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**THE EU STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT:
PROCESS AND PROSPECTS**

By

Barry Dalal-Clayton

Strategies, Planning and Assessment Programme
IIED

IIED

3 Endsleigh Street

London WC1H 0DD

Tel: +44-207-388-2117; Fax: +44-207-388-2826

Email: barry.dalal-clayton@iied.org

Website: www.iied.org

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SUMMARY

This paper is a contribution to a project to generate Asian, African and Latin American perspectives of the external dimensions of the EU sustainable development strategy, and on key policy instruments and processes which shape the interaction of the EU with other regions of the world. Hopefully, it will also inform future policy debates on the further development of the SD strategy. The paper is concerned with the process of developing the SD strategy (both its internal and external dimensions). It does analyse the contents of these documents in any detail.

The Helsinki European Council (December 1999) invited the European Commission (EC) to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy dovetailing policies for economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development” in time for the Council meeting in Göteborg in June 2001. This paper is concerned with the process of developing this SD strategy - both its initial *‘internal’ component* and the *‘external’ dimension* prepared subsequently.

Following an initial year of drift, in November 2001, the EC Secretary General established a small *Task Force* to coordinate the process. It adopted a two-pronged approach. First an analytical report was prepared (with no conclusions) through negotiations between EC Directorates General. A decision was taken (it is not clear at what exact stage) not to address the external dimension of the strategy and to leave this for subsequent consideration. A *consultation paper* was released in late March 2001 for wider comment and stakeholders were invited to express their views (in writing or electronically) by the end of April 2001.

The paper posed a *series of questions*, analysed *six key themes* (following an approach similar to that in the EU’s Sixth Environmental Action Programme) and suggested a *policy toolkit* to address the key problems. Despite the limited time to comment, the paper was generally well received, but the absence of an external dimension was strongly criticised. The *European Parliament* was unable to engage effectively in shaping the strategy, but its Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy prepared a report on sustainable development in preparation for the Göteborg Council.

Because of time restrictions, the communication for the Göteborg Council was prepared in parallel to the above process. As internal inter-service negotiations on the document proceeded, a number of elements in the consultation paper were weakened because they would not ‘fly’ politically. For example, a number of concrete targets were removed.

The College of EC Commissioners finally adopted a *communication on the new SD strategy* in May 2001: *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World – A European Strategy for Sustainable Development* (COM (2001)264 final). It consists of three parts:

- ?? A set of *cross-cutting proposals* to ensure that future policy-making is more coherent and cost-effective with a long-term focus, as well as to promote technological innovation and stronger involvement of civil society and business in policy formation. It proposed that the future reviews of common policies (eg agriculture, fisheries, transport) should have SD as their central concern;
- ?? A set of *headline objectives and EU-wide measures* to tackle the biggest challenges to SD not dealt with in the Lisbon strategy: climate change, threats to public health, depletion of natural resources, traffic congestion and land use problems;
- ?? *Steps needed to implement the strategy and to take stock of progress*. The EC will submit a progress report on implementing the SD strategy at all future spring meetings of the European Council, and establish an *SD Round Table* of independent experts to advise the

Commission President. The strategy will be comprehensively reviewed at the start of each Commission's term of office, and assessed every two years by a *Stakeholder Forum*.

The Göteborg European Council (15-16 June 2001) endorsed the strategy but also invited the Commission to further develop it by addressing the *external dimension* by January 2002. In response, an *Inter-Service Group* (ISG) was established (comprising the Directorate Generals for Environment, Development and Trade) and chaired by the Secretary General's office. *Tensions* between the three DGs emerged during the preparation of early drafts in October and November 2001 – each had clearly different objectives, agendas and 'territories' to defend. DG for External Relations (Relex DG) joined the ISG and assisted the production of a new draft, released in January 2002. This was subjected to another round of inter-service consultation in February 2002 and the document was edited and shaped through negotiations and the *final document* (*Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*), agreed by the Commission, was released on 13 February 2002. Given the extremely short period to prepare the communication, there was no formal opportunity for external stakeholder comments. However, some NGOs did make suggestions on issue and themes they thought should be addressed, and published critiques of the communication.

The external dimension of the SD strategy sets *priority objectives* and outlines *concrete actions* to harness globalisation and promote the role of trade for sustainable development, to fight poverty and promote social development and to promote the sustainable management of natural and environmental resources. It also addresses the pre-conditions for success, improved coherence of EU policies, better governance at all levels and increased financial resources.

The communication was submitted to the European Parliament, the European Council (for consideration at the Barcelona summit, 15-16 March 2002), the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), and the Committee of the Regions.

The Barcelona Council did not debate sustainable development issues in any detail, and merely noted the communication and the views of the Environment Council on the external dimensions of the SD strategy.

The *first spring synthesis review* after Göteborg was published in January 2002 in advance of the Barcelona Council. At this time the Commission was still working vigorously on a new set of indicators and the synthesis was broadly criticised for inadequately integrating the environmental dimension. In practice, the Barcelona Council paid little attention to sustainable development, mainly because the Spanish Presidency was not particularly interested in the issue.

The first of the two-yearly *Stakeholder Forums* to assess the SD strategy was organised in September 2002. Very few high level representatives of EC attended and no report was presented by the Commission or the EU Presidency. Broad but unfocused working sessions were held on transport and energy, sustainable production and consumption, agriculture and public participation.

The *Round Table* of experts was established in January 2003, chaired by Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former French Finance Minister, to provide high-level advice on sustainable development to the Commission President. It has met four times so far during 2003 but no tangible products have yet emerged.

Work will commence soon to *revise the strategy* for the next Commission, to cover the period 2004-2009. This will be coordinated by the Secretary General's office.

To improve the annual reviews and the revision process, a number of issues might usefully be addressed (Box 1):

To achieve *effective stakeholder engagement* in the review and revision process, the strategy must be distributed with an explanation of how people can comment and contribute. Reliance on the internet will not be sufficient for developing countries. Existing consultative mechanisms, some regional meetings and perhaps facilitating dialogue in Brussels with selected individuals from the south would be helpful. An EU paper setting out the main points of the existing SD strategy (internal and external) should be produced as a basis for discussions in all such events.

The SD strategy is one of the biggest policy statements that the EU has made and, therefore, it might be argued that it should be subjected to an *extended impact assessment* procedure. This will require an external consultation process - that also satisfied the Commission's December 2002 communication on improving consultation.

Box 1: Some critical questions for revising the UE Sustainable Development Strategy

- ?? What is the best institutional mechanism for coordinating how the EC addresses sustainable development and reviews/revises the SD strategy. Would a dedicated unit in the EC Secretary General's office be a good option?
 - ?? How can consideration of the internal and external dimensions of the SD strategy be integrated?
 - ?? What have been the achievements to date of the SD strategy, and what additional measures are required, particularly to deliver on the outcomes of the WSSD?
 - ?? How can stakeholder involvement in the review/revision process be enhanced and how can southern stakeholders best engage in the process?
 - ?? How can southern leaders and governments best voice their perspectives on sustainable development to the EU?
 - ?? What role could the European Parliament play in the SD strategy in future?
 - ?? How could the strategy be better integrated with national SD strategies?
 - ?? What are the implications of the draft European Treaty for future EU policy on SD?
 - ?? How can better policy coherence on SD issues be achieved – and what are the barriers to this?
 - ?? Should the SD strategy be subjected to an impact assessment procedure, and how could this best be used to enable stakeholder involvement in the SD strategy revision process?
 - ?? What steps can be taken to overcome misconceptions about sustainable development (eg some officials and politicians still see sustainable development as a Trojan horse for the environment)?
-

1. Focus and aims of the paper

This paper is based mainly on structured interviews undertaken on 8th and 9th September 2003 with staff of the European Commission and Brussels-based NGOs (listed in Appendix 1). It also draws from official documents available on the website of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int>) and reports of other organisations. It is a contribution to a project being undertaken during 2003-2005 by IIED and the Regional and International Networking Group (RING)¹. The project aims to generate Asian, African and Latin American perspectives of the external dimensions of the EU sustainable development strategy (henceforth termed the SD strategy), and on key policy instruments and processes which shape the interaction of the EU with other regions of the world. The paper will be presented, along with other background papers and think pieces to five regional workshops, to be held between November 2003 and March 2004 (in Senegal, Kenya, Pakistan, Chile and Thailand). It will also be made available to Brussels-based organisations, including the European Commission and will hopefully contribute to future policy debates on the further development of the SD strategy.

The paper is concerned with the process of developing the SD strategy which emerged in two parts, both official communications of the European Commission: an 'internal' component focusing on sustainable development within the European Union; and a subsequent document dealing with the 'external' dimensions of the SD strategy.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyse the contents of these documents in any detail. Rather, the aim is to examine how the SD strategy was put together and the lessons deriving from this; and where there might be opportunities, particularly for southern stakeholders, to input to (a) annual reviews of progress in implementing SD strategy undertaken by the EC for the Spring meetings of the European Council² and (b) revision of the SD strategy required at the start of the new Commission in 2004³.

2. Preparation of the 'internal' strategy

2.1 *Origins*

The pursuit of sustainable development was introduced as an objective of the EU by the Amsterdam Treaty which came into force in May 1999⁴. NGOs (including the European Environment Bureau) then lobbied the then President of the Environment Council (from Finland) to take steps to implement the concept of sustainable development through developing an EU strategy. The Environment Council put forward such a recommendation to the Helsinki European Council meeting in December 1999 which, in its conclusions, invited the European Commission (EC) to "prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy dovetailing

¹ A coalition of NGOs around the world engaged in policy research.

² The European Council is the most senior policy-making organ of the EU and is attended by Heads of Government.

³ The European Commissioners (effectively European ministers) are nominated by Member States and serve for a fixed five-year term. A new College of Commissioners is due to be appointed in the summer of 2004.

⁴ The negotiations for the Treaty of Amsterdam involved a review of the Treaty on European Union (EU) with the aim of creating the political and institutional conditions to enable the EU to meet the challenges of the future such as the rapid evolution of the international situation, the globalisation of the economy and its impact on jobs, the fight against terrorism, international crime and drug trafficking, ecological problems and threats to public health. The Amsterdam Treaty provides stronger guarantees for environmental protection than given by the Single Act and the Treaty on European Union by inserting the concept of sustainable development in the Treaty establishing the European Community.

policies for economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development” in time for the Council meeting in Göteborg in June 2001.

The enthusiasm for this initiative really came from Sweden which was to assume the EU Presidency after Finland, especially in view of the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and the perceived need for the EU to satisfy the target agreed at the UN General Assembly in 1997 that every country should have a strategy for sustainable development in place by 2002. The EU felt it could not participate in WSSD without having developed its own strategy.

2.2 *Establishing a Task Force*

There was a feeling within the EC that it would not be appropriate to give leadership of the task of preparing the SD strategy to the Environment Directorate General as this might be perceived as biasing matters towards environment – one of the three pillars of sustainable development along with the social and economic dimensions. So EC President, Romano Prodi, gave the task to the Forward Studies Unit (FSU). But 2000 was effectively a ‘lost year’ with many philosophical discussions about sustainable development which, in practice, made it harder to determine how best to proceed. The FSU did not produce any convincing proposals and the group of advisers to Mr Prodi showed little interest and provided no effective leadership.

By the autumn, there was growing anxiety about the lack of effective progress, particularly amongst a number of Commissioners, notably Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström. In response, in November 2001, the Secretary General decided to establish a small Task Force⁵ within his office comprising staff seconded from several Directorates General (DGs) and charged with preparing the necessary documentation for the Göteborg Summit. A wider ‘consultation group’ was established with individuals in all key concerned DGs in order to build the necessary support and consensus across the EC.

At the same time, the Swedish Environment Ministry and the European Environment Bureau (EEB) convened a stakeholder conference in Stockholm to discuss the elements that should be included in the EU strategy, and the conclusions were fed into the work of the Task Force by an EEB consultant⁶

2.3 *The approach*

The Task Force decided on a two-pronged approach: first to produce an analytical report – with no conclusions; and then to undertake consultations. It was felt this would make it easier to get the right arguments ‘on the table’ and then to find the solutions. Given time limitations, this process was undertaken in parallel to preparing the actual communication for the Göteborg Summit.

In this work, the Task Force aimed to be both “rigorous and operational” so as to make the strategy “relevant to both the man in the street and to business”. It was decided to focus on “what is unsustainable” - seen as being driven more by policies, and the main threats to European society and the world at large.

⁵ The Task Force was led by Marc van Heukelen (DG Environment). Other members included Rupert Willis (DG Environment), Mark Hayden (DG Economic Affairs), Michel B iart (DG Employment) and Eva Smith (seconded from the Swedish Ministry of Environment). This composition was deliberately set to ‘marry’ economic and environmental dimensions.

⁶ Maria Buitenkamp.

At some point a decision was taken to deal in the communication only with matters internal to Europe - so as to enhance the relevance of the strategy to European people, and to leave the external dimensions until a later stage. This was a decision influenced partly by the perceived complexity of the external dimension and partly because of the limited time available to prepare documents for Göteborg. It is unclear whether the Task Force had been fully aware from the outset that the strategy would need to address the external dimension and took an early and conscious decision to leave it aside; or whether Task Force had overlooked this need until others drew their attention to it, and then made a pragmatic decision to leave the external dimension aside.

2.4 Substrate for the analytical report

The analytical report – issued as a consultation paper (see below) – was able to draw from and build on foundations provided by a range of processes guiding European economic, social and environmental policy-making. Of particular note is the Environmental Action Programme. Following the 1992 Earth Summit (UNCED), the Fifth Environmental Action Programme⁷ became the EU's main vehicle for implementing the Rio agreements, and provided a framework for the Union's efforts to implement the climate and biodiversity conventions. Its successor, the Sixth Environmental Action Programme (6-EAP), was produced in 2001⁸ and sets out a 10-year perspective for EU environmental policy. It provides the environmental component of the EU's strategy for sustainable development (Box 2), placing its environmental plans in a broad perspective, considering economic and social conditions. It also makes the link between environment and European objectives for growth and competitiveness.

Box 2: Sixth Environmental Action Programme

Europe's Sixth Environmental Action Programme (6-EAP) identifies four environmental areas to be tackled for improvements: climate change; nature and biodiversity; environment and health and quality of life; and natural resources and waste. Four main avenues for action are explored.

- ?? Effective implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation - necessary to set a common baseline for all EU countries;
- ?? Integration of environmental concerns - environmental problems have to be tackled where their source is and this is frequently in other policies;
- ?? Use of a blend of instruments - all types of instruments have to be considered, the essential criterion for choice being that it has to offer the best efficiency and effectiveness possible;
- ?? Stimulation of participation and action of all actors from business to citizens, NGOs and social partners - through better and more accessible information on the environment and joint work on solutions.

Seven thematic strategies:

Thematic Strategies are one component of the actions foreseen within the 6-EAP. This concept was introduced as a specific way to tackle seven key environmental issues, which require a holistic approach because of their complexity, the diversity of actors concerned, and the need to find multiple and innovative solutions: soil protection; protection and conservation of the marine environment; sustainable use of pesticides; air pollution; urban environment; sustainable use and management of resources; and waste recycling.

The strategies will be developed according to a common, incremental approach aimed at combining

⁷ *Towards Sustainability: A European Community Programme of Policy and Action in Relation to the Environment and Sustainable Development* (CEC 1992)

⁸ Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice (COM (2001)31)

the need for substantiated elements (*sic*) and for policy action and proposals. Thus, all the strategies will be presented in two stages.

Stage 1

A presentation and analysis of the "état des lieux" (inventory of fixtures) in the environmental area of concern, as well as a clear and understandable definition of the problem to be solved. This includes the methodology used to draw this overall picture, the stakeholders actively involved in the analysis and their main concerns. In general, any element that can help substantiate the approach chosen to 'solve' the problem should be incorporated. The aim is to ensure that proposals are solid and have the scientific/technical/economic and social backup to overcome counter-arguments.

Stage 2

A presentation of objectives and targets answering to the problem identified, together with a set of proposals that will contribute to solving the problems. This set of proposals should be precise measures, accompanied by their objectives and timetables, and capable of implementation.

After adoption of the Thematic Strategies the proposals will be developed progressively, on the basis of the approved general framework.

Source: Sixth Environmental Action Programme (<http://europa.eu.int/comm./environment/newprg/>)

The analytical consultation paper adopted a thematic approach similar to that in the 6-EAP. Some of the priority issues/areas of analysis are similar – the strategy drafters sought coherence. But whereas the 6-EAP has a 10-year horizon, the final (internal) SD strategy is much bolder and sets clear deadlines. The consultation paper set out an holistic approach although it emphasised the environmental aspects much more strongly than the social and economic ones which had already been largely agreed in the Lisbon strategy ^{see footnote 12}. It placed particularly weight on economic issues such as efficiency, cost-effectiveness, coherence, and the quality of policy-making.

It might reasonably be assumed that the six key themes addressed in the consultation report (see Box 3) were influenced by similar issues and suggestions to those submitted by the EEB conference on the SD strategy in Stockholm in November 2001.

In contrast to some national SD strategies, the European SD strategy was not intended to provide an umbrella for all other strategies and policies. Politically and practically, it could not serve such a function. It was deliberately given a tight and restricted focus, in part because of the requirement to deliver a strategy in time for WSSD in 2002. The number of topics addressed in the consultation paper, and in the final SD strategy, was consciously limited in order to provide a strategy that could be operationalised. Issues that had a major impact on well-being or which had a significant cross-cutting dimension were selected. The selection of key issues was based on three main criteria: the issues had to be important; have a long-term element; and Europe-wide dimension (not be of just national significance).

2.5 The consultation process

A draft consultation paper was prepared in mid-February and circulated amongst Commission services for comment. A final paper was released for external and wider comment in late March 2001 (Box 3) and stakeholders were invited to express their views (in writing or electronically) by the end of April 2001 (within just one month!) on the issues covered in the paper and to consider what more concrete measures should be included in the strategy.

Box 3: Consultation paper on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy

The paper set out the Commission's initial views on the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development in the EU, and presented a policy toolkit for tackling these problems. The paper did not include specific objectives and measures (these were incorporated in the final strategy). It aimed to generate discussion and encourage input from other EU institutions and civil society.

Key questions

The Commission proposed to structure debate around 10 questions:

1. Does focusing on a limited number of the most pressing problems help to make the concept of SD operational? Do the six themes chosen [see below] embody the main long-term challenges confronting European society?
2. This document focuses on SD problems in Europe. Are there any cases in which actions to place European society on a more sustainable path might make the attainment of SD at a global level more difficult? How can reforms of EU policies support efforts to achieve SD worldwide?
3. Since SD is a long-term idea, it should be of clear relevance to accession countries. To what extent are the challenges they face different from those in the current Member States?
4. Do you share the analysis of the causes of these problems and their potential remedies identified here? Do you have any additions to the policy toolkit?
5. What practical measures can be taken to better translate the principle of "policy integration" into concrete action to achieve greater sectoral policy consistency?
6. Governments cannot deliver SD on their own. Business, workers and civil society have an indispensable role to play. How do we make this happen?
7. How can we ensure that the costs of adjusting to SD are minimised, and the opportunities seized?
8. In what areas of SD do you see a clear policy role for the EU?
9. What are the most urgent steps the EU should take in the framework of an EU SD strategy?
10. What specific objectives would you like to see included in the EU strategy for Göteborg? What arrangements should be foreseen to ensure their implementation?

Six themes

The following six themes were chosen because of the severity and the potential irreversibility of the issues identified, because they are common to several or all Member States, and because finding and implementing solutions will be eased by cooperation.. They are also themes where a cross-cutting approach could provide new insights by taking into account the spill-overs between decisions in different sectoral policies:

- Climate change and clean energy;
- Public health;
- Management of natural resources;
- Poverty and social exclusion;
- Ageing and demography;
- Mobility, land use and territorial development.

The paper analyses some common problems connected to each of these themes which have led to the emergence of unsustainable trends, and shows that many of the problems "have their origins in a small number of shared failures, eg. distorted market prices, insufficient knowledge, information and communication, and an inconsistent sectoral approach to policy-making which takes too little account of linkages and spill-overs between sectors".

Policy toolkit

The paper suggests how these problems can be solved, through improved policy coherence and integration, coordination and dialogue. SD is seen as "a framework for policy that focuses on long-term management rather than short-term quick-fix solutions".

Ways to improve policy coherence are suggested and important tools described that can be used as building blocks of an SD strategy:

- /// *Systematic examination of the costs and effects of all policies* (including impacts in other policy areas) – identifying win-win opportunities, and identifying where trade-offs are required;
- /// Identifying concrete, ambitious, achievable *long-term objectives* necessary “to give substance to policies for SD, and to develop popular understanding and support for these policies”, with the objectives leading to “the establishment of clear – and preferably measurable – *targets*”;
- /// *Creating markets and getting prices and incentives right* – so prices reflect the true costs to society of different activities. Examples of available methods include creating tradable property rights, defining property rights, subsidies, applying the ‘user-pays’ and ‘polluter-pays’ principles;
- /// *Integration of broader (SD) concerns into sectoral policies*, including through greater transparency – “integration must mean something more than minor adjustments to ‘business as usual’ if SD is to move from rhetoric to reality. This needs political commitment and leadership”. The paper argues the need for “a *practical political mechanism to arbitrate* in a consistent and rational way across sectors when competing interests are at stake, and to provide clear long-term policy objectives” and suggests the creation of a *Council for SD* with no direct stake in the policy process. The regular, systematic, open, *review of policies* is recommended.
- /// *Technology* has brought great progress, but also brings its own challenges. It *must be harnessed in the interests of SD*. Stable public policy, committed to SD, must influence innovation and stimulate new technologies;
- /// *Improving knowledge and understanding* through, for example: peer-reviewed, independent research; evaluating the risks (economic, social, environmental) of innovations; improving capacity to respond to emerging risks;
- /// *Better information* (eg for producers and consumers), *education and participation* (eg open dialogue on the costs and benefits of different options);
- /// Measuring progress through *appropriate indicators* – quantitative and qualitative;

Source: *Consultation paper for the preparation of a European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development. Communities*. Staff Working Paper (SEC(2001)517), 27 March 2001. Commission of the European Communities, Brussels (available on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/eussd/>).

Many organisations submitted their comments and, in general, the consultation paper was well received’ although, inevitably, concerns were expressed at the short period for comment. For example, a group of European NGOs, led by the European Environmental Bureau⁹, sponsored a report bringing together views from a range of influential stakeholders. The proposals were seen as tangible with targets and timetables and the language was stronger than in the Sixth Environmental Action Plan.

EC Officials have expressed disappointment at the role the European Parliament was able to play – which weakens the legitimacy of the strategy. Given the time limitations, it was

⁹ The EEB, together with Friends of Nature International, Friends of the Earth Europe, and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, submitted a response report a report in April 2000, “*EU Strategy for Sustainable Development: Stakeholder Views*”. This contained separate commentaries from environmental organisations, consumers, civil society groups, churches, trade unions, business, the financial sector, social organisations, the energy sector, transport and environment organisations, the farming sector, and local authorities.

difficult for Parliament to engage effectively. There is no Committee that deals with sustainable development. A stakeholder conference on the consultative paper was organised in April 2001 by the Commission and the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC)¹⁰. Parliament apparently responded unenthusiastically to an invitation to be a co-organiser.

A key question was how much of the strategy thinking set out in the consultation paper could be retained and incorporated in the final EC communication to be submitted to the Göteborg Summit. Because of the strict time limits, this was being prepared in parallel to the consultation paper and public consultation process by a small team and involved significant lobbying of individual Commissioners and their Cabinets¹¹. Responses to the consultation paper were analysed and revisions made to the draft communication. But a number of elements in the consultation paper were weakened during the process to finalise the communication because they would not 'fly' politically. For example, a number of concrete targets were removed.

Conflicts and disagreements over text on particular issues were resolved at different levels according to their nature and importance. Many issues were dealt with through discussions within a contact group of individuals in various key DGs. Text on more difficult issues (eg transport pricing) was dealt with by progressively senior officials, and ultimately by the College of Commissioners.

In the event, the final communication incorporated a surprising number of bold, concrete and challenging proposals – as insisted on by EC President Prodi. For example, it contained a proposal to end EU subsidies for tobacco growing – one not finally approved by the European Council in Göteborg.

The College of EC Commissioners finally adopted the new SD strategy in May 2001: *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World – A European Strategy for Sustainable Development* (COM (2001)264 final) . It consists of three parts:

- ?? A set of *cross-cutting proposals* to ensure that future policy-making is more coherent and cost-effective with a long-term focus, as well as to promote technological innovation and stronger involvement of civil society and business in policy formation. It proposed that the future reviews of common policies (eg agriculture, fisheries, transport) should have SD as their central concern;
- ?? A set of *headline objectives and EU-wide measures* to tackle the biggest challenges to SD not dealt with in the Lisbon strategy¹²: climate change, threats to public health, depletion of natural resources, traffic congestion and land use problems;
- ?? *Steps needed to implement the strategy and to take stock of progress*. The EC will submit a progress report on implementing the strategy SD at all future spring meetings of the

¹⁰ A consultative committee consisting of 222 representatives of various economic and social groups in the European Union. It meets in Brussels.

¹¹ The European Commission comprises a number of Directorates General – DG (equivalent to line ministries) and each is headed by a Commissioner (equivalent to a minister). Commissioners are politicians nominated by the member states. Each Commissioner is assisted by a Cabinet – a private office with six staff members: policy advisers and private secretaries. The Commissioner can bring in one private adviser and one private secretary; the other members are drawn from the DGs.

¹² The decision by Heads of Government at the Lisbon European Council meeting in March 2000 to bring various social and economic initiatives together in a single annual review, geared towards making Europe “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”. The Lisbon strategy is aimed at economic and social renewal and includes a large number of rather specific targets, timetables and indicators – mostly within a timeframe of 10 years.

European Council, and establish an SD *Round Table* of 10 independent experts to advise the Commission President. The strategy will be comprehensively reviewed at the start of each Commission's term of office, and assessed every two years by a *Stakeholder Forum*.

The European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy prepared a report on sustainable development in preparation for the Göteborg Council meeting¹³, and considered this at its meetings in April and May. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs also provided an opinion. The report generally welcomed the communication, called for a range of matters to be addressed, and expressed "regret" that the European Parliament had been left out of discussion of the Commission's communication on the SD strategy.

The European Parliament subsequently debated the communication on the SD strategy on 15 May 2001.

2.6 The Göteborg Council (15-16 June 2001)

US President George W. Bush met with European leaders in Göteborg on the eve of the Council meeting when divisions between the two camps were clear over climate change issues. European nations were in favour of ratifying the Kyoto Protocol; the USA was against. This claimed much of the Council's attention and many issues in the draft conclusions of the Council meeting were not debated in detail. As a result, it is not clear to what extent leaders were aware of the full implications of the SD strategy.

In its official conclusions¹⁴, the European Council endorsed the strategy:

"The European Council welcomes the submission of the Commission's communication on sustainable development.

The European Council agrees a strategy for SD which completes the Union's political commitment to economic and social renewal, adds a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon strategy and establishes a new approach to policy making. The arrangements for implementing the strategy will be developed by the Council".

The Council also invited the Commission to further develop the strategy by addressing the external dimensions:

"The Union's sustainable development strategy forms part of the Union's preparations for the 2002 World Summit of Sustainable Development. The Union will seek to achieve a "global deal" on SD at the summit. The Commission undertakes to present a communication no later than January 2002 on how the Union is contributing and should further contribute to global sustainable development"

¹³ Draft Report on environment policy and sustainable development: preparing for the Gothenburg European Council (2000/2322(INI). Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy, European Parliament, 5 April 2001.

¹⁴ The conclusions of the European Council have no actual legal standing, but they provide the ultimate political mandate. The conclusions note, support and invite actions by others including the European Commission. If the Council doesn't mention or only weakly welcomes a communication from the Commission, this doesn't inhibit the Commission taking the issue forward, but it has the affect of making it much harder and changes the tone of the 'internal cuisine' with the Commission. This is particularly important as regards European legislation. Only the Commission has the right to initiate legal instruments at the European level, although the Council and Parliament can make strong suggestions of need.

A decision had been taken earlier at the 2001 Spring Council meeting in Stockholm, when reviewing progress with the Lisbon strategy, that a separate reporting process would not be established for the SD strategy. Rather reporting would be incorporated with that for the Lisbon strategy in a synthesis report for Spring meetings of the European Council.

But this presents some problems in practice. The European Commission has only a weak mandate as far as social issues are concerned. Reporting on these under the Lisbon strategy is through 'open' coordination led by successive EC presidencies, with the European Commission merely providing information. In contrast, for environmental issues, the Commission has a much stronger mandate and is empowered to make regulations and laws (eg the chemicals policy). Preparation of the Spring report commences in November/December with a draft released in January for comment. The Presidency then takes the lead in negotiating potential conclusions for the Spring Council.

A problem is that the Lisbon strategy does not fully reflect the social and economic pillars of sustainable development because of its limited scope and timeframe (10 years). When the Millennium Development Goals and indicators of SD are compared with the Lisbon strategy, many issues can be seen to be lacking. For example, the Lisbon strategy does not address public health. But despite these limitations, it can be considered a big step that environmental aspects have been put at the same level as the social and economic goals of the EU in its yearly evaluation.

2.7 After Göteborg

After completing its work on the Communication, the Task Force was disbanded and the Secretary General created a network of DGs on sustainable development which meets every three months.

On 9th July 2001, the European Environmental Bureau organised a conference in Brussels in cooperation with the new Belgian Presidency on "*Implementing the EU Sustainable Development Strategy*" (EEB doc. no. 2001/017).

3. External dimension of the strategy

In response to the request of the Göteborg European Council that the Commission develop a communication on the external dimension of the EU's sustainable development agenda and setting out the EU's contribution to global sustainable development, the Secretary General established an Inter-Service Group (ISG). This comprised the DGs for Environment, Development and Trade, chaired by an official in the Secretary General's Office.

A first staff-level meeting was held in September 2001 and a start on drafting was made by the Development DG in October 2001 with the aim of producing a product for review by Christmas. This left no opportunity to engage wider stakeholders in the process. Information from a range of existing documents and the internet was drawn upon. Some parts of the document were ready much earlier than other 'more difficult' parts (covering, for example, trade, agriculture, globalisation, and social aspects). These could have been released for civil society comment, but it was felt inappropriate to release just part of the document.

The first draft (November 2001) made "poverty" the main focus and the aim of making poverty as prominent as possible in the interpretation of sustainable development. Poverty and social exclusion (within Europe) was also one of the six themes addressed by the internal strategy. In an effort to make the communication a twin of the internal strategy document (entitled *Sustainable Europe for a Better World*), this first draft adopted a similar title, A

Better Europe for a Sustainable World. However, the final communication was called *Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*.

This first draft was circulated amongst the ISG for formal consultation but was found to be unacceptable by the Environment and Trade DGs. Points of view differed substantially. The other DGs felt that its tone was somewhat negative and alarmist, that it failed to adequately recognise the international progress made on addressing poverty, and that it gave insufficient attention to the agreements reached at the UN International Conference on Financing Development (Monterey March 2002)¹⁵, and negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda and world trade. There was a feeling amongst a number of EC officials that many of the elements needed in an external strategy had already largely been developed through these other processes and also during the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The three DGs clearly had different objectives, agendas and ‘territories’ to defend. Development DG had led on Monterey; Trade DG on Doha; and Environment was leading on WSSD.

A Commission communication on preparations for WSSD (*Ten Years after Rio: Preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002*, COM(2001) 53 final) had already been submitted to the European Council in February 2001, several months prior to the Göteborg summit. It covered key issues such as energy, water, finance, globalisation of trade, etc. and included text on the Millennium Development Goals and aid targets since these affected the environment-development nexus. Preparation of this communication involved informal stakeholder consultations. The communication was presented to the Council jointly by the Environment and Development Commissioners. Although nominally a collaborative product, in practice, it enjoyed little buy-in within the Development DG.

To help smooth the tensions between the three DGs in reaching convergence on the objectives for a clearly-focused communication on the external dimension of the SD strategy, the DG for External Relations (Relex DG) joined the ISG and assisted the production of a new draft, released in January 2002. This was subjected to another round of inter-service consultation in February 2002 and the document was edited and shaped through negotiations. Arbitration over difficult issues was dealt with at progressively senior levels, as needed: the Secretary General’s office, DG Cabinet level, the special Chef’s meeting (of all 20 Chefs de Cabinet), and ultimately the Wednesday College of Commissioners meeting (it considered issues on three occasions).

The final document (*Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*), agreed by the Commission, was released on 13 February 2002, and presented by EU development Commissioner, Poul Nielsen. It notes that:

- ?? Many countries have benefited from increased economic growth, and that whilst developing countries have advanced on many fronts, poverty, unemployment, inequality and exclusion remain;
- ?? There is a need for a much better balance between global market forces on the one hand and global governance and political institutions on the other;
- ?? The complex relationship between markets, global governance and national policy is at the source of many unsustainable trends;
- ?? Many least developed countries (LDCs) are caught in the poverty trap of low income, low investment and subsistence-based economic structures;
- ?? Tackling these problems requires a global partnership embracing all stakeholders;

¹⁵ Following hard negotiations on the EU’s position for the Monterey conference, agreement was reached that EU Member States would commit themselves to trying to achieve development assistance levels equivalent to 0.39% of GNP. This compares with the OECD DAC ODA target of 0.7% which few countries have ever come close to meeting.

?? The UN system should take a lead in developing a global governance structure for SD.

It sets priority objectives (Box 4) and outlines concrete actions to harness globalisation and promote the role of trade for sustainable development, to fight poverty and promote social development and to promote the sustainable management of natural and environmental resources. It also addresses the pre-conditions for success, improved coherence of EU policies, better governance at all levels and increased financial resources.

The communication was submitted to the European Parliament, the European Council (for consideration at the Barcelona summit, 15-16 March 2002), the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), and the Committee of the Regions.

Both the Environment and Development Committees of the European Parliament debated the document and expressed opinions, and it was also considered during a debate in the Parliament plenary on 15 May 2001.

Prior to the Barcelona Council, the Environment Council met on 4 March 2002 and endorsed the Commission's communication on the external dimension:

"[The Environment Council] welcomes the submission of the Commission's communication "Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development", which contributes to developing the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development";

Underlines the need to fully implement the Sustainable Development Strategy and its environmental priorities;

Recalling that, pursuant to the Strategy for Sustainable Development, the "road map" submitted by the Council (General Affairs) indicates the importance of adopting an overall package on sustainable development including the internal dimension adopted at Göteborg which will be complemented by the external and global dimension ..., reaffirms the links and complementarity between the internal and external dimension ...".

In considering the synthesis report prepared for the Barcelona summit, the Environment Council placed a particular emphasis on the need to address environmental issues much better:

"The Council stresses the need for the next edition of this Report to reflect environmental issues in a wider and more extensive manner, in order to establish a new approach to policy-making where the three dimensions of Sustainable Development are treated in a more balanced way with a view to their progressive integration and in accordance with the 'road map' ".

The Barcelona Council did not debate sustainable development issues in any detail, and merely noted the communication and the views of the Environment Council on the external dimensions of the SD strategy:

"The European Council shall, on the basis of the Commission's communication "Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development" and the conclusions of the Environment Council of 4 March 2002, determine the overall position of the European Union for the Johannesburg Summit at its June meeting in Seville, and in Spring 2003 will review the comprehensive strategy for sustainable development with a focus on putting into practice the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It underscores the importance of improved global governance in this field".

The conclusions of the Seville Council meeting (21-22 June 2002) make broad reference to the EU's position for the WSSD but there is no specific reference to the SD strategy.

Box 4: Priority objectives of the EU's 'external' strategy for sustainable development

Harnessing globalisation: trade for SD

- ?? Ensure that developing countries are integrated equitably into the world economy and help them to reap the benefits of trade and investment liberalisation through complementary policies;
- ?? Provide incentives for environmentally and socially sustainable production and trade;
- ?? Strengthen the international financial and monetary architecture and promote better and more transparent forms of financial market regulation to reduce global financial volatility and abuses of the system.

Fighting poverty and promoting social development

Attain the IDTs [international development targets] and MDGs, particularly halving extreme poverty by 2015 – through:

- ?? Enhancing the quantity, quality, impact and sustainability of development cooperation.

Sustainable management of natural and environmental resources

- ?? Ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at national and global levels by 2015;
- ?? Develop sectoral and intermediate objectives in some key sectors – water, land and soil, energy and biodiversity.

Improving the coherence of EU policies

Ensure that the objectives of SD are progressively integrated into all EU policies, with due respect to their internal and external dimensions:

- ?? Ensure that an impact assessment is carried out for all major policy proposals, analysing their economic, social and environmental consequences in accordance with the conclusions of the Göteborg European Council, June 2001;
- ?? Continue the process of adapting key policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy, and EC policies on energy, transport and industry to the internal and external objectives of SD;
- ?? Tackle actual or potential problems of coherence whenever EU policies are formulated, reviewed or reformed.

Better governance at all levels

Ensure good governance at all levels and by all countries so as to achieve common SD objectives:

- ?? Enhance good governance within the EU and other industrialised countries;
- ?? Support and facilitate good governance in developing countries;
- ?? Support the legitimacy, participatory basis, coherence and effectiveness of global economic governance;
- ?? Strengthen governance structures on global social and environmental issues;
- ?? Improve coherence and cooperation between all institutions involved in global governance.

Financing sustainable development

Ensure adequate financing to attain the IDTs and MDGs:

- ?? Make decisive progress towards reaching the UN target of 0.7% of GNP in Official Development Assistance (ODA);
- ?? Ensure that the debt burden on developing countries is reduced in a consistent and effective manner;
- ?? Identify effective means of delivering and safeguarding global public goods;
- ?? Stimulate a further increase in, and regional broadening of, foreign private investments in developing countries.

4. Reviews, revision and progress in implementation

4.1 *Spring reviews*

The spring (synthesis) review document (which now reports on progress of both the Lisbon strategy and the SD strategy) is about 30 pages long (plus annexes and appendices) but, in practice, only two of these are devoted to environmental matters – economic and social issues (the Lisbon agenda) predominate.

ECOFIN (the Council of economic and finance ministers) decided not to add to the overall number of indicators for the spring review report. So new environmental indicators had to be included at the expense of existing social and economic ones. One restriction is that indicators may only be used if all Member States have reliable data for the preceding three years. Thus, in a few important areas (eg biodiversity, impact of chemicals on public health, natural resource use), the lack of available data means that indicators cannot be used in the spring review. As a consequence, where key issues are not included and reported on due to the absence of indicators, they are not debated and political attention is not focused on them at Council meetings.

At the time of the Barcelona European Council meeting in March 2002 – the first Spring Council after Göteborg, the Commission was still working vigorously on a new set of indicators. The synthesis review was published in January 2002 and was broadly criticised for inadequately integrating the environmental dimension – environmental aspects seemed to have been added at the last minute, as lip service. There was not a single environmental indicator in the main report, but nine social and economic indicators, including 19 sub-indicators (*Sustainable Development: Making it Happen: A Crucial Role for the European Union*. EEB position paper, March 1, 2002). The Commission has now developed seven environmental indicators in the full set 42 indicators (but this is due to change again).

In practice, the Barcelona Council paid little attention to sustainable development, mainly because the Spanish Presidency was not particularly interested in the issue.

4.2 *Stakeholder Forum*

The first of the two-yearly Stakeholder Forum's to assess the SD strategy was organised in September 2002 by ECOSOC. Very few high level representatives of EC attended and no report was presented by the Commission or the EU Presidency. Broad but unfocused working sessions were held on transport and energy, sustainable production and consumption, agriculture and public participation.

4.3 *Round Table*

The Round Table of experts was established in January 2003, chaired by Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former French Finance Minister, to provide high-level advice on sustainable development to the Commission President. It has met four times so far during 2003 but no tangible products have yet emerged. The 14 other members of the Round Table include politicians, intellectuals and members of civil society.

4.4 *Revision of SD strategy*

Work will commence soon to revise the strategy for the next Commission, to cover the period 2004-2009. This will be coordinated by the Secretary General's office.

A first inter-service meeting to discuss the revision process was due in the week of 15-19 September 2003.

4.5 Some comments on general progress

?? There is a view that the SD strategy has mainly symbolic value and that many things that have been done by the EC and EU might have been done anyway. But its existence has helped smooth the way for certain reforms such as the issuing of the EU Energy Taxation Directive in March 2003.

?? The strategy emphasises the need for 'joined-up' government. Progress in this regard has been made in agreeing a new approach to impact assessment and an Action Plan for Better Regulation (COM(2002)278). In May 2002, the Commission released a communication on *Impact Assessment* (COM(2002) 276 final) signalling its intent to launch impact assessment as a tool to improve the quality and coherence of the policy development process (Box 5). Technical guidelines followed in September 2002.

In December 2002, the EC published a communication on improving consultation: *Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue – General principles and minimum standards for a consultation of interested parties by the Commission* (COM(2002) 704 final, 11,12,2002). This covers consultation aimed at securing "input from outside interested parties for the shaping of policy prior to a decision by the Commission".

?? The Göteborg Council made a commitment to develop a framework for internalising the external costs of all modes of transport. This commitment has been partially met in the Commission's proposal on road charging.

?? There has been some progress in implementing the external SD strategy through various cooperation programmes with developing countries (the energy and water programmes), and revising the Common Fisheries Policy (in December 2002) and the Common Agriculture Policy (in June 2003) - the first three pages of which are devoted to the implications of the strategy as agreed at the Göteborg Council

5. Participation in the EU SD strategy process

5.1 General

Within the Commission, there were standard inter-service negotiations to develop and agree the communications. Only the internal dimension of the strategy was subject to any external inputs through a very short window (1 month) when stakeholders were invited to express their views.

5.2 NGO activities

A number of Brussels-based NGOs played an active role in inputting and critiquing the SD strategy, both individually and collectively (they frequently worked together).

The European Environment Bureau (EEB) was particularly active in pushing for the preparation of an EU SD strategy, lobbying Commissioners and government, and submitting inputs and

comments to the development of the internal strategy (it did not focus much on the external strategy). It worked to bring together stakeholder views and organised workshops and conferences¹⁶. It also interacted closely with the Task Force preparing the consultation paper and EC communication, and published a common response to that paper on behalf of its members¹⁷, and provided regular commentary in its newsletter, *Metamorphosis*.

In comparison, the European Policy Office of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) was mainly concerned with the external dimension. In a critical perspective on the consultation paper on the internal dimension in March 2001¹⁸, it set out various areas of the approach it felt to be misguided, particularly the lack of an external dimension. It followed up with a published response in April 2001¹⁹, and then wrote to Heads of State and Government and to EC Commissioners to voice its concerns prior to the Göteborg Council meeting. Subsequently, WWF prepared a critique on the published EC communication²⁰ setting out what it saw as key shortcomings in the external dimension document.

In October 2001, in collaboration with the Green Globe Task Force, WWF organised a high level seminar in Brussels on globalisation, sustainable development and the EU's external policies – to debate the Göteborg conclusions and WSSD. It made a number of observations on how the external dimension of the SD strategy should be focused. Subsequently, WWF published a report identifying themes, objectives and policy deliverables that it believed should be addressed in the EC's communication on the external dimension²¹.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) funded a conference organised by Friends of the Earth in Göteborg on the SD strategy. HBF also supported a number of activists from southern NGOs to spend three months in Brussels and Washington to learn about EU policies, and UN and WSSD processes. They were placed with different NGOs in Brussels and some in the European Parliament during the preparations for WSSD. The report of papers prepared by these activists for a capacity-building workshop in May 2002²² includes a critical analysis of the EU external SD strategy.

¹⁶ (a) An expert conference in Stockholm, November 2000, with the Swedish Environment Ministry;

(b) A conference on implementing the EU SD strategy with the Belgian Presidency in Brussels, October 2001; and (c) A conference in March 2003 at the time of the Barcelona European Council)

¹⁷ *EU Strategy for Sustainable Development: A common response to the European Commission's 'Consultation paper for the preparation of an EU Strategy for Sustainable Development'*. European Environmental Bureau, Brussels, 27 April 2001.

¹⁸ *European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy: A Critical Perspective by WWF*, by Tong Long, European Policy Office, WWF, Brussels, 26 March 2001.

¹⁹ *Taking Responsibility for the Environment: Europe's Global Leadership Role: A WWF Response to the European Strategy for Sustainable Development*. European Policy Office, WWF, Brussels, April 2001

²⁰ *WWF's Critique of the European Commission Communication: 'Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development'*. European Policy Office, WWF, Brussels, March 2002

²¹ *Shaping the EU's International Sustainable Development Strategy: WWF's Contribution to the European Commission's Communication*. European Policy Office, WWF, Brussels, January 2002

²² *The Jo'burg Generation: A New Vision for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*. A compilation of reports by Mohammad Rabah Aghbareh, Yael Cohen, Amanda Gonzales Córdova, Arqam Hijawi, Kannikar Kijtiwatchakul, Anna Matros. Dany Va y Yonas Yohannes. Heinrich Böll Foundation, Paper No.12 for World Summit 2002.

6. Reviewing and revising the SD strategies: some opportunities and options

6.1 *An integrated revision process is needed*

The process for revising the SD strategy for the start incoming Commission in 2004 is not yet clear. It is currently under consideration in the Secretary General's office. Hopefully, the communications setting out internal and external dimensions will be taken together and reviewed as a single process, so that the revised strategy is fully integrated.

6.2 *Role for a dedicated Unit in the EC Secretary General's Office*

This might best be facilitated and coordinated by creating a permanent unit responsible for sustainable development in the Secretary General's office. It would need a clear mandate for addressing the sustainable development agenda and particular responsibility for reviewing progress and revising the SD strategy. Such a unit would need adequate financial resources and could be staffed by qualified individuals with a range of skills/experience (environmental, social, economic) seconded from different Directorates General, serving perhaps for 2-3 year periods.

6.3 *More effective stakeholder involvement*

Most people interviewed and documents reviewed agree there is a need for more effective stakeholder involvement, and more time is needed for this. Given that the strategy revision is required by mid 2004, this provides adequate time for a 'reasonable' consultation process, provided it is started fairly soon. This should involve stakeholders both within and outside the EU – especially since the strategy has both internal and external dimensions. Country mission offices and existing consultative mechanisms have a role to play here. A number of obvious mechanisms for improving stakeholder participation are available: e.g. internet-based information and consultations, ad hoc multi-stakeholder group meetings, workshops, conferences.

6.4 *An improved role for the European Parliament*

The European Parliament played no role in shaping the SD strategy (either its internal or external dimensions). This was in part because of the way the EU works. It is the Commission's role and responsibility to develop communications. It was only able to debate the published documents. But the review and revision processes should engage fully with the Parliament to build broad political support and increase awareness. Northern and southern stakeholders can also make submissions and provide evidence to parliamentarians and encourage broader debate and analysis.

6.5 *Explanatory information on the revision process and how to engage*

To achieve effective stakeholder engagement, it will be necessary to distribute the SD strategy – particularly the external dimension – and explain that a revision is being undertaken and how people can comment and contribute. Many people will be able to access documents on the internet, but many in developing countries face difficulties in downloading long documents. So other ways will need to be explored. The Commission might best seek the assistance of European-based (and particularly Brussels-based) NGOs and networks, to help distribute information about the revision process and raise awareness of how to engage..

6.6 Regional and Brussels-based meetings

In addition, a few regional meetings could be held in the south in EU-focus regions and consultations could be organised through country delegations and existing consultative mechanisms. Also, a selection of knowledgeable individuals from the south could be invited (and supported) to travel to Brussels for meetings and discussions with the EC, Parliament and northern NGOs.

6.7 EU briefing paper

An EU paper setting out the main points of the existing SD strategy (internal and external) should be produced as a basis for discussions in all such events. This might include or be accompanied by a separate paper that examines *what has been achieved and been successful* in the first strategy (internal and external) and why; and what *additional measures* might be required in the main identified areas. Furthermore, such a paper should review the *outcomes of the WSSD* to determine what the EU needs to deliver – what is in place and what the gaps are.

6.8 An improved voice for southern leaders

There is a view that real progress in influencing northern leaders to take sustainable development (in a global sense) seriously will only be achieved if southern leaders can sell their problems and needs to northern voters. It is vital to overcome the widely held view in European countries that aid is a waste of tax payers' money. One interviewee put it bluntly that "it is necessary for the south to make a convincing case setting out clearly how developing countries are responsible co-citizens in the world, how they matter to the north, and why they are worth helping". If these voters are convinced, that might translate into pressure on political leaders to act. For example, it might raise the level of attention and awareness regarding the southern case if one or two senior, respected leaders (eg representing India or NEPAD²³) would request to attend and present a case at one of the Spring Council meetings to support sustainable development in the south – not the usual demand to "give us the money and leave us alone".

6.9 Using the impact assessment route

An avenue to press for greater stakeholder engagement might be explored through the new instrument for impact assessment of policy initiatives (Box 5). What is and what is not a policy is not entirely clear. But the SD strategy must represent one of the most significant policy statements that the EU has made and, therefore, it might be argued that it should be subjected to an extended impact assessment procedure. This will require a consultation process (and one that also satisfied the Commission's December 2002 communication on improving consultation (see section 4.5). Given the strategy includes an external dimension, southern stakeholders could demand to be consulted.

²³ NEPAD. The New Partnership for Africa's Development: a merger of the Millennium Partnership for the Africa Recovery Programme and the OMEGA Plan, approved by the Heads of State and government summit of the Organisation of African Unity in July 2001. NEPAD is the African leaders' vision and programme of action for the redevelopment of the African continent, aiming to implement a comprehensive integrated development plan that addresses key social, economic and political priorities in a coherent and balanced manner. Its goals are: to promote accelerated growth and sustainable development; eradicate widespread and severe poverty; and halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process.

Box 5: Impact assessment of EC policy initiatives

Impact assessment will be introduced within the Commission, gradually from 2003, for all major initiatives (i.e. those presented in the Annual Policy Strategy or later in the work programme of the Commission).

“The new impact assessment method integrates all sectoral assessments concerning direct and indirect impacts of a proposed measure into one global instrument, hence moving away from the existing situation of a number of partial and sectoral assessments. It provides a common set of basic questions, minimum analytical standards and a common reporting format. However, the new method will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the differences between Commission policies and to take into account the specific circumstances of individual policies”.

There will be two stages: (a) *preliminary assessment* - a first overview identifying the problem, possible options and sectors affected; and (b) *extended impact assessment* (for those proposals decided by the Commission) with more in-depth analysis to secure a better balance between economic, social and environmental concerns; and consultation with interested parties and experts.

The assessments are to be undertaken in-house by Commission staff. Some 40 assessments were anticipated to be undertaken in 2003.

Source: Communication from the Commission on Impact Assessment (COM(2002) 276 final) (available on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/eussd/>).

Undoubtedly, this will be a challenge and likely to incur resistance amongst some bureaucrats. It will be a complex and time-consuming process, but one that can only benefit the EU. It will help make the strategy more effective and avoid future difficulties. After all, this is one of the major rationales and benefits of undertaking environmental impact assessments (of projects) and strategic environmental assessments (of policies, plans and programmes). They help the development of a more robust projects or policies and reduce the risk of later, costly mitigation or remedial actions.

7. Some other challenges

A number of other issues will need to be addressed when revising the SD strategy.

7.1 Vertical and horizontal integration

If the EU SD strategy is to be effective in shaping the direction of European development along a sustainable path, it will need to provide a mechanism for both horizontal and vertical integration:

Horizontal integration is required across the DGs and other EU agencies to ensure that the wide array of different EU sectoral policies and instruments are mutually supportive and reinforcing, not in conflict. It also implies dialogue with the private sector and civil society to build consensus and to ensure that such policies make sense and can be implemented.

Vertical integration is needed between the EU/EC and member states to enable dialogue to ensure cohesion and synergy between the policies and actions proposed at the EU level and

those agreed, being developed or implemented at national (and more local) levels. Many EU countries are currently developing or revising their national SD strategies, and many Local Agenda 21's have been prepared by cities and municipalities across Europe. Mechanisms will need to be considered that provide effectively for such integration. Some national SD strategies are already making efforts to build synergies. For example, a revised federal SD strategy is being prepared in Belgium and is focusing on the six key themes in the EU SD strategy. The extent to which national SD strategies address the external dimension is unclear.

Multi-stakeholder National Councils for Sustainable Development, or their equivalents, have been established in most EU countries and could play a key role in building synergy between the EU SD strategy and national strategies. In practice, they have themselves already identified this need. The Working Group on Sustainable Development of the network of European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC) submitted a paper to the 2003 EU Spring Council pointing to need to establish such links²⁴

“Many European countries are currently creating or updating their own SD strategies in the light of the Johannesburg conclusions. These national strategies will have important linkages with the evolution of the European strategy. We believe that it would be timely to organise a major European conference in 2004, to:

?? take stock of national and EU progress on SD strategies;

?? intensify any further efforts needed to implement them more effectively, and

?? promote public and political awareness of SD in the newly enlarged Union”;

and recently launched an initiative to work on this issue.

7.2 New EU financial perspectives

The EU financial perspectives (the existing ones end in 2006) provide a framework for the Council, Parliament and Member States on the budget envelope. They are closely linked to political priorities and discussion on the Lisbon strategy (as broadened by the SD strategy). To ensure the kind of integration discussed above, the revision of the SD strategy should link closely with the process to develop the new financial perspectives

7.3 Securing attention to sustainability synergies

A key challenge within the EU will be how to assure effective synergies between environmental, social and economic dimensions so that environment is not sacrificed when there are economic downturns. One vehicle is the communication on innovative environmental technologies due by the end of 2003.

7.4 The time horizon

The revised SD strategy will need to look forward - to 1020/2015 and beyond. Visioning and scenario planning should form a critical part of the revision process and provide an excellent platform for involving both experts and a broad range of stakeholder perspectives.

²⁴ EEAC (2003): *Strengthening Sustainable Development in the EU* : Recommendations from the Sustainable Development Working Group of the network of European Advisory Councils (EEAC), offered as a contribution to the post-Johannesburg review of the European Sustainable Development Strategy to be undertaken for the EU Spring Council in 2003.

7.5 *The EU Treaty/Convention*

Sustainable development is likely to be taken more seriously if this concept and goal is addressed clearly and prominently in the EU Convention currently being shaped. The Commission is discussing the idea of a *Protocol on Sustainable Development* as an addition to the Convention which will commit the EU institutions to take long-term sustainable development into account. This idea is under general discussion but needs firmly pushing and wider support.

An important issue is the implications of the draft European Treaty for future EU policy on SD?

7.6 *Overcoming misconceptions*

As in most bureaucracies the evidence shows that, in general, within the EC, the aims and requirements of sustainable development are still poorly understood. It tends to be seen as incorporating the three pillars (economic, social and environmental) into policies and frameworks, but in a parallel fashion rather than so they truly integrated and balance each other. So sustainable development still tends to be dealt with in a disaggregated or segmented way. There remains a fairly widespread perception amongst officials and politicians that sustainable development is merely a Trojan horse for the environment. These misconceptions need to overcome if real progress is to be achieved.

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees

(Interview conducted on 8th/9th September 2003)

(A) EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Henning Arp

Member of Cabinet of Environment Commissioner (Mrs M. Wallström)
B-1049 Brussels
Tel: +32-2-2981812
Email: Henning.arp@cec.eu.int

Jill Hanna

Deputy Head of Unit
Development, Environment & Mediterranean
European Commission, BU-9 05/166
9 Avenue de Beaulieu
Tel: 00-32-2-295-3232
Email: jill.hanna@cec.eu.int

Julio Garcia-Burgues

Head of Unit ENV-E.2
International Affairs, Trade and Environment
Environment Directorate General
European Commission BU-9 5/58, B-1049 Brussels
Office: 9 Avenue de Beaulieu, B-1160 Brussels
Tel: +32-2-296-8763
Email: julio.garcia-burgues@cec.eu.int

Marc van Heukelen

Head of Unit, Budget Directorate-General

Rupert Willis

Budget Directorate-General

European Commission, BRE2 11/464, B-1049, Brussels
Office: 19 Avenue d'Auderghem, B-1040 Brussels
Tel: 00-32-2-299-3405
Email: marc.vanheukelen@cec.eu.int
Email: rupert.wllis@cec.eu.int

Rob Rozenburg

Development Directorate General (Unit DEV/B/1)
European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels
Office: 12 Rue de Geneve, B-1140 Brussels
Tel: +32-2-296-1831 / 296-0457
Email: robertus.rozenburg@cec.eu.int

Hugo-Maria Schally

Head of Unit DEV A/2
"Relations with the Unit System, Member States and other OECD Donors"
Development Directorate-General
European Commission,
B-1049, Brussels
Office: G-12 9/111, 12 Rue de Geneve, B-1140 Brussels
Tel: 00-32-2-295-8569
Email: Hugo-Maria.Schally@cec.eu.int

(B) NGOs

John Hontelez

Secretary General
European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
34, Boulevard de Waterloo, 1000 Brussels
Tel: +32-2-289-1090
Email: hontelez@eeb.org

Patricia Jimenez

Vice Director
Heinrich Boll Foundation
15 Rue d'Arlon
Tel: +32-2-743-4100
Email: jimenez@boell.be

Tony Long

Director,
European Policy Office
Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)
36 Avenue de Tervuren, Box 12
1040 Brussels
Tel: +32-2-743-8805
Email: Tlong@wwfepo.org