

Second opinion on the follow-up to Rio+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

- **At the request of the Minister for sustainable development, Steven Vanackere, and the Minister for development cooperation, Paul Magnette, in letters dated 29 October 2012**
 - **Prepared by the international relations working group**
 - **Approved by the general assembly, by written procedure | 25 April 2013 (see annex)**
 - **The original language of this opinion is Dutch**
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1. Context

- [a] The Council has received two requests for an opinion. The first comes from former ministers Magnette and Vanackere and relates primarily to the Post-2015 Development Agenda¹, i.e. to a successor for the millennium development goals (MDGs)². In connection with Rio+20 it was agreed that sustainable development goals³ - SDGs - should be developed. Both processes are to be integrated in one way or another over the next few years. The other comes from minister Vanackere and relates to the follow-up to Rio+20⁴ and is oriented towards the role of Belgium in the various follow-up processes⁵ involved.
- [b] The Council has decided to combine the two requests for an opinion and to draw up two opinions on that basis.
- [c] A first opinion was approved by the general meeting of the Council on 29 January.⁶ The aspects already covered in the first opinion will not be repeated here in the second.
- [d] This second opinion deals primarily with the communication of the European Commission on Post-2015 and the SDGs. It also considers the broader framework which will determine the success of the various processes involved in the follow-up to Rio+20 and preparation for Post-2015. Lastly a number of subjects which play an important role in these processes are considered in more depth.

2. Opinion

2.1. The European Commission communication

- [1] On 27 February 2013 the European Commission published its communication 'A Decent Life for All'.⁷ This communication sets out an approach to an integrated vision on the development of both the SDGs and the Post-2015 framework. This communication will be used as a basis for the European Council conclusions for the coming summer.
- [2] The FRDO-CFDD notes a good number of positive elements in the communication:⁸

¹ [Beyond 2015](#)

² MDG = Millennium Development Goal

³ SDG = Sustainable Development Goal | The Future We Want, points 245-251

⁴ [Outcome Document 'The Future We Want' Rio+20](#)

⁵ [Follow-up Rio+20](#)

⁶ See: http://www.frdo.be/DOC/pub/ad_av/2013/2013a01e.pdf.

⁷ [A decent life for all](#)

⁸ See also the analysis of the communication by the ICDO, supplemented by the discussions in COORMULTI.

- It is positive that the Commission has, following strong pressure from a few Member States including Belgium, opted for a single integrated communication on the two processes (SDGs and Post-2015). This could make a major contribution to a coherent and common approach by the EU and the Member States to the current negotiating processes. The decision to link the eradication of poverty structurally with sustainable development is the right one.
- The Council is pleased to observe that the Commission is a clear proponent of a single set of global goals.
- The Commission's emphasis on the importance of open dialogue with partner countries and stakeholders is welcome. It is important to ensure that all stakeholders are fully involved.
- The approach adopted (the heritage of the MDGs, 'drivers', sustainable management of natural resources, 'justice, equality and equity', peace and security) is a good starting point.
- In a number of places the emphasis is rightly put on the importance of development which takes account of planetary boundaries.
- It is welcome that the communication appears to opt in principle for the importance of 'social protection floors', although the details of these remain too vague or even inadequate (see below).

[3] However, the council is also disappointed by certain other aspects of the communication:

- As a whole the communication makes few practical suggestions for how the principles adopted should be translated into a more concrete policy, particularly concerning how these principles should be implemented at European level.
- The communication makes too few connections with current international initiatives, such as the first UN System Task Team Report.⁹
- And – although the Communication calls for an integrated approach – its Annex 1 contains nothing but a list of current and sectoral initiatives. This Annex also reduces many policy areas to an implementation of EU 2020, which is unacceptable as regards social policy, unemployment and the environment.
- In particular, despite many references to the importance of the inclusion of the three dimensions of sustainable development, the environmental dimension is underdeveloped in the communication.
- Along the same lines the communication emphasises a transition to an inclusive green economy. This approach is too narrow. A clearer choice needs to be made of a fair transition to a model of sustainable development within planetary limits. In this context there should be greater emphasis on the importance of sustainable and fair patterns of production and consumption.¹⁰
- Too little attention continues to be given to the structural integration of gender equality and empowerment of women throughout the vision and policy.
- There is also too much emphasis on national responsibility. More attention needs to be paid to multilateral and subnational policy levels. Likewise constant attention must be given to the international support needed for initiatives to be taken at national level, inter alia in establishing models of social protection.
- The Communication remains too vague on the 'Means of Implementation' (MoI). It is unsatisfactory that for the financial aspect of the discussions on the MoI, reference is made to an as yet undrafted Commission communication which is to be published midway through 2013, since the substantive contents of the European Council conclusions are to be approved

⁹ [Realizing the Future We Want for All](#)

¹⁰ see also the [FRDO opinion](#) on the long-term vision for sustainable development 2050 [available in Dutch and French only]: point 7: "Our objective is that by 2050 there should be some signs of a significant turnaround in the capacity of the planet to support life, with an eye to a complete recovery of natural capital. That implies a transformation of our unsustainable patterns of consumption and production in which respect for the limits of the ecological load-bearing capacity of the planet plays a central role."

within the same timescale. The Council feels that it is not possible to adopt a coherent position without a clear vision on the funding of commitments (see below).

- The references to the EU SDS¹¹ as secondary to EU 2020 and thus superseded are not merely premature, but also run counter to the position adopted on this by the Environment Council.¹²

[4] What certainly does have yet to be developed is a global vision on decent work and properly constructed social protection.

- The importance of decent work in development and the fight against poverty was already recognised in the Millennium Development Goals (2005) but received too little attention too late and is far from implemented. In the new context, decent work, as formulated by the ILO (job creation, labour rights, social protection and social dialogue) is included as a goal.
- It is very positive that the communication tackles the approach needed to growing inequality, although this focus should be emphasised more strongly across the text as a whole.¹³ It is also positive that in a number of places in the text reference is made to the importance of decent work. These two elements need to be closely related with each other in the EU's final position.
- The EU needs to be far clearer in its choosing universal social protection as a goal by setting 'social protection floors'.^{14 15} The ILO has for some time been developing initiatives in this area which also have effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms.
- It is a positive that the provision of "a decent life for all"¹⁶ by 2030 has been adopted as a goal. The description of that principle as "a floor under which no man, woman or child should fall by the very latest in 2030"¹⁷ is too minimalistic. This leaves too much room for interpretation as a 'minimum level', while what is important is that a high level of social protection is a target in the long term.

[5] Fundamentally seen this communication is still excessively biased towards an approach by the North to the South. Sound principles are presented, on the basis of good analyses on the seriousness of the global challenge. But in the end the vision is strongly driven by a narrative in which the South needs to be 'helped'. The communication says particularly little about what the EU itself wants and would have to do in order to be able to achieve a genuine global partnership. In this respect it is crucial for the EU to work towards greater coherence of policies which would inter alia allow these mechanisms that slow or obstruct sustainable development – both inside and outside the EU – to be tackled.

2.2. A supportive environment for the new goals

[6] A full set of global goals is in itself no guarantee of achieving sustainable development such as defined in Rio+20.

¹¹ EU SDS = [EU Sustainable Development Strategy](#).

¹² See in particular point 3 of the [Council Conclusions of 25/10/2012](#).

¹³ A strong commitment by the EU on the subject of inequality is very important, not merely at home, but also internationally. It is vital that the approach to inequality in its different forms takes centre stage in the Post-2015 framework. In this context the Council has some concerns about the [communiqué](#) issued after the last meeting of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda on 27 March 2013. It appears on first sight from this communiqué that the Panel does not greatly value the theme of inequality. Hopefully this impression will not be confirmed by the final report that the Panel is to submit to the secretary-general in May.

¹⁴ As noted in the [Bachelet report](#) and in [ILO recommendation 202](#).

¹⁵ At the request of the European Parliament a [study](#) was published on the feasibility of systems of social protection in countries of the South.

¹⁶ A Decent Life for All, 5.1, p. 12.

¹⁷ A Decent Life for All, 4.1.1, p. 9.

- [7] If the aim is to achieve a real partnership¹⁸ between all countries of the world, choosing an MDG model of goals oriented primarily towards the countries of the South is no longer an option. If Belgium and the EU are serious about seeking a framework of universal goals then, in the relatively short term, there is a need for clear political initiatives which demonstrate that they themselves want to make progress towards implementing all the current international agreements, not least on the climate (not merely emission reductions, but also climate finance).
- [8] The new set of goals would best be embedded into a broader framework of international law. Various relevant international agreements, such as the treaties on universal human rights, the Rio principles and major sectoral agreements can be reconfirmed in the form of a political demonstration. There must be absolutely no question of any kind of back door exit from existing international agreements.
- [9] The new set of goals requires a global context which helps rather than hinders their implementation. The global financial crisis, the climate crisis, imbalances of power and armed conflict, for example, are preventing the implementation of the existing millennium goals. This analysis must be made and backed up by the international community. Inter alia ECOSOC and the new High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development have an important role to play in the monitoring of the relationship between the goals and other relevant processes, forums and organisations. In this context Belgium can work with others to call for increased effort in the following areas:
- A truly profound and internationally more coherent reform of the international financial architecture so that international crises can better be prevented.
 - A fair trading system that takes account of the position of developing countries and counters unfair competition, including social and environmental dumping.
 - More international cooperation against tax havens and tax fraud and for fair taxation of multinational enterprises.
 - Measures against speculation in currencies, agricultural products and raw materials.
 - Conflict prevention and disarmament.
 - Gender equality and empowerment of women.
 - A universal basis for social protection.
- [10] The Council expects Belgium and the EU to produce a series of initiatives to improve coherence across different policy areas covering relations between North and South. The follow-up for Rio+20 must go beyond the circle of ministers of the environment and development cooperation, with active involvement of heads of government and ministers of foreign affairs, finance, the economy, energy, equal opportunities, agriculture and fisheries. Similar involvement is desirable within institutions and groups such as the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD and the G20 (in which the EU and Belgium are also represented). In this regard the Council is looking with care at the Belgian government's announced policy framework concerning policy coherence (PCD¹⁹).
- [11] Discussions on the Means of Implementation (MoI)²⁰ cannot be put off any longer. The Council expects an ambitious communication from the Commission which will lead to unambiguous commitments. The Council expects Belgium to adopt a proactive manner. In the short term the Belgian government must take up a position with a clear vision on the various MoIs, and of course also on their financial aspects.²¹

¹⁸ See also the second report of the UN System Task Team: [A renewed global partnership for development](#).

¹⁹ PCD = Policy Coherence for Development | See [2013 policy note on development cooperation](#) [in Dutch and French].

²⁰ The Future We Want, points 252-282.

²¹ And this should also be in line with the international agenda for development finance: [Monterrey Consensus, Doha Declaration of Financing for Development](#).

- [12] The Council expects Belgium and the EU to opt systematically for strong participation by all stakeholders. That applies both to the implementation of their own policies and to guaranteeing that there are plans for involvement in the various UN processes relating to the Rio+20 follow-up and the construction of the Post-2015 framework.
- [13] The bundling and strengthening of all initiatives – at different levels of government and by the different players – for the further greening of the economy (based on a coherent vision of sustainable development and within planetary limits) will play an important supporting role. The Council expects great ambition from Belgium in this area. Much attention must be given to a progressive innovation policy (technological and social), in particular for SMEs. Positive experiences in one’s home country can thus also be replicated elsewhere via a partnership with players from the South, as requested for in Rio+20.²² In this respect, active support for the development of sustainable technology can be positive for both North and South and can also strengthen the position of our companies internationally.
- [14] The transition to sustainable patterns of consumption and production must remain central in a coherent set of universal global goals such as the Council wishes to see. More ambition for further greening of the economy is a prerequisite for this. The experience of transition policy built up in recent years by the various levels of government in our country can usefully be applied here.

2.3. A few themes offered for Post-2015 and the SDGs

- [15] In the first opinion on Rio+20 and Post-2015, the Council proposed a number of areas²³ where Belgian diplomacy in the various ongoing negotiating processes could provide added value. These areas also require further investment in building up expertise.
- The right to food. See below.
 - The eradication of poverty, with attention to relative poverty. Here the Council would, inter alia, draw attention to what was said above in the analysis of the Commission communication. Belgium should in particular urge that the Gini coefficient should be used as an indicator.²⁴
 - Decent work. Here again the Council would draw attention to what was said above in the analysis of the Commission communication.
 - Sustainable consumption and production. The Council also calls on Belgium to take a clearer vision on the further implementation of the 10YFP on SCP²⁵, at home and globally, as called for in the first opinion, and would be happy to be consulted on this. Belgium should in particular strive for international consensus on an indicator along the lines of the environmental footprint.
 - Universal access to sustainable energy. At Rio+20 too little was achieved concerning the SE4All programme²⁶. We are counting on new initiatives from Belgium and the EU to put this project back on track.
- [16] The Council urges the Belgian government to adopt an integrated view over the whole follow-up to Rio+20 and the Post-2015 framework in the immediate term.
- [17] Much care is required when developing indicators for the new global goals. The indicators should go beyond the merely quantitative. They need to encompass the multidimensional nature of the issues

²² The Future We Want, points 72-73.

²³ Opinion 2013a001e, point 18.

²⁴ See also: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>

²⁵ 10YFP on SCP = [10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns](#)

²⁶ SE4All = [Sustainable Energy for All](#)

and must facilitate the follow-up and evaluation of the policy and the measures taken. Indicators should also be supplemented by qualitative analysis and evaluation.

[18] In the following paragraphs we outline the opening moves for Belgium and the EU in a number of important fields involved in the processes of follow-up for Rio+20 and the preparation of the Post-2015 framework.²⁷

[19] Health.

- The Council urges the inclusion of an inclusive health goal centred on people and their inalienable rights, fairness and justice, with attention to decisive social factors and the essential pillars of healthcare systems.
- Universal access to health care is however not enough. The decision makers at different levels must therefore work towards a “healthy physical and social environment” (e.g. safe drinking water, adequate food and housing, gender equality, etc.)
- It is appropriate to consider health in the context of systems of social protection. This must however not be allowed to lead to responsibility for it being placed entirely onto the shoulders of the national governments of the countries of the South. A model of global financial support for the construction of social security systems is required.
- For people world-wide to be able to exercise their rights to health citizens must also be guaranteed the right to participate in decision-making on social sectors and fields which have an impact on their health.
- When the ultimate goals are determined, the communities whose health is under threat and NGOs and mutual bodies with experience in designing healthcare provision in the South must be actively involved.

[20] Oceans.

- The Rio+20 Outcome Document²⁸ contained some positive elements, such as the application of an ecosystem based approach to the management of activities liable to have an impact on the marine environment and a review of subsidy regimes. These issues were “recognised” in the text, but no binding measures were included. To this extent Rio+20 was a disappointment on this matter.
- The implementing agreement under UNCLOS²⁹ for the protection and sustainable management of marine biodiversity in areas which fall outside national jurisdiction was postponed. In the Rio+20 concluding text the 69th UN general assembly was put forward as the last date by which the decision must be taken to start negotiations on this issue.
- It is important for Belgium to play a positive role in a European context to ensure that the negotiations on a legally binding implementation framework under UNCLOS get off to an effective start. Since the EU has a large fleet and is one of the largest consumers of fish world-wide, it is important that the EU uses the current negotiations on the reform of the common fisheries policy to show that it is serious about making sustainable fishing work, both inside and outside European waters. The Council is therefore counting on the authorities involved at Belgian level to adopt a clear strategy.

[21] Food security and the right to food.

²⁷ See also the text giving a starting point for a position on Belgian development cooperation on the Post-2015 development framework drawn up by DGD.

²⁸ The Future We Want, points 158-180.

²⁹ UNCLOS = [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#)

- To complement the positions previously adopted on this issue³⁰ the Council calls for additional initiatives to guarantee world-wide food security and the right to food. New indicators comparable with those for the MDGs are required here.
- Major initiatives are required, not merely to combat hunger but to eradicate it. That is possible via national and supranational strategies which provide an agricultural system that is productive enough within the planetary limits, for guaranteed access to high-quality food that provides adequate nutrition, systems to tackle price volatility, the construction of social protection systems, equal access to and distribution of natural resources (including land)³¹, the prevention of climate chaos and reinforcement of biodiversity.
- The promotion of equality between men and women must form a central plank of any strategy for greater food security. A redistribution of traditional gender roles and responsibilities between men and women is key in this. It is therefore important for women to be guaranteed equal rights to own and occupy land and means of production. In this context, the Council calls on Belgium to take new initiatives to act on the recent report³² on gender and the right to food by the special UN rapporteur on the right to food.
- In the spirit of what the SDGs should become, the goals should not concentrate solely on malnourishment in some countries in the South, but likewise consider overnutrition in some countries in the North. It is primarily a matter of insuring the right of all to healthy, high quality food.

[22] Gender.

- The Council supports the inclusion of a separate specific global goal on gender equality.³³ This should cover, inter alia: the elimination of violence against woman, guarantees of women's participation in decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and rights, the right to make choices in economic development, parity in high-quality education.
- The gender dimension must also be fully mainstreamed in all other goals chosen.³⁴ The empowerment of women and girls and the protection of their rights must be central elements of the Post-2015 framework. In that connection we call for Belgium to take further initiatives to guarantee the sexual and reproductive rights of women.
- A prerequisite for all this is that there is a guarantee that the relevant UN decision-making bodies will have equal composition with a guarantee of the presence of experts on gender. Full participation by civil society in all these processes is a necessity, and feminist organisations from both South and North should also be guaranteed a place when determining participation.

³⁰ see inter alia the following opinions: (1) Opinion on a sustainable food system, [2010a03e](#), (2) Opinion on animal and plant proteins, [2011a01e](#), (3) Opinion on the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD) strategic memorandum on the agricultural sector and food security, 2011a02n/f in [Dutch](#) and [French](#) only.

³¹ See also the FRDO-CFDD opinion on biomass [2008a04e](#), for the concept of the hierarchical structure in land use:

³² Report on [Gender and the Right to Food](#), March 2013.

³³ And in compliance with existing international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women | The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women | the UN resolution on women, war and peace | commitments stemming from the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) and the Cairo conference on Population and Development | the conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women

³⁴ As provided for in the new law on development cooperation (2013) and the law on gender mainstreaming (2007).

Annex 1 Voting members of the general meeting who participated in the vote on this opinion

- 3 vice-chairs:
I. Callens, L. Cloots, M. Verjans
- 3 of the 3 representatives of the non-governmental organisations for environmental protection:
M. Bienstman, M. Cors, S. Leemans
- 3 of the 3 representatives of the non-governmental organisations for development co-operation:
R. De Meyer, B. Gloire, V. Rigot
- 5 of the 6 representatives of the workers' organisations:
B. De Wel, S. Storme, D. Van Daele, D. Van Oudenhoven, C. Verdoot
- 5 of the 6 representatives of the employers' organisations:
C. De Buyser, M.-L. Semaille, G. Vancronenburg, P. Vanden Abeele, A. Nachtergaele
- 2 of the 2 representatives of youth organisations:
L. Fastrez, O. Beys

Total: 21 of the 24 voting members

Annex 2

Meetings for the preparation of this opinion

Preparatory working group meetings were held on 12 and 28 March and 11 April 2013.

Annex 3

Involved in the preparation of this opinion

Chair

- Dries LESAGE

Voting members of the FRDO-CFDD and their representatives

- Antoinette BROUYAUX (Associations 21)
- Rudy DE MEYER (11.11.11)
- Brigitte GLOIRE (Oxfam Solidarité)
- Renaat HANSSENS (ACV)
- Sabien LEEMANS (WWF)
- Maggi POPPE (Nederlandstalige Vrouwenraad)
- Diana VAN OUDENHOVEN (CGSLB)
- Daniel VAN DAELE (FGTB)
- Oumou ZE (CNCD)

Scientific advisors and invited experts

- Tim BOGAERT (PODDO)
- Marlies CASIER (Sensoa)
- Bernard MATHIEU (Heidelberg Cement)
- Wim Van de VOORDE (Sensoa)

Excused

- Olivier BEYS (Vlaamse Jeugdraad)
- Véronique RIGOT (CNCD)
- Sébastien STORME (FGTB)

FRDO secretariat

- Jan DE SMEDT
- Jan MERTENS