



Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD)

Opinion on the priorities for the Belgian EU Presidency in 2010

- **Requested by Paul Magnette, Minister for Energy and Climate**
- **Submitted to the General Meeting of the FRDO-CFDD of 27 March 2009**
- **Prepared by the working group on Strategies for Sustainable Development, enlarged with members of other working groups**
- **The original language of this opinion is Dutch**

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Context of the opinion

- [a] Belgium will hold the presidency of the European Union from 1 July to 31 December 2010. With a view to greater continuity of the presidency, in 2007 the EU embarked on a trio Presidency or troika of three countries. This means that the three countries that assume the presidency in succession draw up a common programme for the period of their trio presidency (i.e. eighteen months in total). The Belgian EU presidency will fall between the Spanish presidency (first half of 2010) and Hungary (first half of 2011). This troika will at the end of 2009 submit to the Council a common presidency programme that will enter into force on January the first 2010.
- [b] Against this background, in a letter of January 23th 2009, Minister Magnette asked the FRDO-CFDD for opinion on the topics and issues to which Belgium will have to give priority during its presidency.
- [c] The bureau of the FRDO-CFDD has decided to issue a brief opinion on the main lines at this stage. By way of background information, the council had a document from the federal administration with an inventory of issues which might be broached during the presidency, and a draft "Strategic Framework of the Team Presidency" of Spain, Belgium and Hungary.



The contribution of the FRDO-CFDD applies both for this document, the final version of which will be published in November of this year, and for the programme of the Belgian presidency, which will be made public in June 2010.

Priorities for the Belgian EU Presidency in 2010

- [1] The FRDO-CFDD sees 5 important priorities for the Belgian Presidency. These are presented below one by one.
- [2] First, the Council wishes to point out that it is of crucial importance for the actions of the Belgian Presidency to be framed in a vision of Sustainable Development. The integration of economic, ecological and social aspects must lead to a more consistent and more effective European policy. The draft version of the trio presidency of Spain, Belgium and Hungary does not depart from such a vision on the future for the Union, and the FRDO-CFDD asks that sufficient attention be paid thereto in the final "Strategic Framework of the Team Presidency."
- [3] As regards the process, the FRDO-CFDD stresses the importance of transparency and participation in policy implementation for the Belgian Presidency. There is a need for open communication on the positions that our country defends, and when charting such position, due account must be taken of the social views on the issues to be broached. It is already positive that stakeholders are asked for their opinion on the priorities of the presidency, and that a "Task Force 2010" has been set up to communicate with the citizen about the European presidency.

Priority 1: A sustainable response to the economic crisis

- [4] The current financial and economic crisis will undoubtedly still feature high on the European agenda during the troika presidency. This gives the presidency a sterling opportunity to approach the challenge raised by the financial and economic crisis and its dramatic social impact head on and intelligently, by not seeing it separately from the ecological challenge, but on the contrary by using the response to the ecological challenge as an element of the recovery.
- [5] An integrated policy response at both the EU and the national level is needed for these crises, where short-term measures are integrated in a long-term vision. It makes no sense today to propose policy solutions for the short-term which will evoke even greater problems in the future. For instance, it makes no sense to scale down goals for energy efficiency, renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction at this time, because any short-term benefits they may yield will be undone in the medium and long-term by the costs that climate change will entail. Such a long-term vision must also serve as reference for the policy for the financial sector.
- [6] Conversely, a long-term vision that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development must give direction to the recovery policy for the short term. Support measures, such as those being currently taken for the automobile industry, the construction industry or the financial sector, must be adjusted in accordance with ecological and social criteria.
- [7] An important impulse for growth in other sectors too can arise from the goal of a low-carbon economy that makes frugal use of energy and raw materials. A recovery policy must therefore be geared in particular for the promotion of eco-innovation on different levels, especially under the new Lisbon strategy (cf. §§ 9 ff.).



- [8] The FRDO-CFDD therefore calls for a sustainable new deal: a structural and collective response to the economic crisis that reviews our production and consumption by taking into account the ecological challenges, the demand for social justice and the call for a healthy economy.¹ The council calls on the presidency to include this priority in the discussions on the next EU budget (multiyear financial framework).

Priority 2: Combine Lisbon and sustainable development into a sustainable new deal

- [9] The FRDO-CFDD proposes that this idea of a *sustainable new deal* be discussed at the European level during the summit on the environment, climate and energy to be held according to the Belgian federal government agreement in Brussels, a first time under the Belgian Presidency of the EU.²
- [10] The sustainable development approach and a Sustainable New Deal must be given concrete shape by the Belgian and the trio presidency when renewing the Lisbon strategy. This strategy for growth and jobs, launched by the European Union in March 2000, and revised in 2005, runs until 2010. The FRDO-CFDD asks the Belgian presidency, when renewing the Lisbon strategy, to plead that this strategy be pursued concurrently with the other umbrella strategy of the European Union, namely the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy (EUSDS).
- [11] The latter strategy is in theory complementary to the Lisbon process, but uses other instruments and is oriented more to a longer term.³ In reality, however, both processes appear to function independently from each other at both the European and national level.
- [12] To bring about the integration of Lisbon and the EUSDS under a Sustainable New Deal, the new strategy must be followed up and assessed on the basis of a limited but balanced list of indicators.
- [13] Both the Lisbon strategy and the EUSDS contain an important social dimension. In this regard, 2010 has been designated the European year for the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The trio presidency will draw up a programme together with the Commission on this matter. After an evaluation of the Social Agenda, the three countries will, together with the Commission, propose a new Social Agenda and a broad deliberation and consultation round.⁴ In this regard, the FRDO-CFDD appreciates that the framework text of the trio presidency underscores the importance of social security and healthcare in the Member States, and states clearly that these systems must be strengthened, certainly in times of economic crisis (§ 21). Care must also be taken here regarding the sustainable nature of public finances.

Priority 3: An ambitious climate and energy policy

- [14] As regards the climate policy, the result of the climate conference in Copenhagen at the end of 2009 will be of great importance for the Presidency. Our country must therefore ensure that the European Union confirms its pioneering role on climate policy by calling for an ambitious new world climate agreement and for a rapid ratification and implementation thereof. The climate agreement must take account both of the principle of common but

¹ Cf. FRDO-CFFD 2009a03

² Cf. Federal coalition agreement 2007

³ See FRDO 2006a11, 2006a06 and 2004a09.

⁴ Cf. draft of the trio presidency of Spain, Belgium and Hungary "Strategic Framework of the Team Presidency" §§ 17 ff.



differentiated responsibility, and of a level playing field for the actors concerned, so that regions that commit themselves to an ambitious climate policy do not suffer economic loss from competition by regions that use less strict climate standards.

- [15] If a new world agreement is reached for the post-Kyoto period (after 2012), Europe will have to define the terms and conditions of the new climate regime. The FRDO-CFDD believes that such post 2012 agreement must be performed not only in an economic and ecological, but also in a socially acceptable manner, and that the necessary means and resources must be provided for such a transition. To be able to give the necessary impetus at EU level, our country must as of now already prepare and invest in the necessary expertise, by calling on government experts as well as the scientific world and social organisations.
- [16] At the same time, the Presidency must encourage the Union to set the good example by implementing its energy and climate package (3 x 20 by 2020) without delay. The economic crisis must not be used as a pretext to scale down this policy (see § 5). In this connection, it is worth pointing out that it is important to have a vision on climate not only for the medium term (2020) but also for the long term, as benchmark for policy. As regards the energy policy, the council calls for attention to be paid to the social and economic impact of rising energy prices, and for the expansion of energy networks between countries, which also enables support in an energy crisis.

Priority 4: Attention for biodiversity and sustainable production/consumption

- [17] 2010 will be an important year for the protection of biodiversity, and the trio presidency programme rightly mentions this as a priority.⁵ More specifically, the final assessment report on the EU biodiversity action plan 2006-2010 will appear next year; in October 2010, the 10th meeting of the *World Convention on Biological Diversity* will be held in Japan; 2010 has been designated as the International Year of Biodiversity by the UN, and a special session of the UN General Assembly will be convened in September. Our country will play an important role as EU president at these international conferences. Here too, the European Union must set ambitious goals for the period after 2010, for Europe and for the world. It will be necessary to ensure that the biodiversity approach is consistent with policy in other areas, such as climate and agriculture. In this field too, Belgium must invest in resources and expertise in order to be able to play a pioneering role.
- [18] Sustainable management and sustainable exploitation of natural resources will be needed in order to maintain biodiversity. Forest management and fisheries are important aspects in this connection. The European Union must ensure that only legal wood reaches the European market by enacting and applying strict regulations. Furthermore Belgium, given its historical links with Central Africa, must work hard within the European Union against deforestation. The fisheries policy also deserves the necessary attention of the Belgian presidency. The FRDO-CFDD calls on the Belgian Presidency to commit itself to a fisheries policy that integrates economic and social goals better with environmental concerns such as the exhaustion of fish stocks. An important effort must in particular be made to switch from harmful fishing practices to more sustainable fishing methods.⁶
- [19] The FRDO-CFDD believes that, against this background, the Belgian Presidency must place sustainable production and consumption higher on the agenda. In addition to the ongoing processes in implementation of the Commission's announcement on the matter, thematic strategies on waste prevention and recycling and on the sustainable use of natural resources

⁵ Cf. § 39

⁶ Cf. The FRDO-CFDD report on the request for opinion in the National Operational Programme for Fisheries and on the Strategic Environmental Assessment:
<http://www.frdo-cfdd.be/DOC/pub/rest/NOP%20FRDO%202008%2007%2028.pdf>



will be evaluated in 2010. This will be a good opportunity to organise a reflection on dematerialisation and on cradle to cradle at European level.

[20] As regards the instruments for such a policy, the FRDO-CFDD has noted that on 10 March instant, the Council (Economic and Financial Affairs) had not reached an agreement on the possibility of lowering the VAT in the EU Member States also for “energy-saving materials and other environment-friendly products and services.” The FRDO-CFDD calls on the Belgian Presidency to stimulate a concrete decision on this matter at Council level, as part of a global reflection on market-based instruments.

[21] Preparation for the 7th European Environmental Action Programme will apparently get under way in 2010. The presidency must insist on a transparent and participatory process, both in the evaluation and the definition of the new action programme, with particular attention paid to a harmonisation of methods for environmental inspection and reporting in the EU Member States.

Priority 5: Include the world and social dimension also

[22] The FRDO-CFDD also underscores a need for a coherent approach to sustainable development for issues relating to the external policy of the EU and the policy of multilateral institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO. Furthermore, the FRDO-CFDD calls on the Belgian Presidency to do its utmost for the Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) process and to stick to the schedule for the European quantitative commitments on cooperation for development (“the 0.7%”). For the Millennium goals will also be assessed in 2010. The FRDO-CFDD believes that this is a matter of priority for the Belgian Presidency, as our country will represent the European position at the UN conference in New York. Belgium’s attention should focus in particular on Africa, all the more so as the Third EU-AU Summit will be held during its presidency.

[23] The Belgian Presidency will also have an important role to play in the revision of two important development instruments, namely the European Development Fund (EDF) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). The FRDO-CFDD calls for the integration of the EDF in the European budget, without reducing the specific nature thereof or of the funds available for the ACP countries. The FRDO-CFDD also calls for maintaining the autonomy of the DCI and the entire European development policy in the light of the institutional reform of the European external policy, with the retention of a responsible Commissioner with appropriate resources at his or her disposal. In this context, more attention will also have to be paid to the sustainable management of resources and the climate policy, and to make sure that the funds for such policy are not appropriated at the expense of the current funds for official development aid.

[24] The FRDO-CFDD appreciates that the trio presidency will pay attention to social inclusion within the framework of multi- or bilateral external relations in order to put the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda to practice.⁷ By extension, the European trade strategy “Global Europe” must be revised so that the Decent Work Agenda, more attention for the broad social and environmental impact, and respect for all human rights, in particular the right to food, take centre stage in the EU’s external trade policy.

⁷ Cf. § 28



Annex 1 Voting members of the general meeting that took part in the voting on this opinion

- 3 of the 4 (vice-)presidents:
T. Rombouts, I. Callens, A. Panneels.
- 5 of the 6 representatives of NGOs for the protection of the environment:
R. de Schaetzen (Natagora), J. Gilissen (IEB), M. O. Herman (IEW), J. Miller (IEW), J. Turf (Bond Beter Leefmilieu).
- 3 of the 6 representatives of NGOs for development cooperation:
A. Heyerick (VODO), B. Gloire (Oxfam-Solidarité), N. Van Nuffel (CNCD)
- 1 of the 2 representatives of NGOs defending consumers rights:
Catherine Rousseau (CRIOC)
- 2 of the 6 representatives of trade union organisations:
D. Van Daele (Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique), D. Van Oudenhove (ACLVB-CGSLB)
- The 6 representatives of the employers organisations:
A. Nachtergaele (Federatie Voedingsindustrie), I. Chaput (Essenscia, M.-L. Semaille (Fédération wallonne de l'agriculture), A. Deplae (Union des Classes Moyennes), P. Vanden Abeele (Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers), O. Van der Maren (Fédération des entreprises belges).
- 0 of the 2 representatives of the energy producers
- 5 of the 6 scientific representatives:
M. Carnol (Université de Liège), R. Ceulemans (Universiteit Antwerpen), L. Helsen (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), D. Lesage (Universiteit Gent), E. Zaccarì (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

Total: 25 of the 38 voting members

Annex 2

Meeting for the preparation of this opinion

The working group on *Strategies for sustainable development*, enlarged with members from other working groups, met on 19 February, 6 and 11 March 2009 to prepare this opinion. During the first meeting, Mr Philippe Detheux (from the office of Minister Maignette) gave an explanation on the request for opinion.

Annex 3

Participants in the preparation of this opinion

Chairman/Vice-Chairman

Wim MOESEN – (KUL)

Jan TURF (BBL)



FRDO-CFDD Members and their representative

Esmeralda BORGIO (BBL)

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3Pauline De WOUTERS (IEW)

4Despinoza EUTHIMIOU (CJEF)

5Myriam GISTELINCK (OXFAM)

6Brigitte GLOIRE (Oxfam)

7An HEYERICK (VODO)

8Wiske JULT (111111)

9Gerard KARLSHAUSEN (CNCD)

10Isabelle LETAWE (CJEF)

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12Jacqueline MILLER (ULB)

13Emilie JK MUTOMBO (ULB)

14Amélie NASSAUX

15Edilma QUINTANA (CNCD)

16Christophe QUINTARD (FGTB)

17Marianne SCHLESSER (KBIN – Biodiversiteit)

18Alexandre SERON (CNCD)

19Stéphane VAN DEN EEDE (IEW)

20Sam VAN DEN PLAS (WWF)

21Jo VERVECKEN (ABVV)

22Michael VOORDECKERS (VBO)

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