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## **New Sustainable Development Strategy for EU**

### **Newcomers' point of view**

1. "A Sustainable Europe for a Better World. A European Union Strategy on Sustainable Development" adopted in Gothenburg in June 2001 created a good framework for the implementation of the sustainable development concept in an integrated manner and with focus not only on the European Union but also on the relations of EU with the whole world. The basis for the implementation of such an important document is wide participation in its development and then its wide dissemination. Neither the former, nor the latter have taken place in the case of the new EU Member States. This document is unknown and no discussion has been conducted on the consequences which it may bring, either among the government agencies, or in the public. Despite the fact that the new EU Member States were not its members when the document was developed, the provisions which were included in the strategy are fully applicable to them. After it was adopted and became an official EU document, it was not appropriately disseminated. Practically, no one knows it, apart from the staff of the Ministry of the Environment and a narrow group of experts and environmental activists. This is also the case at regional and local levels and for social groups and entrepreneurs. However, the activities envisaged in the strategy may be of large significance for the new members. E.g. in Poland the elimination of environmentally unsound subsidies in the energy sector is a very important issue for the mining industry, particularly its hard coal branch, and for the power generation industry, particularly large power plants. At the same time, the document itself poorly discerns the specific nature of the new members.

Conclusion: It is desirable to widely disseminate this document, along with public debates in the new EU members, as this may provide the basis for its implementation.

2. In addition to the political stability of the Continent, for the political and economic elites the most important arguments for the accession of new EU members include opportunities for fast economic growth, improvement of the living conditions of society and overcoming unemployment. This inscribes well into the Lisbon Strategy. Unfortunately, these considerations leave no space for environmental protection and sustainable development. These are regarded as costs which will slow down economic growth and contribute to the loss of competitiveness of new EU members on the free market. Indeed, the Lisbon Strategy initially failed to see the need to refer to the idea of sustainable development and it was only later, in Gothenburg, that it was complemented with a third pillar – sustainable development. Unfortunately, this complement did not consist of the integration of the Lisbon Strategy with the Gothenburg Strategy, but only of a political decoration. In all, this does not create a good climate for the implementation of the sustainable development strategy in the new Member States. Two examples from Poland distinctly demonstrate such tendencies:

- In the preliminary work on the designation of sites qualifying for Natura 2000, sites with a surface area corresponding to about 15% of the whole territory of the country were proposed. However, as a result of pressures from local governments, which were afraid of restrictions on economic growth, the water management authorities and, in the initial phase, the forest administration as well, the proposal which was submitted to the European Commission covered only about 10% of the territory of the country.
- In the National Allocation Plan for CO<sub>2</sub> Emission Allowances as adopted by the Polish Government, the quantity of allowances granted to industry exceeded by more than 35% the level envisaged by the National Climate Policy approved by the Polish Government two years before. The basic argument for such generous state aid for the plants which would participate in the emissions trading was the statement that this would allow them to maintain their competitiveness with industries in the old EU Member States. There is concern that the industrial plants in the new EU Member States are significantly less prepared to compete in the Internal Market and will be pushed out of it.

The tendency described above and the absence of the real integration of the Lisbon Strategy with the idea of sustainable development will lead to the weakening of the EU environmental policy and the loss of its position of a world leader. This will be partly the effect of the activities of the Members of Parliament and administration staff from the new Member States, with support from the industrial lobby. One of the basic causes is the poor

understanding in the new UE Member States of the idea of sustainable development, including such concepts as: dematerialization of production and consumption, the elimination of environmentally unsound subsidies, the internalisation of external costs, ecological fiscal reform or green jobs.

Conclusion: The Lisbon Strategy should be changed with a view to its integration with the idea of sustainable development by discerning competitiveness and job creation under the conditions set out by the concept of sustainable development.

E.g. in transport this means the internalisation of external costs, which represent more than 10% of GDP in EU, and the elimination of subsidies, which are estimated at 40 MEUR annually in the transport sector.

3. One of the basic processes serving to implement sustainable development is the Cardiff Process, i.e. the integration of environmental policy into the policies of the economic sectors. Unfortunately, this process has brought very poor results and its absence is particularly conspicuous in the actions for the new EU Member States. This can be seen clearly in the allocation of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, based on the National Development Plans for 2004 to 2006. Positive elements can only be found in the agricultural sector, i.e. in the support for the development of organic farming and the implementation of agri-environmental schemes, although its magnitude is distinctly far from sufficient. A particularly critical situation occurs in transport, where the prevailing quantity of resources is allocated to the construction of new road infrastructure – often on virgin sites. Far lesser resources are allocated to the improvement of existing roads, e.g. their widening, not to mention support for rail or public transport and the so-called demand side management related to transport services. Such a policy leads to a conflict with the Gothenburg Strategy and it will be completely impossible to achieve the goals envisaged there for climate protection or biodiversity conservation. This is indicated by the following two examples from Poland:
  - In the National Allocation Plan for CO<sub>2</sub> Emission Allowances as adopted by the Polish Government, it is projected that the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the transport sector will grow by 80% from 2001 to 2015.
  - Out of 77 identified important bird areas, 27, i.e. more than 35%, may be threatened by the development of transport infrastructure. 78% of the threatened important areas are situated in the impact zone of the TINA Network roads.

Conclusion: The aforementioned Strategy should be a point of departure for the assessment of the extent to which proposed projects contribute or do not contribute to sustainable development. It should be a reference point. The introduction of the obligation to perform an assessment of the degree of sustainability of development could become a good tool. It should be applied in programming for 2007 to 2103 as well as in the process of accession of the new Candidate Countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia). Unfortunately, it proved impossible to do so in the course of the negotiations with the new Member States, although this was a frequent demand from environmental non-governmental organisations.

4. One of the key difficulties in the implementation of the sustainable development strategy is the absence of an institution to bear full responsibility for this process. Unfortunately, in practically all the countries, the Ministers of the Environment are too weak to meet this challenge in the face of strong opposition from the Ministers of Finance, Economy or Infrastructure. The different bodies which are appointed to provide opinion or advice, such as the Commission for Sustainable Development, do not solve this problem, either. The pressure of the public is an important element, but so far it has been too weak to make politicians interested. An important element of the implementation of the strategy is the monitoring of its progress. To date, such a review, however insufficient, has been performed by the European Commission in Brussels. The situation is much worse in the Member States, particularly in the new ones, where no monitoring and reviews are carried out at all. Neither the authorities, nor non-governmental organisations do it.

Conclusion: Further work is indispensable to seek the best institutional arrangement for the implementation of the sustainable development strategy. In parallel to the implementation review carried out by the Commission, such a review should be performed in the Member States.

Final conclusion: It does not seem necessary to create a new EU sustainable development strategy; first of all, a plan for implementation of existing one should be prepared and brought into effect, along with implementation plans in the Member States.