

Opinion on the Follow-Up to Rio+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

- At the request of the Minister responsible for sustainable development, Steven Vanackere, and the minister responsible for development cooperation, Paul Magnette, by letters of 29 October 2012
 - Prepared by the working party on international relations
 - Approved by the general meeting of 29 January 2013¹, with an abstention by the employers' organisations
 - This opinion was originally drawn up in Dutch
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1. Context

- [a] The Council received two requests for an opinion. One came from ministers Magnette and Vanackere and pertains primarily to the Post-2015 Development Agenda,² i.e. the successor of the MDGs.³ In connection with Rio+20, it was agreed that SDGs⁴ would be defined. Both processes will one way or another be integrated in the course of the following years. The other request stems from Minister Vanackere. It concerns the follow up to Rio +20⁵ and is geared to the role of Belgium in the various processes⁶ for the follow-up to the Rio+20 conference.
- [b] The Council opted to combine the two requests for opinion and to produce two opinions on the basis thereof. The first opinion will provide only certain guidelines for the Belgian position on the processes for the follow-up to Rio+20 and will moreover deal primarily with the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the SDGs. By completing this first opinion rapidly, the Council hopes to be able to give input to the federal government, as the European Commission plans to publish a communication on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the SDGs in the beginning of 2013. In a second opinion, it will then delve deeper into aspects which were broached only generally if at all in this first opinion.
- [c] This opinion is not intended to assess the results of Rio+20, but is geared primarily to the follow up of the conference. The various opinions issued on this subject in 2011 and 2012 can be referred to for the Council's position prior to Rio+20.
- [d] Just as in previous opinions in preparation for Rio+20, the Council wants to stress the gravity of the planetary situation, which has not improved since the Rio+20 conference – quite the contrary. In spite of efforts by many, the real results (particularly in checking and repairing environmental degradation, reducing inequality) after twenty years of sustainable development remain limited, whilst wealth has doubled worldwide since 1992. In some ways, things have deteriorated compared with 1992. This observation makes certain ecological and social challenges even more urgent.

¹ The employers' organisations did not take part in the activities for drawing up this opinion. They consequently did

² [Beyond 2015](#)

³ MDG = Millennium Development Goal

⁴ SDG = Sustainable Development Goal | The Future We Want, § 245-251

⁵ [Outcome Document 'The Future We Want' Rio+20](#)

⁶ [Follow-up to Rio+20](#)

- [e] The MDGs have produced a number of positive results, but the balance is not homogenous enough. Results in reducing hunger and child mortality are particularly scarce in Sub-Saharan African countries. According to the UN, the proportion of people suffering from hunger has remained unchanged (16%),⁷ in spite of the global increase in wealth. The SDGs and the creation of a new framework for international cooperation and development provide an opportunity to broach a number of problems, and not simply their symptoms. To the end, we must look into non-sustainable consumption and production patterns, and tackle the causes of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation.

2. **Opinion**

2.1. **Framework for the Belgian position in the follow-up to Rio+20**

- [1] The Council expects Belgium to adopt an active position in the different processes for the follow-up to Rio+20. Belgium should play a pioneering role, through the EU framework, in the following processes:

- Secure optimal integration of the processes for Rio+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, at the international and EU level (see also below).
- Strive to secure as strong a mandate as possible for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF)⁸ which is to be set up as the successor of the CSD.⁹ The Council hopes that the positive attainments of the CSD will be adopted and continued by the HLPF.
- Define an ambitious 10YFP on SCP.¹⁰
- Bolster UNEP.¹¹
- Guarantee structural stakeholder participation in the different processes.¹²

- [2] The Council calls on Belgium to make every effort to get the EU – by way of response to the weak agreement on the green economy¹³ in Rio+20 and the limited public support for that agreement – to opt unequivocally for the greening of the economy through a coherent vision on the three dimensions of sustainable development, within the planetary boundaries. This entails in particular the following elements:

- The systematic setting of clear goals, particularly for resource efficiency, that chart the course for achieving an inclusive low carbon economy by 2050.
- The upgrading of initiatives relating to Beyond GDP.¹⁴
- The embedding of the principles of a just transition in EU policy.
- The adaptation of the European Semester by actually taking into consideration – in addition to stability and convergence programmes – the EU 2020 strategy as originally drawn up by the EU, and step out of the unilateral austerity rationale for Europe.
- The adaptation of the EU2020 framework, with fully-fledged integration of social and ecological objectives, to arrive at an integral approach to sustainable development, as the EU also says it wants to do through that strategy.
- Improved coherence between the different strategies, worked out in roadmaps.

⁷ www.un.org/fr/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml

⁸ The Future We Want, § 84-86.

⁹ CSD = Commission on Sustainable Development

¹⁰ 10YFP on SCP = [10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns](#) | The Future We Want, § 226

¹¹ The Future We Want, § 88-90

¹² The Future We Want, §42-55

¹³ The Future We Want, § 56-74

¹⁴ www.beyond-gdp.eu

- Striving for greater synergy between the different council configurations that would be involved in the implementation of Rio+20 and in shaping EU2020 and the European Semester.
- Attuning the Seventh Environmental Action Programme (7EAP)¹⁵ to the results of Rio+20.
- New initiatives to make up for lost ground in the implementation of the biodiversity policy.
- Develop a strategy that effectuates a just transition¹⁶ in the long term, and in particular provide quality employment for young people.¹⁷

[3] The Council calls on the federal government to take new or enhanced initiatives to implement Rio+20 in our own country. This entails the following elements in particular.

- An ambitious new Federal Sustainable Development Plan at long last, which charts the course to an inclusive low carbon society by 2050 through clear goals and a binding framework.
- A concerted strategy by the federal and regional governments that strives for maximum coherence among the different policy areas from the perspective of sustainable development and with respect for the planetary boundaries.
- A package of concrete policy measures for a greening of taxation¹⁸ and doing away with environmentally hazardous subsidies.¹⁹
- Proactive new initiatives to alter non-sustainable consumption and production patterns in anticipation of an ambitious 10YFP.

[4] The Council wishes to be structurally involved in these different initiatives.

2.2. Beyond 2015 and the SDGs

[5] Political trust and confidence between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres (which was often lacking in the context of Rio+20) is a crucial factor for success. Consequential monitoring of the balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development is a prime precondition to that end. Respect for the ecological boundaries of the planet must in particular be reconciled with the global fight against massive poverty and inequality and the legitimate right of the South to economic development. Taking into account the common but differentiated responsibility, more engagement and more solidarity must be forthcoming from all parties. This should manifest itself concretely in ambitious negotiating positions and targeted efforts to break through impasses.

[6] The Council calls on Belgium to take an active stance wherever possible in order to achieve maximum integration of the Post-2015 processes on the one hand, and to define SDGs as part of Rio+20 on the other. The two processes are evolving separately for the time being, with a different timetable and different guidance (via the UN or an inter-governmental effort). This should change in the course of the coming months. The aim should be a unified process after the 2013 UNGA.²⁰

[7] The Council calls on Belgium to continue pressing for as extensive an integration as possible of EU initiatives for these processes. It is a positive development that the Commission will, at the request of Belgium, among others, proceed to an integrated communication, and not to separate

¹⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/index.htm>

¹⁶ The five pillars of a just transition are: (1) dialogue (social dialogue and dialogue with the government), (2) respect for human and labour rights, (3) green and decent jobs, (4) investments and green competencies, (5) social protection.

¹⁷ The Future We Want, § 24.

¹⁸ Cf. In particular *Ten criteria for the greening of taxation within the framework of sustainable development* in the [FRDO/CFDD opinion](#) on the greening of taxation from 2009.

¹⁹ The Future We Want, § 225

²⁰ UNGA = [United Nations General Assembly](#)

communications on these subjects. This means that the initiatives of the separate commissioners, but also of the different council configurations, will be integrated. This integration should moreover guarantee fully-fledged attention being paid to all dimensions of these processes, which in concrete terms means that the attainment of the MDG model will not be subordinated to the charting of new SDGs.

- [8] The council is convinced that there is a need of one set of global goals. These should apply to all countries and must stem from a vision of sustainable development. The goals must be action-oriented, compact, easy to communicate, limited in number, global in nature and universally applicable. The new framework must enter into force in 2015. The goals defined should preferably be attainable by 2025.
- [9] The global goals should be based in particular on the following principles:
- Three principles must be at the core: human rights, equality (including equality between man and woman), sustainability²¹
 - Ongoing attention to eradicate poverty and improve the situation of the poorest and most vulnerable countries
 - Universal goals that can be applied nationally
 - CBDR²² for the implementation
 - Via a systemic approach, within planetary boundaries, geared to restoring the natural capacity, relying on equity in an inclusive society
 - Geared to the causes or drivers of non-sustainable consumption and production patterns
 - The goals are in themselves an expression of the three-dimensional agenda of sustainable development
 - Geared to good governance and accountability
 - Bolster participation by the civil society
 - Measurability and enforceability of goals.
- [10] To guarantee the CBDR principle, when translating world goals into national policy, countries must be given an opportunity to chart an implementation course based on their socio-economic position. In addition to the general global goals, countries must set their own specific goals. International solidarity and redistribution remain the guiding principles when implementing and financing such goals. The richest countries must first take the most far-reaching steps as rapidly as possible. To that end, they can draw inspiration from successful experiences from other countries, including in the South.
- [11] Global goals are not inextricable from the institutional framework. Defining such goals is not enough to achieve more sustainable development. Attention must therefore be paid to just international trade rules, equal access to and distribution of natural resources, control on the financial and capital flows, and a fair international legal order.
- [12] There is a need for an unequivocal mechanism for monitoring and following up the implementation of these goals by Member States. Goals and indicators must be in line with the international legal framework (human rights, ILO standards) and with the recent scientific insights (for ecological goals).
- [13] The active participation of stakeholders must be guaranteed in all phases of this course.
- [14] Vertical and horizontal integration are needed to achieve the goals. For vertical integration, goals and actions must be inter-coordinated at the world, European (in the case of Belgium), national and

²¹ As set out in the report of the UN System Task Team: [Realizing the Future We Want for All](#).

²² CBDR = Common But Differentiated Responsibilities ([principle 7 Rio Declaration](#))

subnational level. For horizontal integration, the different policy areas must work from an integrated vision. An ambitious programme for policy coherence (PCD)²³ in our country is consequently of crucial importance.

- [15] It is important, when defining goals, to integrate existing goals, such as the Aichi Targets for the protection of diversity, for instance, without any impairment as a result. The new framework must also include a goal for social protection floors, as provided in ILO Recommendation 202, which has defined an international standard of the matter that must be applied at national level. Furthermore, the ILO Agenda for decent work provides a reference instrument for understanding decent work and its elements together with indicators for assessing implementation progress.
- [16] Binding agreements are needed on providing the necessary financial means and resources so as to be able to achieve the goals.
- It is necessary to start with an adequate cost calculation on which the actors involved agree.
 - Agreements on development aid must be complied with fully (in particular ODA²⁴ and climate financing).
 - Innovative financial instruments must be used (in particular the FFT).²⁵
 - Belgium and the EU should develop new initiatives that lead to the effective provision of 'new and additional financial means and resources' over and above compliance with the previously agreed commitments as to the quantity and quality of aid.
 - The promotion of just taxation in all countries and at international level is a crucial factor for more international solidarity.²⁶
- [17] Defining the themes that must be given a place in the framework of the new world goals is no easy matter. In this connection, the Council supports the framework²⁷ that is proposed in the UN System Task Team as a point of departure for arriving at a balanced distribution of themes. Four dimensions are elaborated on the basis of three principles in this respect, and enablers are indicated each time. The three principles are: (1) human rights, (2) equality, (3) sustainability. The four dimensions are: (1) inclusive social development, (2) ecological sustainability, (3) inclusive economic development, (4) peace and security.

²³ PCD = Policy Coherence for Development (cf. [States General Development Cooperation 2012](#))

²⁴ ODA = Official Development Aid

²⁵ FFT = Financial Transaction Tax

²⁶ In this connection, the Council refers to ongoing initiatives and talks by the EU, the OECD and G20 on how to fight against tax havens, the adequate taxation of multinationals, and the connection between taxes and development.

²⁷ The Future We Want for All, diagram on p.24.

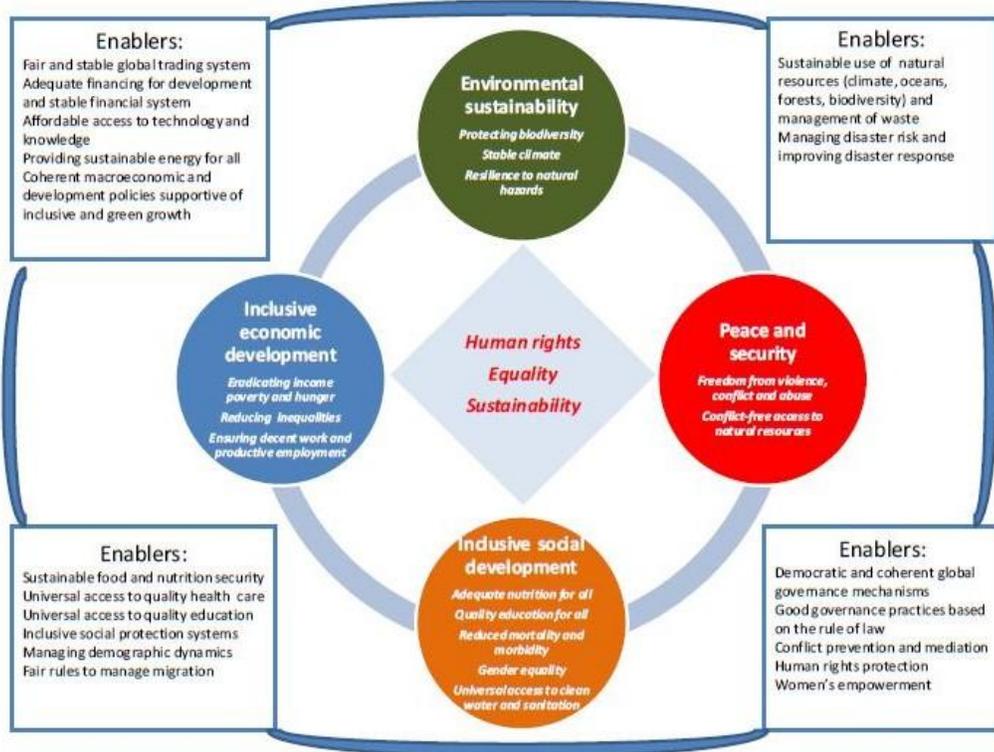


Figure 1. An integrated framework for realizing the "future we want for all" in the post-2015 UN development agenda

[18] In seeking a balanced whole of themes, the Belgian negotiators can provide added value thanks to the expertise they have acquired. According to the Council, Belgium must see to it that the following elements are included as a matter of priority:

- Right to food
- Eradication of poverty, with special attention to relative poverty
- Decent work
- Social protection
- Sustainable production and consumption
- Universal access to sustainable energy.