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The Role of National Sustainable Development Councils in Europe in Implementing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

Overview and Conclusions

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Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Chapter I The frame for universal sustainable development: The Sustainable Development Goals and National Sustainable Development Strategies.....	6
1.1 Global Sustainable Development Goals: An introduction.....	6
1.2 NSDS: State of affairs in nine EU Member States.....	7
1.2.1 A headline summary on the state of play and some of the challenges in the NSDS focus areas	8
1.2.2 Strategies for the governance of Sustainable Development	10
1.2.3 Monitoring and reviewing the SD strategies.....	11
1.3 How SDGs might challenge national and regional governance	11
1.4 Concluding remarks.....	12
Chapter II National Councils for Sustainable Development.....	14
2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2 Sustainable Development Councils: Setting the Scene	14
2.2.1 SDC coming into being.....	14
2.2.2 What are the drivers that changed the Councils and their focus?.....	15
2.3 Main tasks of SD Councils.....	18
2.4 How do Councils function?.....	20
The composition of Councils	22
2.6 Summary.....	23
Chapter III Implementation of the SDGs at the EU level. The need for an active EU Sustainable Development Strategy portfolio (Contribution by Derek Osborn)	24
3.1 The challenge for the European Union	24
3.1.1 Implementation Tasks	25
3.1.2 An integrated approach.....	25
3.2 A new framework or over-arching strategy for the EU?	26
3.3 Flagship Programmes?	27
3.4 Monitoring and Review	28
3.5 Strengthening the Semester Process?	29
3.6 Engaging Stakeholders in the Creation of a new European Strategy and subsequent stages of the Sustainability Cycle.....	30
Bibliography.....	33
Annex I.....	34

Foreword

By Günther Bachmann, Michiel de Vries, Derek Osborn

With deep roots in the Rio-Summits of 1992 and 2012 and the Millennium Development Goals policy, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) now create a new momentum for all of us. This momentum is crucial and business as usual is no option. There is a lot at stake, worldwide and nation-wise. The bottom line is how we perceive our own role in a disturbingly and rapidly changing world. The UN Agenda 2030 challenges parliaments and politics, the corporate community as well as the organised civil society – and in particular, how those groups interact with each other.

Councils for Sustainable Development are expected to work this interface and to facilitate political path finding in areas where the regular routines and institutions are still failing to deliver. This is not an easy task, and we already experienced the abolishment and downturn of a couple of Councils that began their work with high hopes and full swing. Others, however, continued and expanded their practise and were able to successfully introduce meaningful action and new political features. The universal Agenda on Sustainable Development as recently passed by the United Nation General Assembly in September 2015 gives us the chance to increase our efforts to integrate sustainability into mainstream policies, to keep the notion of sustainability exposed and open to action, evaluation and societal learning.

This report suggests fresh thinking and new action in order to foster and expand civil society engagement in implementing sustainability. SDG implementation is clearly a matter of regulation, but regulation alone will not do the trick. We need new forms of governance that resonate with society, the private sector and organised civil society groups. This is true for some time already, and throughout Europe national Councils added good practices and effective policy recommendations. This report presents an overview of the challenges ahead, the importance of engaging stakeholders of all kinds in the process and the contribution and potential of nine national Councils for Sustainable Development in European Member States. It also presents a reflection on gaps and opportunities on the side of the European Union as a whole.

We hope that this report's findings will win support amongst Councils for Sustainable Development and similar bodies in Europe and world-wide, and amongst stakeholders of all kinds. We hope to connect with the interest and readiness for action that we perceive in all parts of society, the European institutions, national and sub-national Governments and Parliaments throughout Europe and internationally.

Preamble

The concept of sustainable development - meeting the needs of the present, while safeguarding those of future generations - is receiving support throughout the world –but too often principles and programs did not lead to real action. Already in 1992 at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders committed to the Rio Principles of Sustainable Development and to the comprehensive programme embodied in Agenda 21. Emphasizing this dedication, the Rio Summit in 2012 added a new feature to it. An intergovernmental process tasked an Open Working Group to propose universal sustainability goals. With the adoption of a new set of universally applicable Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, and targets the UN General Assembly in September 2015 has endeavoured to give renewed momentum to the cause of Sustainable Development and the sustainability transition which all countries need to go through to secure a safe and viable future for the peoples of the world and to protect the natural resources and ecosystems of the planet that support all life.

Implementing the SDGs poses a major challenge for every country of the world, but it also promises benefits and innovation. The universal goals and targets need to be adapted and re-articulated to the specific situation of each country and region. Each country, region and local institution will now need to design a comprehensive governance approach to deliver the goals and targets. Institutions and processes will need some radical changes and fundamental improvements.

For the great transition towards a more sustainable world, the SDGs have a clear message. Ambitious Government action is needed. Goals and targets must be rooted in democratic decision making and administrative excellence. But this is not enough. The active involvement of the whole of society and the engagement of many different stakeholders as willing and committed partners would really make a difference. The quest for solutions to the many different and challenging issues is bigger than can be met through any single action.

Over-arching national and sub-national strategies for sustainable development will need to be revived and refreshed to co-ordinate and drive progress across the whole of this broad front. At the UN level a regular process of global monitoring and review of progress based on a comprehensive set of indicator reports is to be instituted, and every country will need to establish appropriate monitoring and progress-reviewing structures to feed into this process.

Councils for Sustainable development and similar institutions are not new ‘on the block’. The question now is how to build on the capacities and experiences that Councils have gathered so far, how experiences can be shared more effectively, and whether good practise attracts new appetite for the creation of Councils by national governments where they do not yet exist.

Only a minority of European countries at present have established National or Sub-national Councils for Sustainable Development. This paper reports on nine such bodies which are also active in the European Environment and Sustainable Development advisory Councils Network (EEAC). The situation in the other European Member States was taken into account but is not dealt with in detail in this report.

The first two chapters of this report have been drawn up by Michiel de Vries, the Co-ordinator of the EEAC network. They provide an overview on:

- the main challenges ahead in implementing the SDGs, and the status and scope of National Sustainable Development Strategies in EU Member states
- the tasks and functioning of National Sustainable Development Councils in Europe, and their capacity for participating effectively in the SDG implementation tasks ahead.

In concluding, we make a number of suggestions about how national Councils for Sustainable Development in Europe might be adapted and strengthened to play a leading part in engaging stakeholders of all kinds with the long term process of building awareness and commitment to the fundamental changes which the full implementation of the SDGs will require in Europe and with the monitoring and review of progress.

We see a good opportunity for those European countries which do not at present have a functioning national Council for Sustainable Development or a similar body to consider establishing or re-establishing one, perhaps specifically focused on the task of engaging stakeholders. The first European Sustainable Development Action Week (ESDW) in June 2015 is an encouraging experience. Initiated by the European Sustainable Development Network and supported by the EEAC and national Councils for Sustainable Development it has managed to encourage thousands of civil society actions. This shows the high potential the concept of sustainability has in combining concrete action with an over-arching aspiration.

The third and final chapter is a contribution by Derek Osborn who is an extraordinary expert and a former member of the EEAC and subsequently of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and first president of its Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO).

The third chapter

- focuses on the challenges the SDGs present at the European level especially in terms of implementation, monitoring and stakeholder inclusion.

This contribution identifies a number of the challenges embodied within the SDGs that particularly need a collective and coherent European approach in order to make the most significant impact on the global problems identified in the SDGs and recommends the creation of a European over-arching approach that would complement and reinforce the parallel actions in Member States. It also emphasizes the need for good co-operation between all levels – a cooperation that could usefully be reflected and reinforced on the stakeholder side by building stronger links and connecting efforts. Against this background the chapter concludes in suggesting the creation of a European Sustainability Forum which the EESC - SDO is currently seeking to foster.

Chapter I

The frame for universal sustainable development

The Sustainable Development Goals and National Sustainable Development Strategies

1.1 Global Sustainable Development Goals: An introduction

During the UN Conference on Sustainable Development at Rio in 2012 (also known as Rio +20) one of the main outcomes was the agreement to establish a set of overarching global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These SDGs were intended to address the three dimensions of sustainable development (people, planet, profit) in a balanced way and to become the core of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development throughout the world.

In order to encourage a co-operative approach to the creation of the SDGs a new approach was adopted. It followed an intergovernmental procedure as opposed to multilateral approach. In the so called Open Working Group (OWG) some 70 interested countries had to share seats with other countries, and they arranged for participation of stakeholder groups in an unprecedented way. E.g. on EEAC level, and explicitly in Germany, SD Councils engaged themselves in this wide discussion and produced suggestions as to how to frame specific goals. That hastened the process of achieving consensus and reduced the risk of content being watered down to an acceptable minimum. After just thirteen sessions the OWG was able to submit an ambitious and comprehensive provisional list of 17 SDGs supported by 169 quantified targets.

World leaders gathered on 25 September 2015, at the United Nations in New York and adopted the proposals made by the Open Working Group. By agreeing on the goals the world leaders have determined unanimously to push the sustainable development (SD) agenda forward comprehensively on an unprecedented scale.

The 17 SDGs, supported by 169 quantified and measurable targets create an important opportunity for the world to give a new impetus to the global drive towards a sustainable transition and against not sustainable pathways. They propose an ambitious effort to guide the whole world towards the path to eradicating poverty, hunger and preventable ill health, transforming the economy into more sustainable patterns of consumption and production, addressing gross inequalities in the world, fighting climate change and protecting the world's natural resources and ecosystems over the next 15 years.

Countries now need to move from the inspirational commitments undertaken at the UN to the hard task of integration and implementation at national level. Every country will need to make a determined effort to revive and refurbish their sustainable development strategies and the policies that support them, and to engage all parts of society in the implementation task, and in monitoring and reviewing progress. There will need to be active engagement with a wide range of stakeholders; and stakeholders will themselves need to strengthen their capacity to interact effectively with the process.

The SDGs are intended to be "universal" in the sense that they apply to all countries, and need to be implemented by all countries. They represent significant challenges to the domestic agendas of developed countries as well as to the developing countries and the development community.

It is very important to take full account of this universality of the goals and the need for all countries to implement them. There has been a tendency amongst some countries and commentators to think of the SDGs as being primarily about the eradication of poverty in the poorest countries of the world through the continuation and extension of the earlier Millennium Development Goals, MDG process, and that the responsibilities of the developed world are primarily to assist those least developed countries to make sustainable progress through development assistance and co-operation.

Those responsibilities are of course extremely important and should form an important part of the implementation of the SDGs by the developed countries. But there are many other challenges for the developed world within the SDGs to make their own societies and economies move into a more sustainable direction. This underlines that sustainability begins at your own house's door.

A recent study undertaken by the Bertelsmann Stiftung¹ examines the situation of the different OECD countries in relation to each of the sustainable development goals in more detail. The study uses a set of key sustainability indicators to analyse the present sustainability status of each developed country and to show how much they still have to do to achieve each of the 17 goals. It shows that there are at present wide variations between the developed countries in their progress towards sustainability. It finds that although some of these countries are further ahead than others towards achieving the goals, all of them still face significant challenges in achieving the full set of goals over the next 15 years, and some have a long way to go.

The study's statistical analysis shows that some of the main transformational challenges facing the entire set of OECD countries in terms of the SDGs as far as their own societies are concerned are fostering an inclusive economic model (goals 8 and 10) and sustainable consumption and production patterns (goal 12) as well as climate change and energy.

The detailed SDGs and targets require country-specific measures. Well-integrated national strategies and delivery plans will be of great help as opposed to single-issue actions that might disregard coordination and therefore provoke conflicts of interest that have to potential to, at some point, stall the whole process altogether. Progress will need to be monitored comprehensively, regularly and diligently. The implementation machinery required will need to be robust, transparent and accountable.

1.2 NSDS: State of affairs in nine EU Member States

Some Member States have made significantly more progress than others and on more of the goals. But all have much more to do.

The efforts made by individual countries differ, but for all countries it means that their national sustainable development policies (often incorporated in National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) will need to be revived and extended (or conversely that more attention will need to be paid to integrating the key objectives of the SDGs requirements in other over-arching strategies of Governments).

¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung (2015). Sustainable Development Goals: Are the Rich Countries Ready? Bertelsmann Stiftung, Berlin: Germany

During the first Rio World summit of 1992 Agenda21² was adopted by all participating nations. Agenda 21 included, amongst other recommended implementing measures, a chapter encouraging all countries to develop National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), and to engage a broad variety of stakeholders in the process. The development of NSDS was further encouraged by the Rio +5 summit in 1997 and the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

In response to these UN commitments the European Council encouraged all European Member States to develop their own NSDS or comparable strategies, and requested the European Commission to bring forward proposals for a co-ordinating European Sustainable Development Strategy that was first passed as the Gothenburg Strategy, but today is a portfolio that seems almost closed and replaced by the EU2020 strategy. With the SDG momentum and a scope clearly reaching beyond the limits of EU2020 this portfolio has to be opened again.

The nine European countries studied in this report all have established national sustainable development strategies and an institutional framework, including implementation and monitoring procedures for sustainable development. The Annex describes the governance structures and monitoring and reviewing mechanism for the NSDS in Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, and the region of Catalonia. It must be noted that there are quite some more sub-national SD strategies. In particular in Germany, as a federal country, the regional (Province (Länder-) level produces quite some activity. To some extent, the grassroots actions listed by the ESDW, European Sustainable Development Action Week, is an echo of this. It appears that most of the SD strategies have made some progress in broadening out from the environmental niche although they are seldom used and acknowledged as the prime over-arching framework (or evaluation proxy) for an effective integration of economic, social and environmental policies.

Shorter term economic and political priorities frequently divert the attention of political leaders and other decision-makers from the longer term perspective and objectives of sustainable development. This, of course, is quite understandable and almost “natural” when e.g. quick emergency responses are requested, and we had those events quite frequently due to the economic and fiscal crisis, the refugees issues, war and terror acts. The point with the crisis of not sustainable trends is that they (a) build up over longer time and (b) in cases of sudden exposure they make themselves known under the name of the concrete phenomenon and not the systemic background.

So far all SD strategies deal with some of the issues covered by the SDGs, but none yet cover the full range of topics embodied in the SDGs or articulate how the countries concerned will set themselves to achieve the full set of specific quantified targets identified for 2030. Full integration of economic, social and environmental policies firmly steering towards achievement of the longer term goals described by the SDGs at the same time as addressing the immediate needs of the present has not been fully achieved anywhere.

1.2.1 A headline summary on the state of play and some of the challenges in the NSDS focus areas

All NSDS have been developed in the context of the unique historical, political, economic, social and environmental conditions in each country as well as their historic, cultural and political circumstances. Therefore the strategies differ in terms of focus areas, institutional design, and political expectations. They also differ significantly in their level of ambition. It is clear however that

² Agenda21 is a comprehensive plan of action on integrating environmental policies with development policies and poverty eradication.

all will require substantial extension or reinforcement and stronger political and society commitment if they are to deliver the full range of the SDGs.

The following notes draw attention to some of the more specific challenges facing each of the nine countries covered by this report, identified in the interviews and research undertaken for the study.

Belgium, for example, already has a strong score on some of the social dimensions of SD such as gender equality and empowerment of women. However challenges remain in the field of air quality and pollution by agricultural activity. The Belgium government has the ambition to publish a Federal Strategy for Sustainable Development which fits the challenges set by the federal long-term vision on sustainable developed, as adopted in 2013; and this could perhaps provide the opportunity to address the challenges of the SDGs.

In France, after an interesting bottom up process involving civil society in an extensive way (Le Grenelle de l'environnement), the government revised its NSDS and issued its latest NSDS in 2015. The new strategy includes clear challenges and focuses on key topics such as the circular economy, the development of clean transportation and energy, and enhanced waste prevention measures (the focus on waste prevention is a direct response to the challenges France is facing on the topic of municipal waste). These priorities seem well directed to the challenge of addressing the implementation of some of the key SDGs most relevant in France.

Germany is at the forefront of countries pursuing sustainable development in Europe. Its NSDS has been continuously revisited, with the latest update in 2012. The next relaunch is said to come in 2016 and to take the SDGs into account. The German NSDS translates ambition and guidance into a restricted number of political goals. Indicators help monitoring progress that report on it. Analysing options to implement SDGs in Germany requested by the Federal Government the German Council for Sustainable Development recommends some fundamental changes to the German SD "architecture". Proactively and using its open mandate in other fields the Council issued the Sustainability Code for transparent corporate reporting on sustainability and thus introduced important new governance tools. Germany as a whole is well aware of the weight of SDG challenges that are not sufficiently addressed, for example in the fields of climate change, resource productivity and recycling, health, or social issues such as gender equality.

The latest Hungarian strategy (like the French strategy) focuses on key areas, including sustainable consumption, forest cultivation, and water usage and village tourism. The focus on sustainable consumption has put Hungary quite high on the list of OECD countries with a sustainable production and consumption policy process. But significant challenges, predominantly in the social and environmental pillars of SD remain.

The severity of Ireland's crisis from 2008 to 2012 (which had fiscal, economic, social, banking and reputational dimensions) meant that the central policy focus was on stabilization, economic recovery and social protection. Nevertheless, Ireland did adopt a new national sustainable development strategy in 2012, *Our Sustainable Future*, and has been working to improve and widen its monitoring and implementation. A feature of the country's economic strategy and recovery has been increased appreciation of the natural resource industries and the green economy. In addition, there has been a strong emphasis on sustainable planning and development as outlined in the Policy Statement on Planning. Another key sustainable development challenge for Ireland is climate change, particularly with Ireland's economy returning to growth. Progress towards a new climate change law and strategy was slow in recent years, but is now proceeding.

The Netherlands issued their latest strategy in 2013, focusing mainly on economic and environmental issues (the social pillar being already relatively well-developed). As with others many challenges remain for the Netherlands. For example they face difficulties reaching the renewable energy aims of their SD strategy, and they are struggling, as are Germany and Belgium, to reduce emissions from agriculture to sustainable levels.

Spain has an NSDS since 2007, which was renewed in 2012. The strategy mainly focuses on the sustainable usage of fresh water, improving energy efficiency and coping with the challenges Spain face regarding the social pillar of SD. Although Spain was one of the first countries in the EU to make major investments to build up a significant renewable energy sector this process has come to a standstill due to major budgets and political and regulatory decisions which hindered the development of renewable energy sources. However, the usage of renewable energy in the Spanish energy mix remains rather high vis-à-vis other OECD countries.

Portugal has a similar time frame, with the publication of its first NSDS in 2007. The Portuguese NSDS includes environmental goals by aiming at better valuation of the environment and natural heritage, and investing in sustainable growth and energy efficiency. Within the social pillar of SD the Portuguese NSDS focuses on more equity, equality of opportunities and social cohesion as well as fighting poverty. The economic component of SD is covered by the aim to make Portugal ready for the 'knowledge society'. Although challenges regarding the social dimension of SD are major Portugal has a head start vis-à-vis other OECD countries when it comes to the usage of energy and their efforts to combat climate change.

Also on the subnational level SDS are implemented, for example in Catalonia. The Government of Catalonia approved its NSDS (EDSCAT2026) in August 2010. It was designed as an "economic, social and environmental strategy". The EDSCAT2026 is structured in 7 pillars, dealing with biodiversity and territory; energy and climate action; mobility; eco-efficiency, competitiveness and innovation; sustainable consumption; health, safety and social cohesion; participation and community building.

Since 2010 the Government has approved various plans and strategies key to the sustainable development. However, they have not been explicitly linked to the EDSCAT2026 (the NSDS).

In general, good progress has already been made in several European countries towards some of the sustainability issues, much remains to be done to set a course towards achievement of the whole range of SDGs, particularly on some of the key cross-cutting integration issues. Societies so far and despite some minor but appreciative changes in consumer behaviour and supply chain policies are generally not on the right track towards sustainability in consumption and production patterns. All European member states will need to address these issues either through extending and strengthening their existing SD strategies or by other similar means.

1.2.2 Strategies for the governance of Sustainable Development

The process of vertical³ and horizontal integration of SD policies has been designed in similar ways in most of the nine European countries that were included in this survey. Most of these countries

³ Vertical policy integration mechanisms support the process of integrating SD strategies and policies across different levels of governance, from European via the national and regional to the local level, with the aim of including all relevant

developed rather comparable forms of inter-ministerial and cross-departmental mechanisms to ensure the process of horizontal integration of SD policies. Responsibility for this process has usually been assigned to the national Ministry for the Environment (e.g., in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal). But there are some important and significant exceptions. In Germany for example, the process is led by the Chancellery and in Hungary the national SD Council is in charge of this process. This more central location for the creation and review of the SD Strategy in those countries may well help in securing the integration of SD objectives across a wider range of policies.

The process of vertical integration between action at national, regional and local level and with different sectors has been developed in similar ways in most of the nine countries. Inclusion of stakeholders is most often arranged by consultation activities and institutionalized mechanisms, or by a mix of arrangements (e.g. Hungary, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain). In Belgium for example, laws and provisions are utilized to support the process of vertical integration. In all countries the national or regional Councils for Sustainable Development play an important part as valuable institutionalized mechanisms to support vertical integration.

1.2.3 Monitoring and reviewing the SD strategies

The way in which countries organize the processes of reviewing and monitoring have several similarities as well as differences. In some countries the Statistical Offices are in charge of the monitoring process (e.g., Belgium, Portugal, and Germany) in other countries the monitoring process is a task of ministerial working groups (Montenegro). In some countries (e.g. Belgium, Hungary) the process of monitoring is obligatory by law, so in these countries institutional arrangements are set in place. In other countries less stringent statutory requirements apply (e.g., The Netherlands, Ireland) and more flexible approaches to monitoring can be used. The process of monitoring is often done on an annual (e.g., the Netherlands) or bi-annual basis (e.g., Germany).

The process of Peer Reviewing gains some new relevance in the context of SDGs. So far, it has already been used in Europe, but the nine countries have conducted it differently. Some countries organize the reviewing process solely by domestic peers (e.g., Hungary), while other countries like France, Germany and the Netherlands have also opted for an international peer-review to supplement internal processes and bring in external views and comparisons. Most of the more systematic review processes operate on a four or five yearly cycle.

1.3 How SDGs might challenge national and regional governance

The 17 SDGs and the 169 related targets pose new challenges to national and regional governments in terms of defining focus areas, rearticulating the SDGs goals (political/policy), designing institutional frameworks and procedures (governance) as well as developing well-functioning reporting and monitoring systems (policy).

The process of rearticulating the SDG challenges in a national context is called alignment or implementation. This process includes aligning time horizons and indicators with the time horizons and indicators connected to the monitoring of the SDGs at the UN level by the UN's new High Level Political Forum. For example in Belgium efforts are already being made to align the timelines for the

stakeholders. Horizontal policy integration mechanisms refer to the cooperation between different administrative bodies within the (national/federal/regional) government.

regular review of Belgium strategies with the proposed set of timelines of the SDGs. In Germany, Montenegro, Hungary and on subnational levels Catalonia. The process of alignment is also in progress. Besides the challenges of aligning the timetables for international and national review, complementation of the NSDS and SD aims and policies with the SDGs and targets is a challenge ahead. With a wide and overarching variety of goals and targets this will generate a significant challenge for most countries.

The question whether the existing governance structures are sufficient to tackle the challenges ahead is an on-going debate. On the basis of interviews conducted by the European Sustainable Development Network, it seems that some countries have so far been expecting to rely mainly on existing SD-related governance structures to handle the new SDG challenges. But several scientists, NGOs and some SD Councils, such as RNE⁴, argue that the SDGs present a much more complex challenge which can only be adequately met through substantial modification and strengthening of existing SD governance structures.

At the national level in NSDS provide the backbone for implementation national sustainability targets with cross cutting character. But no strategy so far covers the whole scope of the SDGs and their targets, neither content-wise nor in terms of the timeframe (2030). All will need to be revisited to ensure that they constitute an adequate response to the global challenge represented by the SDGs and articulate appropriate national, sub-national and even local level targets to contribute their fair share to the global objectives.

Not only national goals and indicators are in need of updating but also sustainable development institutions and processes might envision substantial improvement. Stakeholders of all kinds also need to get themselves engaged and (re)aligned to the transition expressed now by SDGs. As active partners “official structures”, be it in politics or economics, should seek to include them more effectively and consistently. The involvement of stakeholders is a challenge but also an opportunity for governments to engage wider society and a broader range of partners in the transition towards sustainability.

Setting up proper monitoring systems requires, amongst others, well-functioning indicators. Currently, the UN Statistical Office, in combined effort with national statistical offices from around the world, is developing indicators that could monitor the universal targets. It is a highly complex process. European countries as well as the EU institutions will possibly be challenged to adjust and develop existing monitoring systems. Furthermore, the yet to be designed Peer Review process will require further consideration and sharing of lessons from already conducted reviews.

1.4 Concluding remarks

The ambitions of the UN’s SDGs are universal in their nature, though individual countries need to re-articulate these global goals and targets into their national situation. In practice this means that countries need to define focus areas, design appropriate institutional frameworks and need to develop well-functioning reporting and monitoring systems.

⁴ Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung (2015). Recommendation on national SDG implementation. Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung: Berlin

Most countries are preparing themselves for this, and some think that the existing governance systems will be sufficient for the task. However, some Councils for Sustainable Development, NGOs and scientists have doubts about this, arguing that not only goals and indicators are in need of updating but also institutions and processes need to undergo fundamental improvements and be made more effective in order to support the whole range of political decisions and actions needed to implement the SDGs comprehensively.

The process of policy integration by vertical and horizontal measures is generally similar. Although quite strong arrangements to support vertical and horizontal integration exist in theory, in practice these processes do not always work so smoothly and could be improved.

Some monitoring and reviewing processes are already in place in every country described. Strengthening these processes will be important for successful implementation of the SDGs and achievement of the 2030 targets. The process of strengthening SD indicators is on-going, both on the national and on the European level.

In conclusion NSDS processes need to be adapted in order to guide the implementation of the SDGs on the national level. Where they exist this operation is quite easy compared to countries that have no strategy tool already in place. For Europe as a whole and due to the absence of an active European level SD Strategy the question needs political dedication and leadership. The size of the room for manoeuvring on EU level is not yet clear and subject to further decisions. One thing, however, seems clear: the EU portfolio on sustainable development is to be refreshed and filled with new content and processes.

NSDS currently tend to focus on government driven action. This focus is not only understandable while goals and indicators are being set by governments themselves. It is also advisable as it is Government and politics that has to set framework conditions suitable for real action on the ground. In the future and with the increasing public understanding of and devotion to the notion of sustainability the instrument of NSDS, however, will have to prepare to take into account the wider action in society, e.g. sustainability trends in consumption, in cities and local communities, or through science and research. There is a growing need to reflect more on the role of society and to aim at pathways that include broad societal action.

Chapter II

National Councils for Sustainable Development

2.1 Introduction

It is undisputed that national, regional as well as local governments need to be supported by a broad variety of stakeholders in order to successfully finalize the integration and implementation process of the SDGs. National and sub-national Councils for Sustainable Development are expected to play an important role as advisors, in agenda setting and as communicators. They operate on several interfaces, such as the political –societal interface, private sector – society interface and the policy – science interface.

Already broadly recognized is the insight that sustainable development strategies and policies require multi-layered decision making, multilevel coordination and cooperation with a multitude of stakeholders⁵, particularly when considering the integration and implementation challenges of the SDGs at the national and sub-national level. In order to arrange an institutionalised gathering of these different stakeholders, Councils for Sustainable Development should be expected to play a significant role. In countries where they do not exist other institutions or NGO's may operate as a proxy and may be in the position to fill the void to some extent. Whether this works out and to which extent the proxy option really works has not yet been subject of empirical comparison studies. What can be observed and proved, however, is that the existence of national Councils for Sustainable Development help to create political support for implementing goals or strategies and for dealing with the variety of other sustainability issues.

Given the potential value of Councils for Sustainable Development for the integration and implementation process of the SDGs it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the development, functioning, tasks and composition of these Councils. This chapter starts by setting the scene, briefly focusing on how Councils for Sustainable Development and the topics on their agenda have developed to where they are at present. In order to gain an informed inside view on the different developments that might be envisaged for the future, interviews with national experts from five European countries were conducted. Furthermore interviews conducted by the European Sustainable Development Network are utilized. The first part of the chapter is followed by an overview of the tasks of the Councils and a description of the functioning and composition of SD Councils in several different European countries.

2.2 Sustainable Development Councils: Setting the Scene

2.2.1 SDC coming into being

As far back as 1992 Agenda 21 emphasized the importance of inclusive approaches to sustainable development, calling upon governments to include a multitude of stakeholders during the process of developing national sustainable development strategies. Partly in response to these recommendations governments all over the world started to establish SD Councils in the early nineties, or to extend or adapt the role of pre-existing advisory structures to the new sustainability agenda.

⁵ Berger, G. and Streuner, R. (2009). Horizontal policy integration and sustainable development: Conceptual remarks and governance examples. ESDN quarterly report. June 2009

In Europe, since the early nineties several countries established advisory Councils, dealing with issues of sustainable development. While some countries, (e.g., the United Kingdom) developed new and independent bodies, other countries, (e.g., Ireland and the Netherlands) used their existing institutions and added sustainable development specific tasks to the portfolio of their advisory bodies. Besides national Councils several subnational and regional advisory bodies were established as well (e.g., in Catalonia, Flanders and Wales). Germany followed only in 2001. Today 8, including the newly established Swedish Council for Sustainable Development, national Councils for Sustainable Development are active in the EU.

Since 2003, the European Environment Advisory Councils Network (EEAC), established in 1993 solely for academic environmental advice, broadened its remit to include Councils for sustainable development. According to this decision the network renamed itself as the European network of Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils. Today over 13 Councils from 9 European countries are involved in the network. The network and its members strive to be mutually supportive, to learn from each other, and to respect and promote viewpoints which transcend national perspectives and are vital for achieving sustainable development and a healthy and resilient state of environment in the European area and beyond.

2.2.2 What are the drivers that changed the Councils and their focus?

Over the years the Councils as well as the topics they are focusing on have changed and developed. Three developments, which have influenced the process of SD strategy and policy making in recent years have been particularly significant.

First, there has been a growing recognition that the concept of sustainable development is not simply an environmental concern that can be pursued separately by environment departments and the environmental community in a separate niche. On the other hand, for environmentalists it was a lesson learnt that the notion of sustainability helps the case for the environment. The narrative of the three pillars including economy and social is not per se compromising the ecology. It needs to be pursued as an integrating concept across the whole range of government policies and in all parts of society – it needs to be mainstreamed. This was recognised in principle, but so far not fully realised in practice. Mainstreaming must be regarded as being unfinished business in most European countries.

The second development was an external one. The severe economic and fiscal crisis that struck Europe in 2008 diverted political attention from the longer term perspectives of sustainable development towards shorter term crisis management. The extent of this effect differs significantly from country to country.

The third major development, both external and internal, is the process in the United Nations that has redirected attention to the longer term sustainability agenda and has now led to the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals.

- *The notion that SD is getting out of the niche*

Pushed forward by an increasing knowledge level, organised civil society, increasing (online) transparency and private sector engagement sustainable development has gradually left the niche, but did not yet enter the mainstream – with mainstream understood as the routine in decision making where sustainability is the regular proxy and everything else is the exclusion. Nevertheless, this process has resulted in more political attention for topics such as the energy transition, food

security, resource scarcity, green/circular economy initiatives and climate change. There was and is no guarantee that those people who deliberately are committed to sustainability are not only 'talking the walk' but also delivering some 'walking the talk'. For example experts from Hungary, Ireland, and Belgium stressed that although the goal and values of SD have become more politically mainstream in their respective countries attempts to make it a systematic policy approach or concrete activity remain in a rather experimental stage. Similarly the German Council for SD argued that: *'In spite of all the positive changes that have been accomplished, "sustainability" in Germany is still not a principle on which comprehensive action and decision-making are taken'*⁶. However, this sentiment is not the same throughout the whole of Europe. Particularly in some regional areas, such as Wales and Catalonia, sustainable development is considered to have entered the mainstream more decisively.

- *The impact of the economic and fiscal crises*

The financial and fiscal crises that struck the world economy in 2008 had major impacts on progress towards the achievement of sustainable development in many countries. Growth rates fell, unemployment rose dramatically, while poverty deepened and hunger and malnutrition increased again. In order to enhance SD, countries always have to deal with conflicts of interest in general and between short term and long term concerns and the interests of present and future generations. In times of economic crisis the short term interests of affected groups and measures to address them inevitably tend to preoccupy most political leaders and to distract attention and resources away from the longer term sustainable development goals and the investments and measures needed to advance them. This diversion of attention can be observed throughout Europe in recent years, including for example Spain, France, Belgium but also Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany.

The functioning as well as the tasks assigned to Councils for Sustainable Development in European countries was affected by the impact of this political focus on shorter term socio-economic issues. Discussions in some Councils faced difficulties in maintaining a well-balanced approach towards sustainable development. Environmental protection (including climate change) tended to be underrepresented and shorter term socio-economic thinking has had a propensity to dominate the debate. This challenge is more clearly visible within Councils that include organisations representing conflicting interests, such as environmental NGOs, employers and trade unions. Though this situation forms a challenge, Councils for Sustainable Development form an opportunity to find common grounds and to balance the debate, showing the benefits to integrate a sustainable development approach to all parties assembled on the table.

Shifting political focus and budget cuts have affected several Councils also in terms of structure and functioning. Councils from Poland, the UK, and Slovenia were abolished and elsewhere others were merged, for example in the Netherlands, France, and Ireland. Other countries re-structured policies in a way that make regions responsible for sustainable development, as happened in Belgium. As a consequence of merging, the field of interest Councils are dealing with has often been widened. This change means that Councils' focus shifted towards more abstract overarching principles. According to sustainable development experts, rather abstract approaches towards sustainable development by Councils for sustainable development could put legitimacy under pressure, since the broader public seems to be more open to concrete measures rather than appreciating what they feel are abstract grand-designs for sustainable development. This process has not however been seen throughout the whole of Europe. In Germany for example, the SD Council RNE engages the private

⁶ Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung (2015). Germany's Sustainability Architecture and the SDGs. Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung: Berlin

sector in a reporting standard called SD Code⁷. With European legislation requiring big corporate companies to publicly report on sustainable development issues following the year 2017, the Code gains momentum. The inclusion of the private sector and work on specific topics is a long term process which is on-going.

Although the impact of the economic and fiscal crises is clear, several interviewees see a silver lining. Councils in for example Belgium, Hungary, and Catalonia claimed that this major crisis has proven that there are serious weaknesses in for instance the currently prevailing economic model, the level of fossil fuel dependency and the availability of scarce resources. In that sense the crisis could be a driver for transition: a transition towards a more integrated policy approach.

- *The process towards adoption- and the integration and implementation of SDGs*

The process of integrating is a demanding challenge, but also a major opportunity, both for developing and for developed countries.

For governments and parliaments on the national and subnational level it is an obvious need to get advice on the process of implementation, monitoring and review of the SDGs and their targets. Councils are particularly well placed to give advice on complex, multi-layered and long-term challenges, such as the integration and implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, the way in which Councils are expected to function generates the opportunity to have cross-sectoral debate and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing, breaking through silos. Considering the crosscutting nature of the SDGs this ability is much needed.

Equally important is the capacity of Councils to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders and to initiate informed debate. Those debates are needed and should be entered in a well-thought-through way because it is most reasonable to assume that any delivery against the 2030-goals will cause 'winners' but also parties which will not see so many advantages. The effects of the SDGs will touch upon a broad variety of stakeholders. By offering a platform for debate and consensus building Councils for Sustainable Development could play a pivotal role in managing the debate. By their structure and functioning Councils for Sustainable Development seem to be well suited to this task; but the challenges to overcome conflicts of interest in society, which are sometimes reflected within the membership of Councils themselves, will remain obvious.

Of course the establishment of National Councils for Sustainable Development is not the only way in which multi-stakeholder engagement in the process of implementing the SDGs could be arranged in each country. But where such Councils exist they have demonstrated over the years that they do have strengths and advantages in facilitating the continuing engagement of many different stakeholders in a well-informed and constructive way. Organising stakeholder engagement with the SDG means to build up legitimacy, credibility and confidence in strengthening new governance for transition. This is a complex task and it involves continued action over many years of monitoring and reviewing. This is well suited to the capacities and experience of Councils provided of course they are adequately equipped in terms of budget and modalities. And Member States that do not have such bodies at present might like to consider the advantages of establishing (or re-establishing) them in order to assist in their SDG implementation action.

⁷ The SD codex is a transparency instrument for corporate Germany

2.3 Main tasks of SD Councils

Offering well-informed advice to their governments on sustainable development strategies and policies, introducing new sustainable development related themes onto the political and policy agenda as well as including stakeholders in meaningful forms of dialogue lie at the core of their mandated function. Such advice can help to build up and strengthen the knowledge base of policy initiatives and extending its support amongst key stakeholders and sectors of society in order to reinforce their effectiveness and legitimacy.

Councils for Sustainable Development in the European area formally address their national or regional governments and parliaments. When publishing an advice, and Councils regularly accept this as their primary role. All pieces of advice are made publicly available and often Council reports and activities also address the relevant actors in civil society and the private sector. Besides the national or subnational level some Councils (e.g. in Germany) also make recommendations on the EU level and facilitate or operate local or grassroots projects.

There is a variety of important elements that need to be taken into account when arranging working modes for Councils. For Councils for Sustainable Development some elements stand out.

- Safeguarding the long term focus

The first element that should be included in the advisory work of all Councils is safeguarding their long term focus, and representing the needs of future generations. While sustainable development is a topic that needs a long haul, the nature of the current political debate mostly seems to privilege short term subjects over long term challenges, such as sustainable development. This means that safeguarding the long term is increasingly important to keep an integrated sustainable development approach.

- Advocating an integrated approach

The second element of importance is the process of advocating an integrated approach towards sustainable development. In practice this means attention must be paid to better linking different policies and triggering crosscutting arrangements. Safeguarding an integrated approach topic wise is important, especially under current circumstances. Socio-economic issues tend to be centre staged, while a well-functioning sustainable development approach requires an integrated approach containing a balanced representation of both socio-economic aspects and environmental aspects. When an advice is published the quality of the publication is of course of the utmost importance. The position and 'weight' a Council can generate with its advice is directly connected with the quality of its work.

An advice can be attractive and influential when it addresses a topical issue in a timely and well-considered way, or when Council members are able to come forward with well joined-up advice, pre-settling different opinion and conflicting interests. On other occasions Councils can usefully draw attention to important but possibly neglected topics and assemble facts and analysis to illuminate them in a striking way so as to stimulate new action and policies.

- Including stakeholders

The importance of stakeholder inclusion for successfully developing and implementing sustainable development strategies and policies is crucial. Councils can play a pivotal role in this process of inclusion, and their role as facilitators and agents of stakeholder engagement is often identified as a core function of such Councils. In practice Councils have frequently been able to amplify and widen the role and influence of many parts of civil society. 'Through their link to political leadership in sustainability and the expertise combined in the Council, they build up an additional weight to the political sounding usually provided by civil society organisations.'⁸

When preparing their advisory reports Councils for Sustainable Development operate at the science and policy interface. Though the scientific community is involved in order to seek scientific input, the inclusion of a broader range of stakeholders enables Councils to gather different opinions, ideas and interests. More precisely, it enables Councils to include cross border thinking, strengthen innovative thoughts, ideas, approaches and proposals and to counteract the more sectorial or single interest approaches of many individual stakeholders and their lobby groups. Councils therefore, can fuel the process of integration, strategic thinking and developing of strategies. They can inform and qualify policy options by scientific evidence, societal opinions, or by cross-cutting expertise.

Gathering stakeholders is not only a necessity in order to produce balanced opinions and advice. The role of Councils for Sustainable Development is also important since their structure and mode of operation can often provide a forum for open and respectful debate. By bringing a wide variety of stakeholders to the table and enabling open debate on a pathway towards consensus, Councils may act as facilitator of change. Quite often, otherwise intractable sustainability issues need that kind of approach.

- Informing the public

The third general main task of a majority of the Councils is engaging with and informing the public and stimulating wider involvement and informed debate on sustainable development-related topics. In order to do so, Councils need to be visible for the broader public. This makes communicating to political leaders an inherent task of Councils, though the effort that can be put into this task is sometimes constrained both by the mandate of the Councils and by the availability of budgetary resources since effective communication is a resource intensive activity.

To achieve the communication aims Councils use a variety of actions and instruments, depending on budget and capacity. When dealing with a substantial sustainability issue Councils often aim to organise informed and well-balanced debates. They may invite governmental and political actors, scientific experts and other key stakeholders to contribute and to attend the debate, workshop, thematic gathering, conference, or award ceremony event. By including high-level representatives, such as ministers, parliamentarians and business leaders the message that is sent by the event gains value for (mass and social) media and finds its way more easily to the general audience.

Besides physical gatherings, Councils often use services on the Internet and newsletters to reach out to interest groups or the wider public. Councils regularly have a solid group of engaged followers with a major variety of backgrounds. The increasing use of social media enables Councils to communicate sustainable development related topics with the broader public as well. The strength of social media to get the message across should be reassessed in order to ensure that Councils can make the most of it. By sharing and re-sending messages the actual message a Council aims to send

⁸ Niestroy. I. (2007): 'Stimulating informed debate– Sustainable Development Councils in EU Member States. A compilation of tasks, capacities, and best practice'. Brussels

can reach hundred thousands of people at once. Councils from for example Catalonia, Ireland, and the Netherlands are very active users of social media, delivering their messages to almost 10.000 followers each. But although this practise has steadily increased over the years the average usage of this medium by Councils still remains comparatively modest. However, exclusively web-based was the operational and communication service provided for grassroots action in the frame of the European Sustainable Development Action Week 2015, a joint effort by Governments supported by Councils.

2.4 How do Councils function?

Most Councils for Sustainable Development were introduced as a consequence of the commitments countries made during the first Rio Earth summit. The majority of Councils are somehow embedded in either national or sub-national law although the basis on which this is achieved differs from country to country. Thus in Belgium the Council is established under legislation on the coordination of sustainable development policies in the country, whereas the Dutch Council is embedded in the national legislation that arranges formal independent governmental advice, and the German one is established by cabinet decision.

The relation between governments and Councils for Sustainable Development differs. The difference can be seen in terms of mutual obligations and the level of independence. In for example Belgium the government is obliged to request advice concerning the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy. Furthermore, the Dutch government is obliged to answer to the recommendations made by the Council, while in many other countries these obligations are not set in place.

In terms of independence differences can be pinpointed as well. There are in general three levels on which Councils operate vis-à-vis their government: independent Councils, soft-linked Councils, and embedded Councils. This differentiation played a bigger role in the past than it plays nowadays. From a more systemic perspective of political science, this difference is of course very meaningful. It diminishes, however, when seen in relation to outcome and effectiveness.

Some Councils have political and institutionalized independence built into their mandate and budget, which means that Councils are independent to set their agenda and choose their way of working. This is often perceived as independence. This political and institutionalized independence is sometimes not as sharply divided in practice as it is on paper. For example, in the Netherlands and Germany the Councils find it useful to consult informally with the different ministerial stakeholders on their annual working plans, while retaining complete independence in the final determination of their agendas.

So-called soft-linked Councils have governmental observers represented in the Council. These representatives play a more modest role in the discussion and process of consensus building. From the perspective of effectiveness and feedback on recommendations a permanent link to top level governmental decision makers can be advisable, notwithstanding how “independent” a Council sees itself. In various countries governmental contacts are arranged in other ways, e.g., via workshops or bilateral contacts.

“Embedded Councils” are led or dominated by government representatives. Some consider these kinds of Councils as being in effect government led bodies with stakeholder involvement. For example, in France, Montenegro, and Hungary Councils for Sustainable Development are chaired by the minister for the environment or the president of the parliament and have governmental representatives as members to the Council. Stakeholder participation is in most cases organized

alongside the lines of 'mirroring' society. In practice this means that a very broad variety of stakeholders engage in dialogue with the government, with the Council acting as facilitator. Questions can be raised whether this kind of embeddedness diminishes or enriches the scope for interactive discussion between different stakeholders, which may result in the advice coming forward being no more than the sum of individual ideas and opinions of individual stakeholders rather than the evolution of integrated advice to the government. On the other hand, it is often seen as positive that civil society representatives share the table with ministers and senior civil servants. As equal members of the Council they have immediate access to interaction.

When discussing the level of independence there is also a difference between being independent in administrative and budget terms and being independent in political and institutional terms. In practice all Councils are embedded in administrative terms, and rely on governmental resources for their funding. But in terms of political and institutional terms those Councils that operate independently can to some extent choose how close connections with governmental institutions should be. Too independent-minded and critical in their reports and they may lose traction and influence with Government. Too close to Government and they may lose the advantages of taking a fresh look at subjects and opening up new policy options. A well-balanced approach towards 'keeping distance' and 'remaining attached' in the relation between Councils for Sustainable Development and their different governmental sponsors and contacts seems to work best.

Agenda setting is an important step at the start of Councils' advisory work. The process of setting the agenda is rather complex. There is a clear-cut difference between the ways in which Councils establish their agendas. While some Councils are willing to pinpoint hot topics, other Councils are less willing to engage with this kind of issue. The origin of these differences lay in political, cultural and organizational differences.

When Councils have picked a topic of interest the process towards publishing an advisory report starts. During that process joint fact-finding is crucial. Besides the input provided by the Council members themselves most Councils reach out in order to gain external expert opinions. Furthermore, Councils use scientific studies in order to support the process of informed and sometimes evidence-based decision making. During the preparatory process the Council is supported by a secretariat and people active in the field about which the advisory topic handles. Reaching consensus and providing well joined-up advice is regarded as the desirable outcome of the process and functioning of most Councils. How this process of consensus building is handled is however strongly influenced by cultural differences and traditions in the different countries.

The number of submitted advisory reports and publications by the different Councils differs as well. The main source of this difference is the scope of the advisory work, the broadness of the process, the level of detail, the capacity of the Council, and the capacity of its secretariat. Some Councils are able to issue over 50 publications annually whilst others issue many fewer reports sometimes concentrating in more depth on the more major issues.

The budgetary resources within which a Council has to operate are of course a crucial determinant of the scope of their activities and the role they can play. Although most Councils have suffered budget cuts due to the financial crisis they still typically operate with an annual budget above one million Euros, though there are some significant differences between countries.

The composition of Councils

Councils for Sustainable Development in the European area are composed of Council members with many different backgrounds. Some members are appointed to represent their background organization. Some are appointed because of their personal position (being an eminent political leader for example) retaining their other linkages but without formally representing them. A third group of Council members are appointed ad-personam e.g. because of their special scientific expertise and are expected to operate independently. Membership includes individuals with expertise in different scientific disciplines and also people with private sector and non-governmental backgrounds and connections.

These different compositions enable Councils to provide for inter- and trans-disciplinarily approach. Although backgrounds vary, Council members are always appointed by governments. The procedures to nominate and appoint a Council member do differ from country to country. For example, in the Netherlands public job advertisements are issued, while in Belgium and Ireland representatives from different groups are nominated by their own organization. In Germany the procedure is entirely managed by the State secretaries committee for sustainable development. The cabinet-decision establishes the nominations as well as the final compositions of the Council. The size of Councils ranges from ten to sixteen (e.g., the Netherlands, Germany and Catalonia) up to fifty members (e.g., France), with a weighted average of around 20-25 (e.g., Belgium, Hungary, Ireland).

- *Mandates strictly representing interest groups*

When members are appointed to represent the views of specific organisations they often have a so-called bound mandate. These members bring the message of the organisations they represent to the Councils' deliberations. Representatives from all stakeholder groups may operate as representatives with bound mandate. In the case of scientific representation their role is however more often seen as being 'de-polarising issues' by focusing on fact and figures. Council members representing an organization not only bring the message from their institutions, but are also able to use their organisation as a sort of "resonating room", through which ideas, arguments and solutions developed in the Council can be disseminated more widely as well. Countries with a tradition of broad representation such as Belgium, Ireland, and France tend to create Councils like these.

- *Ad personam mandates, soft connected to background of individuals*

The second group of Council members is foremost appointed on the basis of their personal knowhow and position in society. They can have a background in science, civil society the private or public sector. In practice this means that a Council member is able to deliberate freely, but that his/her provenance is in the back of the mind. Since this 'division' between being a Council member and being part of another background one could conclude that in such a situation 'soft representation' is taking place. Portugal has moved for their SD Councils to a more soft representational composition, as well as Hungary, Germany, and the Netherlands.

- *Strictly ad personam mandates*

The third group of Council members is appointed solely ad-personam. Frequently such members have a background as independent experts in one or more dimensions of sustainable development. When a Council is solely composed of this kind of member it can be regarded as a kind of expert-panel. This approach was chosen in for example the U.K and Austria. Taken from recent examples the

debates and results of such Councils may be less connected to the agenda of politics and in some cases tend to have less scope for building bridges on sustainability issues between different interest groups. Disconnect of any kind always causes problems and may put the work of the Council at risk. But it is not a logic consequence that necessarily comes with this type of composition of the Council; it rather may happen regardless of the Council's composition.

2.6 Summary

Inspired by the call of Agenda 21 several European countries established Councils for Sustainable Development during the 1990's. While some countries established new Councils others integrated the tasks into existing advisory structures. Because most existing Councils are no longer 'new on the block' experience and skills gathered so far should put those Councils into a good position to face the new challenges arising from the implementation of the SDGs, and the continuing task of integrating sustainable development more securely into the mainstream of policy-making and response to shorter term economic management.

The experience of those Councils suggest a number of considerations that should be borne in mind by Member States in either in adapting existing Councils or similar bodies to the task of securing effective and committed stakeholder engagement with the new challenge of SDG implementation or in establishing new Councils or similar bodies for the same purpose.

In general Councils for Sustainable Development fulfil a number of core tasks, including submitting advice, acting as a platform for stakeholder inclusion, informing the public, and stimulating involvement and informed debate on SD-related topics. When submitting an advice the quality of the publication depends, amongst others, on the level of long-term focus, an integrated approach, its contribution to strengthen the knowledge base of policy initiatives and its ability to grasp attention of the broader public and politicians. All of these capacities will need to be brought to bear on the task of implementing the SDGs and monitoring and reviewing progress towards them.

Broad stakeholder engagement can generate cross border thinking, strengthens innovative thoughts, ideas, approaches and action. It can diminish the influence of sectorised approaches and help to win broad support for new thinking when consensus on joined-up advice is reached. By communicating widely on SD-related topics Councils can fuel informed debate. On the other hand challenges remain. Although most SD Councils put great efforts in reaching out to the broader public the usage of social media is not fully utilized yet and may need to be further developed.

Councils need to be adequately resourced to tackle the new challenges of SDG implementation, monitoring and review on a broad front and over a long timescale. They will need members and quality staff alert to and well informed on all the aspects of the SDG agenda. They will need to guard carefully the delicate balance between dependence and independence that they have built up over the years. They will need to need to engage with a wider range of stakeholders more deeply and over a longer timescale. They will need to reach out to colleagues in other countries through the EEAC and other networks to share experience and develop common platforms on issues that transcend national boundaries.

Above all and more than ever before they will have the challenging task of acting as the champions of the needs of future generations who do not yet have a voice of their own but whose interests are being put increasingly at risk by unsustainable practices today, and of identifying and promoting ways of bringing these concerns for the future into appropriate balance with the pressing needs of present generations.

Chapter III

Contribution by Derek Osborn

Implementation of the SDGs at the EU level. The need for an active EU Sustainable Development Strategy portfolio

3.1 The challenge for the European Union

The position within the EU in relation to the SDGs as revealed by the Bertelsmann study is similar to that of the OECD group as a whole. Some Member States have made significantly more progress than others and on more of the goals. But all have much more to do. So too does the EU itself.

The sustainability indicators published regularly by Eurostat tell a similar story. Eurostat published a first monitoring report based on an extended set of sustainable development indicators in 2007. That report was one of the inputs for the first progress report on the European Sustainable Development Strategy. Eurostat has subsequently published sustainability indicators every two years, with the last report in 2013 (Eurostat, 2013), and continues to refine and improve the set working closely with national statistics offices in the EU. The current Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) include over 100 indicators, with 12 headline indicators.

The latest 2013 monitoring report reveals a mixed picture of the progress of the EU on sustainable development in the years from 2000 until 2012. Developments have to a large extent been influenced by the global financial and economic crisis after 2007. Apart from the trends towards rising risks of poverty and social exclusion in the wake of the economic crisis several other unfavourable or negative trends are highlighted including public health, the transition to sustainable transport modes, the declining fishing stocks, the decrease of semi-natural and arable land and the decline in financial development assistance after the crisis. Addressing all of these issues will clearly be an important part of the SDG challenge for the EU.

In Europe several of the goals will clearly require action at EU level as well as at national level, or will make better progress if they are driven forward in a co-operative European effort. Therefore the action that needs to be taken at Member State level will need to be complemented by a new European effort to advance sustainability. The European Commission should reanimate its SD portfolio. But a simple re-discovery of the EU SDS will not do the trick. There is more to it. Adding the SDG momentum the advances in policy areas both on EU level and in Member states and considering the above mentioned European divide in terms of SD approaches the EU portfolio has to rebuild from the scratch. Complementarity is essential. Some of the actions needed for the sustainability transformation are clearly primarily within the competence of Member States and should be driven forward primarily at that level. Equally some are clearly within the Union's competence and should be initiated and driven forward by the Commission.

But for many of the topics there are mixed competences and much better progress will be made if the Member States and the Commission work together in a co-operative spirit to try to make progress together. Many of the changes needed may have costs in the shorter term or may disturb a variety of vested interests. By acting together Member States and the Commission should have much more confidence in the measures needed, and much less concern about the risks of eroding their short term competitive position vis-à-vis other Member States.

Similarly many of transformations that sustainability requires will only be achievable with the full engagement and participation of many different stakeholders in a long term constructive partnership. In the EU stakeholders need to be involved both at national and at European level. If this participation is to be fully effective there need to be close linkages between stakeholders at the different levels corresponding to the partnership needed between the Brussels institutions and Member State Governments. This requirement points to the need for new forms and modalities of cooperation.

3.1.1 Implementation Tasks

Drawing on the discussions at the UN, and on past and present experience in Member States and at the European level it would seem that there are four crucial factors that could assist the EU to make a determined and successful effort to respond to the challenge of the SDGs:

- The creation of an over-arching European framework or strategy with full support from political leaders and from stakeholders and society at large to establish priorities and drive action;
- Ambitious programmes for transformational change in relation to the key goals for which business as usual will not be sufficient to deliver the 2030 results needed;
- Continuing engagement with all the stakeholders in society as partners and co-producers of the sustainability transformation.
- A rigorous process of monitoring of progress and review of the adequacy of the strategy and policies, with corrective measures taken wherever progress seems to be flagging.

3.1.2 An integrated approach

Some European countries have already started to develop their own projects on national implementation of the SDGs and to revive or revise their national strategies for the purpose and align them to the objectives of the SDGs. Others have apparently not yet begun to address this formally and have not yet put forward systematic proposals as to how they propose to address the task of implementation, monitoring and review.

Similarly for the EU as a whole the implementation process has not yet been fully elaborated.

Up to the present time most Commission and Council activity around the implementation of the SDGs and the post-2015 agenda has appeared to be focused primarily on the development and poverty eradication agenda for developing countries and how the developed world can assist that process. This was the dominant theme of the Commission communication of February 2013 (COM (2013) 92 Final) "A Decent Life for All"

Again In its most recent communication (COM (2015) 44 final) on a Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015 the new Commission has focused primarily on the development agenda and the role which developed countries including the EU can best play in implementing it. The communication makes very useful proposals on that task, which should clearly be an important part of the strategy for implementing the SDGs in the EU.

The 2013 communication did however identify a number of domestic actions that would also needed to be carried out in order to contribute to the implementation of Rio+20 commitments. The main current EU activities to implement Rio+20 were brought together in a useful Annex mapping a

number of current EU policies and activities onto the main sustainability goals emerging from Rio and the SDG negotiations.

Amongst stakeholders generally there appears to be a wide measure of consensus that a single Agenda-2030 framework for the EU should be created that would cover both the domestic changes needed within the EU to advance the sustainability transformation and the international obligations of the EU to support sustainable development in developing countries (particularly the LDCs) and other parts of the world. Similarly the Council in its conclusions of December 2014 declared that *“The EU and its Member States recognise that advancing sustainable development also depends on our own domestic action and on developing our own set of implementation measures”*.

Further proposals from the Commission on implementation within the EU are still awaited. A further communication on this is expected later in 2015 and is expected to include inter alia a full mapping of the SDGs and targets on to existing European policies and programmes. This should be very helpful in identifying where there may be gaps or shortfalls indicating that new measures may be needed to advance the sustainability transformation and to secure European delivery of the goals and targets.

Meanwhile this chapter of the report makes a number of suggestions about how this task might be addressed, both by the Commission, and by Governments and the Council, and focusing particularly on the domestic or within-EU part of this agenda. These suggestions draw on stakeholder views as expressed both at European level and at member State level, and give particular attention to the part that stakeholders could and should play in the process.

3.2 A new framework or over-arching strategy for the EU?

As noted in the introduction the European approach to sustainable development implementation has changed over the years. In the first decade of this century major effort was put into creating and adopting the European Sustainable Development Strategy and into its review and updating, and this strategy played an important part in driving action forward on a broad front. In more recent years however the Commission has tended to take the view that better progress is made by embedding sustainable development throughout the development of policy in all areas, rather than driving it through its own separate Strategy. The European Sustainable Development Strategy has not been used systematically as an active monitor and driver of progress but has been overtaken by or subsumed into the processes of the Europe 2020 Strategy which has become the main overarching framework for steering strategic European policy development and action.

The time is fast approaching however when the EU will in any case need to consider its objectives for the years beyond 2020. In particular it is widely felt that the setting of objectives for the focal year 2030 would now be appropriate and useful for many different purposes. There is therefore an obvious opportunity to link this 2020 strategy review process with the measures that need to be taken to implement the SDGs in Europe.

The sustainability transformation needed in Europe over the next 15 years will clearly involve some fundamental changes in the European economy, and there is therefore some obvious advantage in terms of co-ordination in including the sustainability transformation within the EU’s top level economic strategy. But the sustainability elements will need to be better addressed than they have been in the 2020 strategy.

Although the 2020 Strategy does contain some important sustainability themes which have benefitted from being included in the Commission's premier strategy and by being driven forward centrally from the top of the Commission and the Council it does not include the whole range of sustainability objectives in a balanced long term sustainability framework. It focuses much more on shorter term economic issues, and in recent years it has in practice been used primarily as a means of co-ordinating policy and measures taken in response to the on-going economic and financial crises.

The 2020 strategy or a simple updating of it in something like its present form would not therefore be an adequate framework for co-ordinating European action towards the very wide-ranging set of universal Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

Given the intention of the Commission to revise the EU 2020 Strategy it has however been well argued by the EESC and several other commentators that the two strategies should not be revised separately, but should be brought together in a radical new package in order to set up a coherent strategic framework for the future of the EU in a changing global environment. In this process the revised EU 2020 targets could represent benchmarks for the mid-term perspective while elements of the EU SDS could be used to set up long-term objectives for European sustainable development in line with the global Post-2015 agenda. Such a new integrated strategy could unite the high level commitment and political weight which the 2020 strategy has enjoyed with the more wide ranging and transformational objectives of the SDGs.

Stakeholders of all kinds will have much to contribute to the formation of such a strategy and it might be appropriate to launch the EU's SDG implementation programmes with a wide-ranging and open-ended consultation with stakeholders of all kinds to build as wide a consensus as possible on the shape of the new strategy and its priorities.

3.3 Flagship Programmes?

A comprehensive sustainable development strategy covers a very wide range of subjects and needs to involve action by many different Government Departments and many different stakeholders. It needs to be followed up by more detailed policies and programmes in key transformative areas. One of the strengths of the European 2020 strategy has been that the over-arching strategy has been complemented by seven flagship programmes of action in key strategic areas, which have set out more specific actions and initiatives in relation to this more manageable number of key priority areas.

In general flagship programmes linked to key SDG objectives could be a good feature to carry forward into the new European sustainable development strategy (EU SDS) following an extensive mapping exercise to appraise current EU policies relevant to the SDGs and identify where new initiatives and transformative action will be most needed to achieve the SDGs.

In October 2012 the Council of the EU called for a full implementation of the outcome of this conference through a revised European Sustainable Development Strategy, and in the same month the Commission launched a public consultation on Rio+20 follow up. The EESC supported feedback through a series of structured dialogues. Over 125 responses to the public consultation were received from individuals, public authorities, businesses and business associations, NGOs, trade unions and consumer protection groups.

In addition to fulfilling the EU's national and collective responsibilities to the developing countries a large number of replies highlighted issues related to the inclusive green economy (in particular pointing to the need for economic indicators going beyond GDP), while others pointed out the need for a favourable trade environment, eliminating environmentally harmful subsidies and environmental taxes. The areas for possible SDGs mentioned by respondents included sustainable consumption and production, climate change and adaptation, resource and energy efficiency, waste and chemicals, biodiversity, water and sanitation, protection of oceans and fisheries, sustainable transport, sustainable agriculture, gender equality, poverty eradication, health and food security.

Many of these suggestions have found their way into the SDG set of goals and targets and may well emerge again as important issues for the new implementation strategy in any new consultation. Amongst these some of the major themes identified in the SF and Bertelsmann studies as being particularly important for the developed world (sustainable production and consumption, climate change and energy, the green economy and an inclusive economic model) might very well emerge from a new consultation as prime candidates for flagship programme status.

Whatever set of the SDGs and related targets are identified for priority action at European level it seems clear that they will cover a wide field. Many different Directorates General of the Commission will need to be involved, and there will need to be strong co-ordination from the centre of the Commission. A similar co-ordinated process will be needed in the Council and its formations, and in the Parliament.

Similarly a wide range of stakeholder will need to be involved both at national and at European level.

3.4 Monitoring and Review

A programme to fully implement the SDGs in Europe will involve fundamental changes to the European economy and European society over the next 15 years. If it is to win allies it should go for the big picture and a high level of ambition - a level of ambition that may excite controversy and debate in parts of Europe and amongst vested interests but one that also will attract attention and engagement and new support of all those who are hungry for a new vision for what The EU stands for in the world.. We need to be bold and ambitious about climate change and energy, resource efficiency and the circular economy, the linked questions of air pollution, health, vehicle emissions and transport. We need new thinking about sustainable cities, and sustainable management of the countryside, and about water and the oceans. We need to bring to some decision points to the long running debates about new economic paradigms and getting away from the tyranny of growing GDP (as presently defined) as being the overall measure of success, and the only guarantee of good employment opportunities. We need new thinking on ways to tackle growing inequalities within and between our countries. We need to be generous and imaginative in the help we give to other parts of the world to achieve their own sustainable pathways forward. A bold lead on all this could pay off much better for Europe and the world than niggling around with technical debates about indicators and data and imperceptible policy shifts that achieve little in the real world. And all of these changes need to result not from top-down pronouncements from the Commission but as the culmination of well-informed and well-structured debate throughout Europe and the active engagement of stakeholders of all kinds. Some European states and regions are pioneering in this engagement process with perhaps surprisingly positive results. Would it not be inspiring if the EU as a whole could lift itself to engage creatively in this debate and co-create a transformative programme, fired on the one hand by the vision of a more sustainable world set out so eloquently in New York at the SDG Summit by the Pope and other world leaders and on the other by the hard and detailed daily challenges set out in the SDGs and targets?

Inevitably the initial strategy will require adjustment over time to take account of changing circumstances, and different degrees of effectiveness of different policies and programmes. Monitoring progress, and reviewing policies and actions will be a crucial part of delivering the goals and targets.

The UN Outcome Document makes interesting proposals for establishing a multi-level process for monitoring, reporting and reviewing progress towards the goals. Countries will no doubt want to shape their own implementation processes in such a way as to fit in effectively with this international framework. The relationship between the different levels and the timetables for strategy making action planning, monitoring, reporting and review at the different levels will need to be well articulated in a supportive and helpful cycle.

In view of the crucial importance of effective stakeholder engagement at all levels for successful implementation it will be very important that arrangements for securing this should also be built into the implementation architecture and its timetables and procedures from the outset.

Currently negotiating attention is focused on the creation of sets of indicators that can be generated objectively by statistical services around the world and will show regularly how much progress is being achieved on the different targets. In the EU it will no doubt fall to Eurostat to be the main source of the indicators needed. Eurostat expects to publish its final report on its present set of sustainability indicators in 2015, and then to move to publishing regulator indicators to monitor progress on the SDGs.

This is clearly very desirable in itself. It is not however sufficient. In recent years the regular publication of excellent sustainability indicators has not supported a very active process for review and adjustment of the strategy or its supporting policies. The production of indicators needs to be complemented by a more vigorous debate about the significance of the figures and in particular to discuss what should be done about indicators which reveal divergences from the desired path towards the 2030 goals.

Processes for enabling and encouraging such debate need to be strengthened, and stakeholders for their part need to develop their own capacity for interpreting the data and other monitoring reports and highlighting areas where new efforts are needed.

3.5 Strengthening the Semester Process?

The introduction of the European Semester as part of the open method of coordination apparatus in place to monitor national progress towards the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy was intended to give new opportunities for stakeholder engagement and provided in particular for “collecting, sharing and implementing good practices” (COM, 2010, p. 6).

In principle the Semester process should be a good instrument for keeping progress towards the SDGs under regular review between the Commission and Member States. If it is to play that part however the process will need to be re-oriented to give greater weight to the sustainability agenda instead of concentrating mainly on shorter term economic issues as it has tended to do. The process also needs to be opened up to more effective stakeholder participation so that their perspectives can illuminate and motivate the debate.

To make the monitoring of progress against the SDGs and the post-2015 agenda a more dynamic process, it should be a more transparent process involving full stakeholder engagement in the assessment of progress, and a clearer commitment to policy review and modification where this is needed to correct adverse trends or shortfalls in progress. This could be a fruitful area for the EESC, National Sustainable Development Councils and similar bodies and other civil society partners to make a significant contribution and add to the impact and salience of the messages that ought to emerge from the indicator reports.

3.6 Engaging Stakeholders in the Creation of a new European Strategy and subsequent stages of the Sustainability Cycle

Stakeholders are needed at all stages of the sustainability cycle - as contributors to the identification of goals and targets and co-creators of shared national strategies, as co-producers of the policies and measures needed to achieve the objectives, as co-implementers in the programmes, projects and actions needed to change unsustainable practices and behaviours, and as co-participants in monitoring and review processes as joint guardians and watchdogs of progress.

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders is crucial to building wide political support for a transformational sustainable development strategy. They need to be brought in at an early stage before the agenda has been fully determined, and their views have to be fully understood and reflected in the strategy that emerges. Insofar as the strategy involves voluntary commitments and actions by players other than government then of course those partners need to be fully engaged in co-production of the strategy which then needs to be jointly owned.

In a recent study of stakeholder engagement in Europe undertaken for the EESC by Stakeholder Forum several general conclusions emerged strongly from the experience at all levels

- Progress on sustainable development at all levels is strongly correlated with effective and widespread engagement with stakeholders of all kinds. Sustainable development cannot be achieved as a series of technical adjustments cooked up behind closed doors – it has to be a worldwide move of society towards eradication of poverty and transformed patterns of behavior, production and consumption. It has to involve stakeholders of all kinds and at all levels as active participants.
- Stakeholders need to organize themselves and build their own capacities to play their part effectively in this engagement and to maintain their commitment and energy. Sustainable development is a long haul for everyone concerned, governments and stakeholders alike, and there need to be well-established but flexible ground rules to enable fruitful engagement.
- There is a crucial role for organizations or groupings such as the Major Groups at the UN, the EESC/SDO in Brussels and National Councils for Sustainable Development (or similar structures under other names) at national level that can bring many different stakeholder interests together and play a convening, coordinating or intermediating role amongst the many different types of stakeholder in a multi-stakeholder process. Such organizations or groupings can play a vital role in acting as a bridge facilitating and focusing communication and constructive engagement between governments and the plethora of stakeholders of all kinds that are concerned with sustainability issues, helping to build consensus where this is possible, or clarifying differences of approach where this is necessary. There is a natural commonality of interest between the EESC's SDO and national SDCs in this respect, and it would be highly desirable to encourage and promote more joint working between the two levels on key issues in the implementation of the SDGs.

- Sustainable development needs to be pursued at many levels, global, regional, national and local. The UN SDG agreement also lays stress on the interactions between all these levels and proposes complex iterative monitoring and review cycles to ensure that the perspectives and experience of each level can be used to inform and improve performance at other levels over time. Stakeholders will need to be able to mirror that complexity. Occupying a strong and nodal position the EESC/SDO and the NSDCs could play an important part in building stronger links and partnerships upwards and downwards.
- Sustainable development involves many different sectors of the economy and many different Government Departments. It works best when it is led strongly and coordinated from the top of government with a strong engagement of economics, finance and business departments as well as environmental and social departments. Similarly stakeholder engagement on sustainable development works best when relevant stakeholders and intermediating bodies are able to gain a position of regular and trusted contact with all these relevant departments and not just with environment departments.
- Stakeholders at all levels need to develop more expertise and skill at handling the complex interactions between different parts of the agenda, how economic, social and environmental requirements can best be co-optimized, how complex data and indicators should be understood etc.

One core recommendation in the above mentioned report to the EESC is that the EESC and its Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) might seek to establish a wider alliance or European Sustainability Forum of stakeholders concerned with sustainable development in all its aspects to engage with each other and with the Commission and other European institutions on a regular and continuing basis throughout the long haul of implementing, monitoring and review of the SDGs. It should be established on an open and inclusive basis, and enable everyone concerned to be constructively and creatively engaged with the other European Institutions in one of the central challenges for the world and for Europe in the years ahead. Such a Forum would be greatly strengthened if EEAC and its members could be included as key members of the new grouping from the outset. In a separate Information Report⁹ the EESC has indicated its intention to move forward on the creation of such a forum.

Monitoring progress of the SDGs at the EU level will need to be well integrated with monitoring at the member state level, and should support a continuing dialogue between the two levels about how progress can best be maintained. Establishing stronger links with individual national sustainable development Councils (NSDCs) (or with their network of European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC)) to concert stakeholder inputs on sustainability issues to the semester process might be one way to start developing this wider outreach.

Looking further ahead ideas that might be considered by the new Sustainability Forum in a programme of joint action involving the SDO and EEAC and its members might include

- Reaching out to include stakeholders not directly involved in the Forum by developing a “European Society’s Commitment to Sustainable Development” (similar to the Finnish approach) to ensure meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in Europe.

⁹ European Economic and Social Committee. (2015) Information report of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Opportunities and processes for civil society involvement in the implementation of the post-2015 agenda in the EU. EESC: Brussels

- Building on past experience with awareness raising, education and communication work reach out to stakeholders throughout Europe to spread the message of the vision implicit in the SDGs and the part that actors of all kinds at all levels can play.
- Developing further the European Sustainable Development Week that has already been successful in bringing together a wide range of European stakeholders to advance action for sustainability in many different ways.
- Developing stronger links with progressive business interests on the lines of the recent developments in Germany and in Wales.
- Developing informal guidelines or best practice models of how best to advance sustainable development and the SDGs at national level so that all can learn from each other's widely differing experiences.

The modalities for stakeholder engagement and the potential role of the EESC, SDO and the EEAC and individual NCSDs could be considered separately at each stage of the cycle of planning, monitoring and review as that point in the cycle is reached. But the value to be added by stakeholder engagement could be greatly enhanced if the modalities for this engagement are built into the plans for the whole cycle at the outset so that stakeholders can themselves build up their capacity to engage productively at each stage of the cycle in a consistent and coherent way.

It would assist the emergence of this new structure and process greatly if the Commission and the Council were together to endorse this method of promoting continuing stakeholder engagement with the SDG implementation cycle as a being a crucial part of implementing the new strategy in Europe and promise their continuing co-operation with it. The European level and national level members of the proposed new Sustainability Forum could then plan ahead with more confidence to provide adequate support for this mandate through the whole cycle of SDG implementation, monitoring and review at both European and at national levels.

The Agenda 2030 adopted by the UN in September spells out a grand vision for a more sustainable world, and the increasing urgency of moving more decisively towards it. The SDGs and targets set out milestones for the journey ahead up to 2030. There is now much to be done to create real action, an agreed route map, and to rally all concerned to march steadfastly and steadily along it.

The EU could and should put itself at the forefront of this great global mission. In doing so it might also help to restore more confidence in its own capacity for taking constructive collective action as all its members, peoples and stakeholders are brought together to forge a worthy and united European response to the greatest and deepest global challenges facing the world.

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Annex I

National Sustainable Development Strategies – State of Play

This annex includes a headline summary of the status of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) in nine different countries and regions. All of these countries have active Councils for Sustainable Development (SD Councils) which are members of the network of European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC).

In order to get an up-to-date view, existing governance structures and the monitoring and review process of the NSDS of the various countries are summarized. The information is based on an analysis executed by the colleagues of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN), with the cooperation of colleagues working in the Councils for Sustainable Development.

Belgium (information kindly provided by Mr. Koen Moerman, FRDO)

Status

Being a “European early bird”, the federal Belgian administration issued its first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development (FPSD) in 1999. Committed to the Rio agreements (1992), Belgium developed a policy framework containing a national strategy for sustainable development as well as a review mechanism. Since the 1999 publication, two renewed FPSDs have been issued; the 2000-2004 and 2004-2008 versions. While the 2000-2004 document was mainly based on the forty chapters of Agenda21, the 2004-2008 publication followed the six themes of the Sustainable Development Strategy as published by the European Commission (EU SDS).

Due to the amendment of leading legislation, the follow-up of the 2004-2008 FPSD was not developed any further. The 2004-2008 FPSD has been extended after 2008 following the revision of the Parliamentary Act of May 1997. At present, federal institutions are preparing a 2014-2019 version of the FPSD. According to the law, the federal government must publish the third FPSD at the end of this year, but as the consultation procedure on the draft version has not even started yet, this deadline will most likely not be met.

The Belgian government has the ambition of publishing an FPSD which answers the challenges set by the federal long-term vision on sustainable development as adopted in 2013. This long-term vision aims for a Belgium that, by 2050, ‘will be an inclusive society with a protected living environment, with an economy suited to the economic, social and environmental challenges and with a socially responsible federal government.’

Prior to the publication of the latest FPSD, a consultation process will be organized. The Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD) is one of the stakeholders to issue their advice during this process. Despite the fact that the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were not presented yet when the Belgian government set its aims, the focus of the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS) will also be on incorporating the UN goals into the federal planning.

Governance

At the federal level, the Ministry of Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development is in charge of the development and implementation process of the FPSD, supported by the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (FIDO-IFDD). An Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) has been installed to support horizontal coordination at the federal level. The

ICSD consists of representatives of the federal Ministries, including the Ministry of Defence. Besides federal representatives, the Commission also includes representatives from the sub-national levels and the regions. The ICSD is supported by the Working Group on Sustainable Development of the FIDO-IFDD, and is responsible for submitting the FSDS.

Due to Belgium's structure, a major part of sustainable development strategies is developed and implemented by the regions and metropolitan districts. For example, Flanders has had a Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development since 2006 and has also adopted a long-term vision for 2050; the Walloon government plans a new Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development this year, and the Brussels Capital Region aims to adopt a new Regional Sustainable Development Plan in 2015-2016.

As the FSDS is only binding at the federal level, sub-national levels, regions and metropolitan districts are not bound by its targets and objectives. A cooperation agreement has been introduced to implement federal goals at the sub-regional and metropolitan level. By strengthening cooperation of regional and federal authorities through the Federal Act on Sustainable Development, Belgium has made a clear effort to increase vertical coordination. The Act ensures that, in the context of the forthcoming FPSD, technical working groups with representatives of each level of government are set up. The ICSD is the leading body for coordination during this process. As mentioned above, representatives from the sub-national governments as well as other institutions will participate in the Commission's activities and can therefore provide comments in the preparation of the FPSD or in the context of the different thematic working groups. This process is intended to facilitate vertical cooperation. The FRDO-CFDD also supports vertical cooperation, and acts as the stakeholders' advisory body, allowing the participation of important groups in the sustainable development policy process in a coordinated and formal way.

Review and monitoring

The federal government organizes the monitoring process along the lines of the report submitted by the members of the ICSD. When preparing this process, the ICSD works together with colleagues from all federal Ministries as represented in the Commission. The report contains information on the implementation of the measures. Furthermore, Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) are published. The latest set of SDIs, updated during the summer in 2015, consists of 25 main indicators. These indicators are all linked to goals, and eleven of these are provided with quantitative and time-bound targets. The monitoring process is part of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle the Belgian government deploys to implement in its sustainable development policies.

Besides the monitoring report, a review study in the form of the Federal Report on Sustainable Development is drafted by the Task Force on Sustainable Development, which is part of the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB-BFP). This report can be divided into two parts: a status and evaluation report, and a foresight report looking at future developments. The status and evaluation report need to be published at least 15 months prior to the completion date of the FPSD.

France (information kindly provided by Ms. Sophie Gaudeul, CNTE)

Status

The 2003-2007 National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) marked the starting point of integrated national sustainable development policy action in France. The first publication of the NSDS

was swiftly followed by a revision in 2006 (2006-2010). By issuing this revised version, France made an effort to bring its NSDS in line with newly launched EU initiatives (EU SDS).

In the build-up to the publication of the 2010-2013 NSDS, a broad stakeholder consultation process was organized. This nationwide process was called “*grenelle de l’environnement*”. From the summer till October 2007, more than 800 people regularly met in 34 working groups. This resulted in 268 commitments which were integrated into the 2010-2013 NSDS.

The 2010-2013 NSDS was extended while political leadership in Paris was preparing a renewed policy initiative. The new initiative was a direct outcome of the “*grenelle de l’environnement*”. This bottom-up initiative challenged the national government to come forward with a new type of strategy, a strategy that would focus on ensuring consistency of public policies and facilitating ownership. The successor of the 2010-2013 NSDS came with the adoption of the Energy Transition Act in early 2015. France launched the fourth revision of its NSDS by publishing the National Strategy of Ecological Transition towards Sustainable Development 2015-2020.

The NSDS 2015-2020 has a threefold ambition: “Defining a vision for 2020”, “Transforming the economic and social model for green growth”, and “Creating ownership of the ecological transition”. The strategy aims to offer an integrated vision for 2020 that goes beyond sectorial policies. The document points at the fight against climate change, re-establishment of biodiversity, restraint in the use of resources and reduction of environmental health risks as being challenges which have strong economic and social implications. Collective and coordinated actions are needed to tackle these challenges, according to the Strategy.

The NSDS states that the transition process, which should transform the economic as well as the social model, should be led by citizens themselves: ‘Citizens are ready to change, provided they have the tools to act’¹⁰. The Strategy provides levers to promote a circular economy, develop clean transportation, save energy, and enhance waste prevention. As with previous strategies, the NSDS also focuses on broad societal involvement by offering support to stakeholders, enabling them to organize and reinforce efforts to support the ecological transition.

Governance

In 2005, France integrated the Environmental Charter in its Constitution. As a result, sustainable development gained a place at the heart of French legislation, and the legislative position to embed sustainable development in the mission of all public institutions was strengthened.

The central coordination of the NSDS process lies with the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, currently led by Ms Ségolène Royal. In order to generate an integrated approach and ensure horizontal integration of sustainable development policies, Directors within the Ministries involved are appointed as SD Coordinators. Every SD Coordinator is responsible for the coordination of the preparatory process of the NSDS at its own Ministry. Together they form the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Sustainable Development. This Committee is also responsible for the definition, coordination and follow-up of national sustainable development objectives.

Besides the people involved within the various departments, there are several advisory bodies advising the French administration on topics related to sustainable development. The Economic Council for Sustainable Development (CEDD), established in 2008, is an advisory board to the

¹⁰ *Ministère de l’écologie, du développement durable et de l’énergie* (2015). National Strategy of Ecological Transition towards Sustainable Development. Paris: *Ministère de l’écologie, du développement durable et de l’énergie*.

Minister of Sustainable Development. The Council is tasked with mobilizing useful economic references to support the Ministry. In addition to the CEDD, the Ministry is advised by the National Council for Ecological Change (CNTE), representing a wide range of stakeholders, on the laws and main strategies in the field of environmental transition and sustainable development. The CNTE meets on a monthly basis.

Review and monitoring

France was the first European country to engage in an international peer review process. A so-called options-based peer review approach was developed. This approach aims to be cost-effective as well as time-effective while being relatively simple and objective. On the basis of this French approach, a European process towards a guideline for peer review on sustainable development was initiated. Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the United Kingdom acted as France's peer countries by evaluating the NSDS implementation process. As part of the monitoring process, an annual progress report on the implementation of the NSDS is sent to Parliament. This report is based on a set of SDIs. The review and monitoring process is a part of the follow-up tasks of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Sustainable Development.

Germany (text kindly provided by Dr Dorothee Braun, RNE)

Status

In 2002 Germany presented its first NSDS at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. This strategy was inspired by the call for action made earlier at the Rio +5 summit. Prior to the publication Germany organized a first effort to consult with the public, including the German Länder and major groups. The establishment of the German Council for SD, which is an independent stakeholder body, was instrumental to this and started the public deliberation by proposing a first set of goals and targets. The German Council was re-mandated every three years ever since. Through a total of three extensive reports Germany's NSDS has been continuously updated, with the latest update in 2012. Germany developed the architecture of institutions devoted to SD issues in the following years, including the Parliament, the R&D sector, sustainable businesses and some soft policy tools such as award schemes and dialogue fora.

The German NSDS is based on four guidelines which outline the challenges from all dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated and cross-cutting way: Intergenerational equity, quality of life, social cohesion and international responsibility. The overarching guidelines are translated in 21 targets or goals (fields of actions), which are associated with 38 indicators (sub-targets) for these targets and reference values, to be able to recognize improvements upwards or downwards and determine future action.

Governance

In Germany Sustainable Development is 'Chef-Sache', a key priority dealt with at the highest political level. The State Secretary Committee on SD, which is chaired by the head of the federal chancellery, is the federal implementation body on sustainability due to its high-level and cross-cutting nature. It is in charge of further developing the NSDS, regularly monitoring the development of the sustainability indicators as well as linking up with the Länder, local authority associations and the Parliamentary Body for SD. The Federal Statistical Office independently monitors the NSDS indicators and publishes a respective report every two years as a reliable and transparent performance control.

In order to achieve horizontal integration all ministries are represented in the State Secretaries Committee for SD. In 2014, the Committee has increased the number of meetings it holds and has set an ambitious working program for the years 2014 and 2015 that focuses on international and domestic SD strategy processes, sustainable management in politics and economy, mobility and sustainable cities. As Belgium, Germany is a Federal State which makes vertical integration an even more pressing matter. Both, the Länder and the municipal levels of governance have important responsibilities in the field of sustainability. Almost all Länder have designed specific sustainability strategies. Though, it seems necessary to boost the level of cooperation through concerted action and new approaches such as the establishment of a working group between the Chancellery and the offices of the heads of the Länder as well as stepping up political interaction between the federal and the municipal level.

Essential component of Germany's SD strategy is its management concept that lays down significance and scope of sustainability, specifies institutions and management procedures and defines roles and responsibilities. Besides the State Secretaries Committee the federal ministries are responsible for implementing measures under the SD strategy. The German Council for SD is an independent stakeholder body that is assigned the tasks of giving advice to the government and contributing to the further development of the SD strategy. Specifically, it is asked to foster social dialogue on the issue of sustainability by demonstrating the consequences of social action and discussing possible solutions.

The German Bundestag has accompanied international SD processes through several Commissions focusing on how sustainable development could possibly be implemented in Germany. In 2004 parliament decided to set up the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (PBnE) as an independent advisory body to accompany the NSDS and to create momentum on SD within the political landscape. Since 2009 PBnE is assigned the task of evaluating the government's sustainability impact assessment by scrutinizing drafted laws against the targets of the SD strategy. Besides, PBnE develops common positions on rather controversial subjects from the viewpoint of sustainable development in order to shape debates and inform governmental actions. It is mentionable that common positions are based on cross-party consensus

Review and Monitoring

Monitoring reports are prepared every two years independently by the Federal Statistical Office to assess development on the basis of SD indicators. Monitoring and review are closely linked in Germany. In 2008 and 2012 the second and third progress report were adopted by the States Secretaries' Committee and the Cabinet. Both reports confirmed that sustainability remains a guiding principle for the concrete political activities of the federal government

Moreover, in 2009 and again in 2013, the German Federal Government invited a group of international peers - chaired by Bjorn Stigson, former president of the World Business Council for SD- to conduct a Review of Germany's SD policies. During the 2013 reviewers from South Africa, Korea, the USA, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands were involved. The reviewers conducted in depth interviews and discussion sessions including a brought representation of stakeholders were conducted. Also business representatives were active in the review process issuing elaborated recommendations, addressing governmental topics as well as topics on integration and coordination processes. Besides Germany France, Austria, The Netherlands and Norway choose for an international peer review process. As mentioned earlier the French started this model of international peer reviewing, followed by Austria, Norway and the Netherlands.

In terms of methodology and processes the peer reviews conducted in Germany is differed from the proposal of EU Sustainable Development Strategy 2006 that encouraged EU member states to carry out peer reviews of their national SD strategies with the participation of National Councils for SD.

Hungary (information kindly provided by the National Council for Sustainable Development)

Status

With the introduction of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) in 2006, all EU Member States were obliged to come forward with their own sustainable development strategy by 2007. As one of the new countries in the EU at the time, Hungary started to develop a strategy, which was published in 2007. The first Hungarian National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) was written by the National Development Agency (NFÜ), together with the Ministry for Environment and Water. The NSDS was presented to Parliament in 2007.

The first revision process of the 2007 publication took place in 2011. During the preparation of the new NSDS, a nationwide public consultation was organized. During the two-year process (2011-2012), which involved all sub-national levels, round-table discussions were held, and an internet platform provided opportunities for (civil) society to share ideas, opinions and knowledge. One of the outcomes of the review process was the establishment of the National Council for Sustainable Development (NFTT) in 2008. The Council is a parliamentary institution and fulfils a central role in the preparation of the NSDS. In May 2012, the newly developed NSDS was published by the NFTT. It was adopted a year later.

The first NSDS focused on sustainability priorities with regard to various policy areas. The current NSDS (2013) has another approach, having pinpointed the following focus areas: sustainable consumption, forest cultivation, water usage, and local tourism¹¹. Targets and goals as well as priorities are identified with regard to these focus areas. With the NSDS, Hungary wishes to effectively facilitate the sustainability transition in its country.¹²

Governance

During the preparatory process of the first as well as the current NSDS, all Ministries were involved. Every department was able to comment on the drafts of both documents at an early stage. During the preparation of the second NSDS, Ministries could choose to either join the preparatory working group or react on draft texts. The process was coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Development. By organizing this process, Hungary attempted to ensure horizontal integration. As part of the process of vertical integration, a broad range of stakeholders was involved in the preparation of the NSDS. Regional round tables were organized in order to include the regional and local levels. To further support vertical integration, the NFTT played a central role in the preparatory process of the NSDS. Established by the National Assembly in 2008, the Council brings together a wide range of governmental and stakeholder representatives, ranging from the Speaker of Parliament (who chairs the Council) and Members of Parliament to stakeholders including the Hungarian Rectors' Conference (MRK) and representatives from trade unions, churches, and civil society organizations.

Review and monitoring

¹¹ The National Council for Sustainable Development (2012). National Concept on the Transition towards Sustainability. Resolution 18/13. Budapest: The National Council for Sustainable Development.

¹² KECSKÉS, G. (2014) Institutional Framework of Sustainability in Hungary – Case Study with European Outlook. Hungary Academy Science: Budapest

The environmental department of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) contributed to the publication “Indicators of Sustainable Development and Changes in Hungary in the Frame of EU Indicators” that was published by the Ministry of Environment and Water in 2004. This publication was in line with the recommendations of the UN and aimed at presenting the main objective of applying SDIs and monitoring sustainable development in Hungary. Besides the KSH, the NFFT has to present a report of the implementation of the NSDS to Parliament every two years. This year, the report will be issued for the first time. After publication, the report will be revised every two years.

Ireland (text kindly provided by Dr Jane Moore, NESC)

Status

In 1997, the Irish government issued its first NSDS. The strategy was issued in order to ensure that the Irish economy and society were able to develop ‘within a protected environment, without compromising the environment’s quality and with responsibility towards present and future generations and the wider international community.’

This Brundtland-based approach was renewed in 2002 in preparation of the UN Johannesburg summit. ‘*Making Ireland’s Development Sustainable*’, was the five-year review of the original 1997 Strategy. The latest NSDS, ‘Our Sustainable Future: A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland,’ was published in 2012. The Framework was adopted by the national parliament as part of a broader package which was proposed as part of Ireland’s input into the Rio+20 summit.

When publishing the 2012 document the Irish government aimed for a ‘gap closing’ policy initiative. The goal of this strategy could be considered two-fold: firstly, it aimed to identify key gaps where progress since 1997 had been limited. Secondly, the strategy was issued to present possible solutions to tackle these outstanding challenges.

The 2012 NSDS focuses on delivering an effective transition to an innovative, low carbon and resource efficient future and identifies some 70 measures to be implemented in over 24 policy fields. As in many European countries, the economic downturn provided some temporary respite in environmental pressures, for example the lack of reduced greenhouse gas emissions. As economic activity increases with Ireland’s economic recovery, a key challenge will be maintaining the focus on sustainability in parallel with economic growth.

Governance

In Ireland, the High Level Inter-Departmental Group for Sustainable Development, chaired by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, leads the implementation of the NSDS. This inter-departmental group issues an annual progress report which is presented to the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and the Green Economy. The use of such an inter-departmental group to facilitate horizontal integration is comparable to most other European partners. Though, there is an interesting process in Ireland that differs from the European mainland approach. While the high level inter-departmental group only meets annually, there are more active sub-networks which despite having a looser coordination structure, are still capable of sending the message ‘upstream’ and therefore generating some vertical integration as well.

This process of vertical integration is supported in a number of ways:

- Through the Environment Fund, the ministry for the Environment, Community and Local Government provides significant funding to the Irish Environmental Network (IEN), an umbrella group for 34 national environmental NGOs.
- Representation is supported by environmental organisations on the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). NESC provides strategic economic, social and sustainable development advice to the Taoiseach (prime minister). The Council includes several pillars, including the environmental pillar, but also the agricultural pillar, trade union pillar, employers pillar, governmental pillar, community and volunteers pillar and the pillar of independent nominees. As Ireland's sustainable development advisory Council, NESC is an active member of the EEAC network and ESDN (European Sustainable Development Network). In January 2012, the Irish national SD Council (Comhár) was closed and some of its sustainable development functions were integrated into the work of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). Comhár had been active from as early as 1999 issuing advice on a broad spectrum of SD related issues. The Council included a broad representation of different stakeholders including governmental representatives (colleagues from different advisory bodies), trade unions, employers, farmer unions as well as environmental NGOs and representatives from the academic field. The Council was tasked with, amongst others, advancing the national agenda for sustainable development, evaluating progress on achieving sustainable development, giving independent and scientifically informed policy advice, including stakeholder participation and supporting the process of informed debate on SD in Ireland.
- NESC took on by public consultations projects, inducted by the ministry. The consultation process took place late 2012/early 2013 and was concluded by a Consultation Conference in the spring of 2012. The conference included participation by the general public and representatives of a wide range of non-governmental stakeholders.
- The Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund has operated since 1997 and supports local environmental initiatives by communities, individuals and not-for-profit groups.
- Vertical integration is also undertaken by state supported agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland who seek to deliver sustainable development objectives through their national and local programmes.

Montenegro (text kindly provided by Marija Mijuskovic, NCSDDC)

Status

The Government of Montenegro adopted its first National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) in April 2007, together with a corresponding Action Plan (AP). This AP was established for a five-year period and was revised in 2012. The NSSD itself was for the first time revised in 2011. A third key document of the Montenegrin government on the topic of sustainable development is the National Communication Strategy for Sustainable Development (NCSSD) of Montenegro. This document was issued in 2010. The Montenegrin strategy is based on a people, planet, profit approach identifying five areas of interest.

Concerning the economic pillar of sustainable development Montenegro will focus on the acceleration of economic growth while regional development disparities will be reduced. Moreover, the strategy should help Montenegro to reduce poverty and ensure equitable access to services and resources. On the side of the 'planet' pillar of sustainable development Montenegro focuses on efficient pollution control and reduction and the sustainable management of resources. The people

aspect of SD is covered by measures to preserve cultural diversity and identity and by improving governance systems and public participation. More sector specific approaches are included in the Action Plan of the Montenegrin government.

Governance

A central role in the process of implementation as well as monitoring is fulfilled by the Division for the support to the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) in the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism. This department takes care of the NSSD. The same institution is in charge of revising the NSSD as well.

There are two bodies ensuring the process of horizontal integration of the NSDS. The first body, a Coordination team for sustainable development, has the task to monitor the implementation process within the ministries involved in the implementation process of SD policies. The Coordinating Body for Sustainable Development (CBSD) consists out of - representatives of all relevant ministries/institutions which are titled to implement the National Strategy of Sustainable Development of Montenegro and includes 35 members. The coordinating team meets on a quarterly basis to fulfil its task to support the process of horizontal integration. The second team the Inter-ministerial group for communications for sustainable development, monitors the implementation of the Communication Strategy of Sustainable Development (CSSD). Besides monitoring progress in communicating SD into the public this second body strives to achieve synergy levels across various governmental communication campaigns

A pivotal role to ensure vertical integration and to ensure stakeholder consultation (one of Montenegro's NSDS priorities) is played by the National Council for Sustainable Development. The National Council for Sustainable Development, which was established by the Government in 2002, act as a cross-sectorial advisory body. From 2008 on the NCSD is working together with municipalities in a process in order to form local Councils for sustainable development.

Review and Monitoring

As earlier mentioned, the Division for the support to the NCSD is the executing office during the review as well as the monitoring process. The monitoring process is executed annually while this process only leads to revision of the Action plan after three years and a detailed review of the Strategy implementation after every 5 years. Monitoring is supported by the use of a set of SD indicators. Montenegro used in e.g. the EU's, the Mediterranean and the Millennium Development Goals indicators as a starting in order to ensure comparability. After criticism issued by the annual monitor report Montenegro developed more quantitative indicators to improve the monitoring and review process.

The Netherlands (information kindly provided by Ms Agneta Andersson and Ms. Hannah Koutstaal, Rli)

Status

The Netherlands has designed various plans and processes that, together, could represent the first National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS). The core of the Dutch sustainable development policy ambitions was based on the Action Programme on Sustainable Development entitled "Sustainable Action", which was issued in 2003.

An international peer review – which was held in 2007 and coordinated by the Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment (RMNO), one of the EEAC members at that time – concluded that Dutch sustainable development policy focused too heavily on the environmental pillar, while economic and social goals were under-represented. Moreover, due to a lack of coordination between different stakeholders, activities led by different actors (government; business; civil society) were not sufficiently linked. As a final conclusion, the review pointed at a lack of ownership in society and the business sector. Based on the conclusions of the review, the Action Programme was replaced by a Cabinet-wide approach to sustainable development issued in 2008. This approach was then revised on the basis of the Coalition Agreement between the governing parties for the period 2012-2016. The Agreement included a paragraph on sustainable development objectives, and introduced four core elements of Dutch sustainable development policy: ambitious climate goals (linked to the international climate negotiation process), a fully sustainable energy supply by 2050, renewable energy targets (16% by 2020), and so-called Green Deals.

The government concretized its sustainable development aims in a Policy Paper on Green Growth, which was issued early 2013. The Green Growth paper included the ambitions to make smart use of market incentives, and to develop a dynamic legislative and regulatory framework in order to stimulate green growth. The paper also focused on innovation, and positioned the government as a network partner in the process towards sustainable development. Furthermore, a set of eight policy domains were designated: fighting climate change, renewable energy, a bio-based and circular economy, and the sustainable deployment of food, mobility and water. These domains are the core of the Dutch efforts to embed sustainable development.

The strategy of the Netherlands focuses on the economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The rather more modest representation of the social aspect can be attributed to fact that goals like factual wellbeing, battling inequality and access to education¹³ have mostly been met already. The economic aspects of the Dutch sustainable development strategy include the aim to realize a sustainable energy supply by 2050, supporting the transition towards a green/circular economy, and investments in innovations and mobility. The environmental aspects focus on climate-related mitigation and adaptation, water usage, and the reduction of emissions from traffic and agriculture.

Governance

In the Netherlands, the Minister of the Environment is responsible for coordination of national sustainable development policies. In practice, it is mainly the State Secretary who deals with this. Besides the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs and Social Affairs also play their role at the national level governing sustainable development in the Netherlands.

The current systems of horizontal integration are arranged through coordination at the inter-ministerial level by the regular coordination mechanisms that support the Cabinet. Furthermore, at the interdepartmental level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads the Task Force on Sustainable Development. The Task Force is chaired by the Ambassador for Sustainable Development. In addition, the SD Ambassador represents the Netherlands during international events related to sustainable development. The position of SD Ambassador is currently held by Mr Kees Rade.

¹³ Statistics Netherlands (2014): the Sustainability Monitor of the Netherlands. Statistics Netherlands: The Hague / Heerlen

The vertical integration of sustainable development policies in the Netherlands is arranged alongside different lines than are followed in most other European countries. The Netherlands has, for example, no national Council on sustainable development. The reason for this is that the Netherlands has a long history of including a broad range of governmental and non-governmental actors and organizations in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of policies. This inclusive process is referred to as the “Polder Model” or “Third Way”.

Although the Netherlands has no Council that is solely designated to advising on sustainable development, a wide range of advisory bodies are involved in the matter, such as the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER), the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (RLI), and the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR). Previously, the RMNO had also been part of the advisory system which was engaged in policy advice on sustainable development, but with the redistribution of tasks (RLI and the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency took over several tasks), the Dutch government abolished the RMNO in 2010.

Besides the initiatives at the national level, the Netherlands has a broad network of local initiatives that utilized the momentum after the introduction of Agenda21 and that are still pushing forward topics related to sustainable development at the grass-roots level.

Review and monitoring

When executing its own review in 2007, the Netherlands used a similar review mechanism as the French did. A so-called options-based peer review approach was chosen. As mentioned above, this approach aims to be both cost-effective and time-effective while being relatively simple and objective. The process was coordinated by the RNMO.

Germany, Finland and South Africa were selected to execute the international peer review. Each country selected four peer group members. The background of the peer group members was diverse, representing government, business, science, and NGOs. The peer group members were invited to review the 2003 NSDS and were asked to come forward with recommendations on how best to develop a new sustainable development strategy. By conducting interviews, organizing workshops and holding focus groups with a broad variety of stakeholders, the Dutch government executed an in-depth review process.

In addition, the Netherlands developed an annual review process that is executed by various organizations. The Sustainability Monitor for the Netherlands is a joint publication by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). As soon as the Monitor is presented, sustainable development is put on the political agenda once again by one of the political factions in Parliament, evoking debate with the Cabinet.

Portugal (According to the existing information in the ESDN data base)

Status

Portugal started the process towards the creation of a NSDS in 2002. In 2005 the government implemented its first decisions. The Final step was taken in 2007, when Portugal ratified its first NSDS. Portugal developed the NSDS in the form of a single policy strategy document including all three dimensions of SD.

The NSDS Includes environmental goals by aiming on better environment and natural heritage valuation, investing in sustainable growth and energy efficiency. Within the social pillar of SD the

Portuguese NSDS focuses on more equity, equality of opportunities and social cohesion and a more modern and efficient public administration. The economic component of SD is covered by the aim to make Portugal ready for the 'knowledge society'.

These main aims, as translated into the NSDS, are drawn up in more concrete measures including fighting climate change, nature conservation and sustainable usage of water and agricultural resources and clear air management. Some of these topics are translated into national policies by now, such as the national plan on climate change.

Governance

Neither local nor regional authorities were directly involved in the development of the NSDS. Representatives of local communities participate in the National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development (NCESD).

According with the last assessment, regarding 2011, 167 potential Local Agenda 21 processes were identified in Portugal, with the ability to influence about 50% of the Portuguese population.

To provide for an integrated and horizontal implementation, the NSDS contains a 'road map' that indicates the institutions responsible for each measure. The NSDS also makes cross-references to other plans and action programmes which have to be reviewed following the new guidelines and objectives outlined in the NSDS.

The horizontal mechanisms have two main functions:

- *coordinating the implementation* of the NSDS in the public administration sectors,
- *reviewing the progress in the implementation* of the NSDS.

Review and Monitoring

Since 2007 a bi-annual review process has been introduced. The last review was undertaken in 2009, which corresponds to the first bi-annual report, submitted to the EC in July 2009. The second bi-annual report (July 2011) has not yet been published.

The evaluation and review process shall be done in articulation with the National Reform Programme (PNR), the Low-carbon Roadmap and the Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP) Roadmap (now the Eco-innovation Action Plan, as adopted by the European Commission in December 2011).

Spain (According to the existing information in the ESDN data base)

Status

The Spanish National Sustainable Development Strategy, SNSDS was adopted by the Council of Ministers in November 2007. It was developed within the framework of the renewed EU-SDS by an Inter-ministerial Group for the SNSDS under the coordination of the Economic Department of the Prime Minister's Office with the participation of other ministries.

The strategy focuses on the environmental, social and economic dimension of sustainability, and approaches the high-priority areas defined in the European Strategy according to the three above

mentioned dimensions. It also proposed the development of a *set of indicators* as a primary goal of the strategy.

To obtain an independent evaluation of its progress the Permanent Commission of the Government for Economic Matters (CDGAE in Spanish) would order monitor and assess the degree of application and success of the policies contained in the SNSDS.

Governance

The first draft of the SNSDS (prepared by a working group consisting of all government ministries) was distributed to the regional authorities for comments and feedback. Moreover, the SNSDS was discussed with regional representatives in the so-called 'sectorial conferences' in which the national and regional Administrations discuss sectorial policy issues.

Regional representatives were also invited and participated in the 'Conference on Sustainable Development' which was held in July 2007. Several stakeholder groups participated and discussed in working groups on various dimensions of the SNSDS. Many comments were received during this conference which would then be included in the SNSDS.

Most of the 17 autonomous regions have developed their own regional SD strategies, although with different degrees of formality; for instance the strategies of these regions may

be consulted on-line: [Catalonia](#), [País Vasco](#), [Castilla y León](#), [Andalucía](#), [Galicia](#), [La Rioja](#), Valencia and Castilla-La Mancha.

Regions mainly include their own particular circumstances in these strategies. However, they have to take into account the SNSDS as well as the EU SDS objectives.

Although no formal body for the coordination between national and sub-national levels has been established (there is no National Council for SNSDS), sectorial policies are coordinated by the national government and agreements are discussed and eventually signed in those areas for which the regions have implementation responsibilities. The main concern here is to include environmental issues (i.e. SD issues) in sectorial policies.

The SNSDS was elaborated through the coordination of all Government ministries led by the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Coordination of the SNSDS. In addition, two separate networks provide an important support to environmental offices of the Regions. The first - Environmental Authorities Network (Red de Autoridades Ambientales, RAA) - is a forum for cooperation between the regional environmental authorities and the authorities responsible for programming and management of EU funds and it is co-financed by the ERDF in the framework of the EU Technical Assistance Operational Programme.

The second network – Environmental Inspection Network (Red de Inspección Ambiental – REDIA) brings together enforcement officers from regional environmental authorities and the MAGRAMA. This relatively new network has become instrumental in promoting the exchange of information and experiences between environmental authorities of the Regions on environmental inspections and developing joint technical projects in this field.

The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has also been proactive in mobilising environment-related activities at the local level. The FEMP has a network of Local Authorities on Biodiversity that supports municipalities in projects related to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in urban environments, and restoring damaged or degraded areas. It has signed with the MAGRAMA a three-year agreement with the FEMP to collaborate on climate change mitigation.

Review and Monitoring

The SNSDS explicitly state a set of 74 indicators for its monitoring. The set of indicator was developed in 2007, and follows the work of the Spanish Environmental Profile (PAE in Spanish), the indicators based report in the field of the environment in Spain.

The first edition was in 2004, and latest, to be published in Autumn 2014 (its 10th edition), will be an electronic version with an “App” developed for tablet and smart phone in iOS and android platforms. It describes 85 indicators organized in 17 environmental and sector areas: Air Quality and atmospheric emissions, Water, Land, Nature, Coasts and marine environment, Green Economy, Environmental Research, Development and Innovation, Waste, Agriculture, Energy, Industry, Fishing, Tourism, Transport, Households, Urban environment, Natural and technological disasters.

There will have a chapter dedicated to Autonomous Regions with 19 descriptive fact sheets of selected environmental data. It also includes references to the socioeconomic framework and other issues of interest, a synthesis of the main messages and a final annex with abbreviations and indicators. The report complies with the information requested of the Aarhus Convention, adopted in Spain by Law 27/2006, about the rights of access to the environmental information, public participation and access to justice in environment.

Sub-national: Catalonia (text kindly provided by Mr. Arnau Queralt and Ms. Sílvia Cañellas Boltà, CADS)

Status

The Government of Catalonia approved its NSDS, called Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia 2026 (EDSCAT2026), in August 2010. It was designed as an “economic, social and environmental strategy”

The elections held in November 2010 brought a change in government. After the elections, the Ministry for Territory and Sustainability undertook a revision of the document, whose purpose was to streamline the initial pillars and re-focus the NSDS according to the economic, social and environmental context (dominated by a deep economic crisis).

The implementation of the NSDS is planned through different sectorial plan instruments, e.g action plans on concrete subjects related to the strategy priority areas. Since 2010 the Government has approved various plans and strategies key to the sustainable development, such as the *Catalonia 2020 Strategy*, the *Energy and Climate Change Plan 2012-2020*, or the *Impulse to the Green and Circular Economy in Catalonia plan*, amongst others. However, they have not been explicitly linked to the EDSCAT2026 (the NSDS).

The EDSCAT2026 was structured in 7 pillars, dealing with biodiversity and territory; energy and climate action; mobility; eco-efficiency, competitiveness and innovation; sustainable consumption; health, safety and social cohesion; participation and community building.

A total of 101 Strategic Objectives were set (49 of which were quantitative goals for 2026). When assessing the current situation one could conclude that the most positive trends are found in energy efficiency and resource management (water use, waste management, etc.) and some aspects of land planning (i.e. increase in protected areas surface). The main aspects to be improved, according to the balance, are the deployment of renewable energy sources (such as solar and wind, that are very far from the objectives for 2020), and social indicators (unemployment levels, poverty risk).

Governance

In 2009 a broad participatory process was organized by the Government in order to elaborate the NSDS. This process included both meetings across the country and on-line participatory tools.

A stakeholder discussion panel and a Local Authorities committee were created *ad hoc* for the strategy. An inter-departmental working group was also established as a fundamental tool to facilitate consensus within the Government of Catalonia. Although the work of these bodies did not continue after the NSDS approval, other forums for stakeholder participation for environmental and SD policies have been put in place.

To achieve true horizontal and vertical integration, with regard to the various sector-based policies and the various levels of government, the government developed structures which support coherence between the various sector-based objectives. The Advisory Council for Sustainable Development (CADS) was given a prominent role in the monitoring and follow-up of the NSDS. Inter alia, the CADS should be consulted prior to the elaboration of any action plan and the monitoring reports (as will be seen below).

Review and Monitoring

The EDSCAT2026 foresaw a biennial assessment report that should include the progress made in achieving the strategic objectives and a prospective analysis of new elements to take into account. The first of these reports was released in October 2014.

This report addresses 10 topics included in the NSDS, updates some of the NSDS indicators, and identifies new issues that should be taken into account on each topic.

The CADS launched a report, in November 2013, assessing the first draft of the above-mentioned balance. The CADS report stated, among other issues, that a NSDS was a very useful tool for designing a strategic SD framework which contributed to an effective integration of SD principles into all sectorial and territorial policies, plans and programs. The report also stated that the EDSCAT2026 should be deeply reviewed in order to consider the impact of the economic crisis and the updates introduced in the policy and planning framework.

After the approval of the global 2030 agenda for SD, a new inter-ministerial process has been established in order to implement the 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets into Catalonia's public policies, plans and programs. This process, which should be led by the Presidential Department and the Ministry for Territory and Sustainable Development, will start with a gap analysis report commissioned to CADS. In the preparation of this report, the council will organize an structured consultation and dialogue process with relevant scientific and technical experts.