Trade Organisation to have its sustainable development strategy better translated into international trade policy. The danger does indeed exist of seeing the Union's efforts to achieve sustainable development, for example via cost internalisation, resulting in a competitive handicap to its economy compared to economies that ignore sustainable development. For that reason, the FCSD advocated in a 2002 opinion *“... a reinforcement of the integration of sustainable development into the current institutions of the UN, Bretton Woods and the WTO (...). Some kind of balance between the three pillars of sustainable development must be reached in the policies of these institutions and organizations”*.⁸² In its recent opinion, the EESC in turn clearly states: *“The Commission must therefore work – much harder than it has done hitherto – to ensure that, for example, sustainability criteria such as clear environmental, animal welfare and social standards are integrated into the WTO negotiations as a matter of urgency. Sustainability therefore has to do not only with production and consumption but also to a very large extent with international trade. However, in the WTO, much too little account has so far been taken of sustainability considerations.”*⁸³ In pursuing this objective, the competitiveness of the EU should also be taken into account.

⁷⁸ Cf. the analysis of the Planning Bureau at the FCSD/CRB/NAR hearings on the EUSDS-review, 10/09/2004

⁷⁹ FCSD 2002a23 (17/12/2002), §10

⁸⁰ Cf. analysis of Chris Van den Bilcke (FOD External Affairs) at the FCSD/CRB/NAR hearing on the EUSDS-review of 10/09/2004

⁸¹ In its “Opinion for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg” (2002a06 § 47), the FCSD advocated *“... a reinforcement of the integration of sustainable development into the current institutions of the UN, Bretton Woods and the WTO. In the short term, there is an urgent need for greater coordination amongst the UN-institutions themselves and amongst these institutions and the WTO and Bretton Woods institutions. In this respect, the Council points to the Cardiff and Göteborg processes at European level and calls on Belgium to argue for a similar integration process at the international level. The policy of these institutions must strike a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development.”*

⁸² FCSD 2002a06, § 47

⁸³ European Economic and Social Committee NAT/229 – CESE 661/2004 (28/4/2004): “Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy – exploratory opinion”, 6.4. Also § 6.5 is relevant here: *“Just as it is necessary to accept developing countries’ argument that they no longer wish to suffer, for example, from agricultural subsidies, so too must other countries accept that the EU can no longer tolerate the abandonment of domestic production because it cannot compete with rival products that are produced using methods that distort competition and are unacceptable from a sustainability angle.”*



[80] In the Commission's document on the external dimension of the EUSDS⁸⁴, a number of actions are mentioned in connection with trade and sustainable development. The promotion of sustainable development in the South is also treated in detail in this document. The FCSD has emphasized the importance of this point in a number of opinions⁸⁵. Yet, the relationship of sustainable development in Europe to sustainable development in the South is not always clear from the EU documents, or, in other words, how the external dimension of the EUSDS relates to its internal dimension. It would be useful for this point to be clarified in the course of the review. A win-win situation in terms of the pillars of sustainable development in Europe does not necessarily mean a win-win situation at global level. There exists the danger that environmental improvements in the North will export resources utilization and pollution problems to the South. It is therefore incumbent on us to ensure that sustainable development in Europe will not lead to ecological (and social) dumping in economically less developed countries.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ COM(2002)82 (13/2/2002) "Towards a global partnership for sustainable development", p.8

⁸⁵ For an example, see 2004a04 (§ 55 and 60), 2002a22 (§37)

⁸⁶ Cf. FCSD 2004a04 (12/5/2004) "Opinion on the Preliminary Draft of the federal plan for sustainable development 2004-2008", §47



Annex 1. Number of members present/number of representatives with voting rights at the General Assembly on 29 October 2004

3 Presidents et Vice-Presidents
5 out of 6 representatives from NGOs for environmental protection;
5 out of 6 representatives from NGOs for development cooperation;
0 representatives of NGOs for the protection of consumer interests;
5 representatives of workers' organizations;
6 representatives of employers' organizations;
2 representatives of energy producers;
6 scientific experts.

Total: 32 out of the 38 members with voting rights.

Annex 2. Meetings to draw up this opinion

The Work Group Strategies for Sustainable Development organized four hearings together with the Central Economic Council and the National Labour Council (24 August, 2 September, 6 September and 10 September 2004). In total 14 experts gave their opinion : V. Pollard (DG Milieu), M. Ribbe and Ehnmark (EESC), I. Niestroy (EEAC), H.Vos (UGent), J.Hontelez (EEB), H.Bruyninckx (KUL), S.Dupressoir (ETUC), J. Langendorff (DG Ondernemingen), N.Gouzée and 3 members of the Task Force SD of the Planning Bureau, Chris Van den Bilcke (Federal Service Foreign Affairs)

In addition, six ordinary meetings of the WG took place in preparation of this opinion: 9, 17, 23 and 30 September, and 7 and 21 October 2004

Annex 3. People involved in drafting this advice

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